

## Kid's Friend

Contributed by Larry Smith

William Burroughs and I understood each other perfectly. Never actually friends, we shared a kinship based on class, although the tacit bond crossed significant genealogical barriers. My paternal blood extended farther back than his, to the China Trade, and my mother's stock was older yet, gentry from turn-of-the-eighteenth century Albany and environs. Yet if Burroughs was a parvenu by comparison, he comported himself as quite the genuine number if only by way of (in his case) that horror of pedigree which may often define bona fide pedigree. I think men like Burroughs, more I daresay than someone like myself, I've always been much less uncomfortable with the accidents of lineage, ever prefer some collective historical immolation to the embarrassments of overt distinction. Their lives host a resolute and perennial potlatch finalizing them as in fact the aristocrats they can't help but be.

Only with the caliente reputation that followed on Naked Lunch did Burroughs seem at all less distracted by his own birthright, yet the clench-jaw cadences persisted, of course, throughout the many incongruous phases and incarnations of his life and career—he sounded more like one of us than any one of us I have ever known—and it seemed to be a burden he just could not unload. Sometimes when we spoke, even after his famous book was published, he'd still practically twitch at the sound of his own voice. It wasn't, as I say, a discomfort with which I empathized much, having really always seen the superficial trappings of privilege as a rather bland fact of life or, to the extent I could count some picturesque wastrels among my near kin, even a tangible literary asset. But Burroughs raged equally against the Midwestern elite and the debasements of commercial democracy that certain members of that elite, having banked the wealth democracy allowed them to amass, affect to despise. Imagine his dismay at first reading *On the Road*, since all his discomfort must have been sorely tweaked by Kerouac's flippant depiction of the mighty trusts and estates ostensibly in store for the character in the book based on Burroughs (especially since the real Burroughs was at that point for all intents and purposes disinherited), although that relationship, not so much between the two men themselves as between two visions, Burroughs' and Kerouac's, and how two such different ways of reading (and writing) experience could possibly coexist in the same subculture, demand a very long and labyrinthine story indeed. In any event, since all that kind of socio-cultural abnegation, in Burroughs or in others I've known like him, I find just tiresome, the bond between us was different and deeper than anything simply attitudinal. More to the point, we understood each other at an extraordinarily physical level, a very basic shared experience of physicality itself which people who have, say, merely made love to each other (which he and I never dreamed of doing) don't come close to knowing. Maybe you have to be a Hapsburg with sliver lips and unimaginable capillary disorders contemplating another like-afflicted Hapsburg to begin to understand what I'm talking about. What Burroughs and I shared was scarifying and personal. It begins, fatefully, with a peculiar fastidiousness. Then—and here the bond proves in equal measure irremediable and unutterable—to disencumber ourselves of that fastidiousness amid such fecal regalia as only those for whom the world and the human bodies in it are, finally, impossible contradictions can appreciate, was an equally definitive organic characteristic Burroughs and I had in common. But nor is it as simple as some purge-and-binge routine when, say, one's retentive little auntie starts to shit her pants all night. The great spiritual quest, and I do sometimes suspect that no one is as equipped to take this journey as those of us who, like Burroughs and myself, were born to nether worlds of such privilege that, Lord knows, someday we may actually be able to hire people to do our shitting for us, the quest, I say, is to maintain the balance; if not resolve the contradictions, at least hold them in exquisite tense abeyance. The love that pitches its whatever in the palace of excrement likewise elegizes New England Indian summers, for sure the happiest times of my life because they were so damn clean, even the mud got caught up in sun showers that scoured the earth we walked on. Lord, I so deeply need to unearth the crap from a young man's gut yet clothe us both in the white roses that feed on and grow from the reeking dump. Not that a single redemptive stem ever sprouted from the raw carbohic residue the Mexicans or the Arabs or whoever the hell it was left caked like acid soap flakes up Johnny's ass. Yet if our brief but telling conversations, or the rather uncomfortable nods of mutual understanding Burroughs and I exchanged at various times in our lives, did hint at kindred vision of sorts, the green coital putrescence and rotted cytoplasmic matter found throughout *Naked Lunch* and *The Soft Machine* evoked a supporting and, I'd boast, a rather sagacious response on my part, especially since I knew the author and the people he was born to so well. Whatever extraneous critical exegeses these passages may merit as commentaries on the lives of drug users or metaphors of whole social infrastructures framed around meta-addictions of the mind and body or medieval rites that seek palaces of the spirit via journeys straight into and then past the unspeakable buboes sublunary flesh is heir to, it was also because these expressions of the physical were, finally, summative expressions par excellence of the real nature of the social class into which he and I were both born, and against which everything he and I have written must be measured, that, I believe, I understood him so well. These deep dirty things are defining inherited expressions no less than Veblenian predation or whatever other tribal atavisms the various great chronicles trot out. Burroughs had to respect me, if distastefully, because I was one of the few people who understood that his writing, at least as much as my own, is signatory of the upper class situation as it maintains its place in 20th century America. So that's what I'm talking about. We were two guys from rich families who were hep to each other's scene, you dig? We were mutually aware and wary. Sententious nods re shit on the dick. Johnny's rancid liver tissue dripping off Ahmad's lip. Dull thrill of carbohic. Dicks greased for the kill. Know what I mean? Secret love stuff of Sudbury, Massachusetts wrapped tight under three-piece suits. You should see the way I clean a toilet after I use it. Robert Bennett Forbes one sec, that's me, then his beatnik alter ego shitass secret sharer the next, that's me too. Just like Proust. And Henry James, the way he's so damn fastidious limning every exquisite little fart of a nuance about Maggie Verver this and Isabel Archer that, withholding so much even in the outpouring of verbiage, yet what an

outpouring, what expulsions, endless paragraphs—Edmund Wilson even called it Jamesian gas—passing out the portal of literature like somebody's gotten into somebody else's shithole and out it all comes, two trillion words about what Maggie may or may not think about her father. Refined textual buggery, lessons from the masters, one expostulation in *The Golden Bowl* is the well-honed climax of the class vision, a spectacle of Johnny ripped gutwise and creamed on with blue viscous poison cum juice in *Naked Lunch* or *The Soft Machine*, I can never remember which text is which, is the denouement. Giving everything and holding it all back, and all at the same time, that's us. I don't know if Burroughs knew tenderness, though I guess maybe he did those later years in Kansas when he lived close by the nuclear test sites with the preppy looking guy, what's his name. I myself have puzzled over tenderness, never quite knowing when or with whom it might be appropriate, as if the great tension which is the real moral imperative of our lives, that Augustan reserve hiding back buckets of shit, and the primal urge to gut-fuck creation itself until it positively drips, have at last precluded what might be called "focused emotional expression." If I am a tender man, and I think I am, it has been all inchoate longing for these many years, undifferentiated yearning and yearning to express what I yearn to differentiate. Ah me! I have loved, mainly men, and there was depth of feeling, passionate appreciation, all that stuff, yet I have dreamt in vain of the frail little connections, glances just as knowing as the ones Burroughs and I might have exchanged, but not this time darksome predilections of scatology in eschatology historically bequeathed; quite to the contrary, similar-looking nods of acknowledgement to memorialize something fundamentally different, more human no doubt, or at least more merciful, the brief but heartfelt moments of personal concern between two human beings, affections subtle enough that at one and the same time they're imperiled and imperishable. However handsomely I've treated some lovers, and I've treated some very handsomely, such moments, moments I know to naturally occur between the most unlikely boorish or sullen folk, I, I freely admit, I have never known. Nor, though, have I ever expected pity because of that deprivation or myself dwelt on it piteously, yet it's probably a piteous fact in any event, and people if they knew me would probably feel pity for me right now even as I may refuse to feel pity for myself, the whole wretched specter of an aging fag writer, who knows, I might be that and nothing else, all the more piteous-seeming as he begins to recall an incident that's persistently haunted him in recent years involving a kid named Michael Langstrum and Michael's friend Joel Ragula which, and this may be the most piteous thing of all to reflect on, brought him, this old fruit, closer to a feeling of involvement with tenderness, the real McCoy, the actual marvelous incarnation of it, and I don't mean its classic poses, the *Pieta* or some other archetypal rendition, but rather such tenderness in utterly transient messages between two beings spoken or unspoken and never more than caught on the fly yet betokening the fabulous concern that one of God's children may have for another. I think the chapter in my trilogy where Felix and Betsey are together in Florida approximates what I'm talking about, the half-sentences that pass between them, the pain and fear each feels mainly because the other one suffers pain and is afraid. I wrote that at least ten years before I met Michael and Joel and it does seem to me, in light both of my own best writing, as well as the memorial persistence of these boys, Michael's soothing words to Joel, Joel's eyes softer on account of the powerful comfort he knew he could count on from his friend, that the actual living of a tender life is, at least from a moral standpoint, no more to be admired (it is certainly more to be envied but, from a moral standpoint, not I think more to be admired) than such reveries as I have been inspired to in subsequent decades. Quite to the contrary, perhaps. Some men are blessedly born to tender delight, some aren't, but abstracting it, essentializing it, and who else but Plato should us butt-fuckers take cues from, salvages it from the rack of time, and salvages them, the kid himself and his friend, from the ravages, not just of age and separation, but of what time may have done to blunt their fine and lovely edges. So here I be, brooding as may be said dove-like o'er the vast proverbial abyss, and what I can still see way down there are the two beautiful young men loving each other beautifully. "Brooding" indeed, for I don't preen myself or dote on the delicious remembered flesh, delicious as it may have been, but instead the memory of Michael and Joel causes me such unending ache I hesitate to revive it as memory much less write about it. Maybe that's why, again if only from a moral standpoint, the abstraction I make cannot be gainsaid simply because the maker himself has never known quite that kind of love in life and might refuse it were it offered. Twenty years are gone by and I'm still aching, and I absolutely do not want to find out what's become of them, dissipated cynics by now, maybe, even overweight Lord knows. But what seems most to the point, if on a scale of values you want to weigh their actual tenderness against my memory of it twenty years after the fact, is that, having almost undone me with a display of the sweetest affection you can imagine between two young boys, which is precisely what they displayed on the day I was with them, having thus made it inevitable that at least on certain subsequent nights I would castigate myself to the core of my harrowed being for never having felt or expressed what these two boys were able to feel and express, I'd still like to point out that, for all we know, at this very moment, they don't even remember each other. Excuse my getting emphatic. But I'm here still and I'll bet all that's left of what once they were is me right now. Maybe I don't know how to love, but without me there isn't any. I met the kid Langstrum in Cleveland when I was guest lecturing at Case Western Reserve University. The main train depot in the center of the city, a tower that still dominates the cityscape, was a pickup scene in those years and I'm still amused it's called the Terminal Tower, death and phallus and ye old terminus too, the city's butthole where mostly decently dressed middle-aged men cruised the boys. I followed Michael out, I recall it was late afternoon, and I found him going to the Publix Book Mart, a very decent store in those days. I can't say I'm ever delighted when a cute kid turns out to be a poetaster, except insofar as it makes it easier for a famous writer to get into his pants. But too often all that literary stuff just obtrudes. I don't disdain meat with a mind, but if I'm getting hot over somebody's rumphole, I hardly care to stop and chat about Faulkner or, God forbid, they'll bring up Vonnegut or, these days, McIlhenny or McInerny, whatever it is. "I can't believe you're in Cleveland," he said when I introduced myself in the fiction section. "It's been in the papers," I said. "There was an item in the Plain Dealer." "I missed it," he said, and seemed confused that I'd know the name of the Cleveland newspaper, much less read it. "Why don't we take a little walk," I said. "It's a lovely, lovely day." Michael was a slim-waist kid with perfect Mediterranean, more Italian than Greek, features, the Anglo surname aside, and a bushy head of hair in multifarious but not girlish curls. I wanted him right

away, the same way I always wanted the kids I'd get. The ones I used to long for, but realize I'd never have, those were vaguer less overtly sexual longings because I kept them vaguer, knowing this hunk was out of my league or that stud too straight even for a blow job. But Michael I wanted with the kind of desire I always felt for the boys I knew I'd crush. I could already just about hear him grunt as we navigated the innocuous moments of the getting-to-know-you crap. "I can't believe I just met you like this. I always thought I'd maybe meet writers and stuff when I got to New York, but I never thought I'd meet somebody who I read and think about just by going out one day. . ." ". . .To cruise the Terminal Tower," I finished for him, and he stammered a little with a quick smile and fell silent. I could see tight brown nipples inside a brown smart shirt. It was July or August, and none of the kids were wearing undershirts. "I saw you there, and then I saw you walking to the bookstore." So he was twice disarmed. First, because I knew he liked men. But, knowing that, I also knew he wasn't a street kid, he was denied that protective psychic comfort because I saw that he was educated, pawing away at Faulkner and Kenneth Patchen and even George Mandel. Good old George, *The Breakwater* was in print then. Now there was a man who couldn't stand the sight of me! But I liked him. And *The Breakwater* is the best turgid book I've ever read. Michael said something about not yet quite finishing my whole trilogy, but that the parts of it he read were great poetry. So I told him about a kid I knew who saw Auden walking on 8th Street in New York. "The kid goes up to the old boy and he says, 'Excuse me, Mr. Auden, but I just love your poetry.' So Auden says, 'Well, Sonny, why don't you come up to my apartment and I'll show you some real poetry!'" Michael laughed, though I don't think he could quite appreciate the rather harsh spirit my anecdote was born of, that manly cynicism all writers share once they grow a little hair on their chest but that, like Auden, they won't let mitigate their commitment or their faith or whatever it is they think they're supposed to have in order to be great writers. My tone softened a little because I liked Michael. "I should stay in Cleveland," I said. "Now that that ninny d. a. levy's killed himself, I could be the poet laureate of the city. Would you be impressed?" We finished the nine blocks back to the Terminal Tower and watched a portly old well-dressed gent bargaining with a couple of blond kids, prototypical gentile get of the Midwest even if Cleveland wasn't quite the Midwest. "Do you like watching the action?" I asked. "Oh yeah. I like watching life." "Not everyone would say this is 'life.'" "They don't understand." I took him home and got his clothes off right away. I rubbed his body with the flats of both hands, squeezing the tight tawny ass and then curling my fingertips against his pubic clump and cute little balls. I liked his flesh a lot, and I was delighted at the thought I'd really get to dirty him up. What a thrill it must have been for him being with me, all so unexpected on a summer day in his own dreary home town with a famous writer. Unless, of course, he didn't really like the trilogy, and was just being polite about the poetry crap. But he was staring hard at my cock, and as I saw him seeing it, I figured he was fascinated because it was mine, after all, and not just because I've got such a big one, but because I was famous, maybe even immortal, like Herman Melville, and here he was playing with my hard dick and he had to know in a thousand years youngsters like himself could be reading the trilogy even if he himself didn't particularly like it. Then the time came to fuck. It may be that at least in those years I couldn't quite take seriously someone I'd screw, not even if I took pleasure in his company, as I did in Michael's, for he was a very nice young man indeed. But at some level I take all these kids very seriously, for their gasps and grunts aren't simply involuntary tributes I wring from their gullets, but little openings as well into their very beings and, since it is their very beings I want, I do savor the fact that, when I spear them in their shit, the noises they make are theirs and theirs alone. That's a kind of love. Like what I was saying before about the abstraction of tenderness being worth more, at least from a moral standpoint, than the tenderness itself which may be soon forgotten as the abstraction endures. Here, by extension, the need to make them squawk like seals was a kind of objectification which I know is not, in the current social climate, a popular thing to fasten on, but I do maintain, if only from a moral standpoint, that an understanding of people for the objects they also are, in addition to whatever particular and personal individualistic human qualities etc. etc. they may presume to, allows more about them as social and political and moral creatures than what most of the lyrical languages of affection can hope to uncover. For here, the lover truly gets at the essence of someone, the object that the beloved is, no matter how much he might not want to be that object, but the lover knows it's really him, and lusts for it, and wants to get at it with his cock, right up there, right up the beloved's ass. It's like blacks, when you objectify them as niggers, at least in bed, of course they're human and for all I know they could be corporate presidents or goddamn brain surgeons, for Christ's sakes, but they're also niggers, and that's beautiful, it's beautiful to be a piece of meat that everybody in the whole goddamn world has fucked at one time or another, and if you truly love a black person, that's part of what you love about him. Real love seeks the real person, but real persons like French food get cooked in awfully dirty pots, and real persons are never things the persons themselves are usually ever comfortable being. Michael whatever his name was could be dead by now, but the squirming smile on his face, the ecstasy he felt even though he was embarrassed because he farted when I fucked him, that lives on forever. His body was slightly brown like a fine moist wood in a green forest, and he smelled like talc, natural talc in his blood, not a powder he put on; I felt like I could absorb this splendid fresh flesh right into mine and indeed I did just crawl right up his little fuckhole until I felt it give. "You're just right," I told him. "Thank you," he murmured with the big tool in his ass. Hairless body; the kid was so sweet, he managed to smile as I probed him. "Not too big, not too tight, you're just right," I said. "Thank you," he said again even as I got him to suddenly grunt a startled effeminate grunt jabbing and groping his shit. "You're just like the three bears. You're not too this, you're not too that. Oooh, baby, you're just right!" "I'll always remember you said that," he said almost laughing. I could imagine him writing it down for his memoirs, a tale of me like some silly intimate story of Hemingway or Fitzgerald. A moment later, though, I'd fall in love with the look on his face as I got ready to cum. It was a gracious, encouraging look, he even raised up his ass a little so I could penetrate deeper, and his eyes were urging me, and there was a strange mature respect in his gaze at me the man fucking him that I don't recall I'd seen before in such a young one. He must have had the presence of mind to take my number off the little plastic strip on the telephone because being famous I have an unlisted number, and I don't generally give it out, not even to sweet kids like Michael. But he kept trying to ring me, as he later confirmed when we finally did meet again. (I often don't pick up the phone when I'm at home either.) One day he left a note on my door

urging me to call him because he had something to talk about that he thought I'd find "very appealing." Soon another note appeared, and I had to acknowledge I was a bit intrigued, and I didn't want to hurt his feelings anyway — we should treat people a little better than might sometimes be our wont, since we're not just famous but as famous poets we affect people deeply, so treating them like garbage isn't quite fair—so after about a week I did call him. "Hey, I been trying to reach you," he said with no resentment or sense I had tried to avoid him. "And now you have," I answered, good-naturedly. "I wanted to talk to you about my friend, Joel. Joel Ragula. He's the closest friend I have, and he thought it was absolutely incredible when I told him about you. He wants to meet you." Idiot me! Another Johnny waiting, soft drapery around his neck, needs it strung tighter, wants a big gallows cum with a dick up his ass—and there I was wasting time not returning phone calls! Maw for more. Renewable stench of love. Gimme. "Just friends?" I asked, still amiable. "What do you? . . . Oh, you mean him and me? Kind of. We sort of play with each other, but we never. . . like what you and me did. Joel's actually kind of a virgin. Say, meet me at The Blue Beak and we'll talk more." Michael ordered a Dubonnet cocktail — a strange drink, I noted, for a young kid, more like something old ladies order when they want to get secretly a little pissed—and I was aroused again by the sight of the boy looking so fresh, —kind of a virgin himself even though I and who knows who else had gotten well up the ass he sat on making it fart like the absurd love meat it is. "So this Joel, he's never had real sex?" "Yeah, he has, with me, and with our friend Brook, but, you know, the sex wasn't like what you and I did." It was intriguing, the way Michael was boldly offering up his friend's body yet tried to be respectful doing so, scrupulous even, he wasn't going to talk too blatantly about a friend, it was another human being after all, and he didn't know how much he had a right to say, but the way he talked, the way he hesitated to say too much, also convinced me the kid's friend could really be an honest-to-goodness cherry ripe for the picking even if it did still sound all too good and I wasn't going to let myself get excited yet. "And I am to do the honors?" I asked. "If you'd like that. He'd like that." "Is Joel easy on the eyes?" "What do you mean?" I love boys. One minute they're so sophisticated, the next minute they don't even know a common figure of speech. One minute they're intelligently explicating *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, the next minute you find out the name Wallace Stevens means nothing to them. "I mean, is he good looking?" "Oh, he's real pretty. He's got bushy blond hair, there's a little red in it, and he's got the face of an angel. Sometimes just when I look at him, it'll change my whole mood for the better." "Why is he still a virgin?" "It's not the kind of thing he's seriously thought he could do, you know what I mean. Until recently." "Then what caused the sea change in your young friend with respect to being butt fucked?" "I guess he's just gotten around to wanting to try it." "And I am to be the recipient of young Joel's newfound craving because I happen to be a well-known writer?" "Yes, he likes your work, and because I did tell him a few secrets about your dick and stuff." "Ah, my dick and stuff!" "And also, this seems strange, but he needs me to see it happen." "Well, dear, you're welcome to participate as well as observe." "As a writer, I think this will interest you. It's something Joel and I used to talk about a long time before you and I met, and he came up with the thought that, if I were to see him get fucked for the first time, it would be a way for him to really tell me how much he loves me." "The two of you are sweet. You're sweethearts." "I feel like I've known him all my life." "Why don't you fuck him?" "I don't do that. But we tell each other everything. You'll love him too." Joel met us the next day for lunch at Emilio's which I picked because I was hot for the idea of a virgin kid stuffing himself with spaghetti and having a gut full of meatballs before getting fucked up the ass. Food and shit go together, I love my boys to eat a heavy meal before I have them. Michael's friend was everything Michael said and more. The face was better than angelic; it was ruddy and therefore cherubic. And he arrived in a svelte tan leather jacket, the sleek suggestive kink a nimble counterpoint to the ostensible innocence I was primed for. I could tell too, by his wide blue eyes, and the way he smiled, and the staccato talk, that he was geared for it, a life-altering experience as well as pent-up physical release. As we sat, Joel for whatever reason was comfortable talking about his family. A few minutes into what I soon realized could be a veritable peroration on the subject of the old folks back home (Scranton), I sensed that his talking about them was a mental preparation of sorts for the imminent maiden voyage, an invocation to the elders, as it were, though Mr. and Mrs. Ragula were probably no older than forty-five. Joel was an only child, and they missed him terribly since he had gone off to Cleveland to, well, I don't actually remember why it was he went off to Cleveland or how he and Michael had first met, though one of them did mention it. They had always given him the space he required as a human being, in fact, they knew better than other parents, especially most other parents in a claustrophobic place like Scranton, that that kind of space was something all human beings have a right to. Joel's tone was affecting; he did love them, it was sweet that he did, and there was a natural honesty in how he talked about his mother and father at this important moment of his life an hour or so before I'd be running a poleax up his rear, which, even though I couldn't see it now because he was sitting on it, I knew was a tight what these days they like to call real bubblebutt. Meantime, Michael said nothing about his own parents, which, if I were the sort to psychologize, would have struck me as significant. Next subject, finally, was another famous writer Joel had met while visiting an uncle or something in Boston. By now, we were warmed up, getting familiar and talking freely. "I thought I'd go all the way with him but I backed off at the last moment, and he just used his mouth on me," Joel recalled. Joel, with an instinct you often find in boys but it comes as a pleasant surprise anyway, must have seen in some quick shadow fretting my expression that I was concerned he might back off from me as well. "But if Michael's there, it's all definitely cool," Joel reassured. I didn't feel quite the lust I had for Michael the first time, but there was a joy I took in Joel's presence, almost a kind of joviality, that I hadn't felt in Michael's, and it got me hot to fuck him just as hard. When they were both sitting on my bed, the way they stared at each other, you'd have thought they were going to embrace at once and couple quite grandly as if no one else were there. What a lovely tableaux defined the moment: Joel's eyes sparkling blue, Michael's soft and dark. Joel's cock was a skinny pretty piece the head of it like a tiny white bonnet new babies wear when the weather's nice but just a little chilly. Michael's loomed out of his half-open trousers. The kid was definitely hung, I'd say eight or nine as the crow flies. But there was a fourth entity in the room: that powerful lyrical longing itself between the two boys which had seized my imagination, which was like to taunt me, and it was that thing, that great ineffable, that I wanted to somehow fuck the bejeesus out of. It was an altogether other-

worldly spirit I sensed had bewitched Michael and Joel and held them in its thrall so that they could never or would never fuck each other, but a somber sharing of such a moment as this consecrate their love instead, and maybe for them it was a searing thrill more binding than the warm liquid thrilling feel of their two bodies conjoined. It was a form of love I'd certainly never seen before. "He's ready for you," said Michael as I stripped. "Oh sweet baby, you're going to get it. You're going to get fucked. He's going to fill up your ass." It was a rare poetry Michael was about to achieve: the physical love he could not express he'd empower in another. Cyrano the proto-poet! "His dick is bursting for you. It's bursting to know you. It's bursting to be inside. He wants to be you. He wants to have all of you, to love you up into little pieces and swallow you and then sleep at last like he was dead." I was delighted. He hadn't memorized this heated language from the books he read, I was sure of that, nor did I figure it pretentious stuff he might have cooked up by himself or together with Joel in a garret in town holding each other's cocks and poking away at a typewriter. This was the genuine number, love's language yanked right out of him by the gods themselves. I know I sound ridiculous right now, I know what an embarrassing canting old queen I must sound like saying all this, but think about the stuff you can yank out of boys even as you shoot your own knowledge right up into them. If I'm hyperventilating, so did the Greeks in their great glory. Plato proscribed poetry, but it wasn't philosophy he ultimately tore out of his boys or filled them full of. Out instead dripped the very subversive stuff Plato hated, dactylic hexameter ouch! after dactylic hexameter ouch! Joel was on all fours. When I spread his cheeks and could see his little butthole, I wasn't yet utterly given over with greed for it that I couldn't at that moment also imagine how that pink naked thing would look to Michael as he came around to my side of the bed to see what his own cock wasn't going to fuck but what his heart of hearts yearned for. Then the two boys just broke my heart. As I felt the fuckslot give way and pressed in to mess him up, they held hands. Pardon my being emphatic again, but I'm telling you they held hands and were in love. "Beautiful ass," I said, wishing I could say more. "Darling Joel," said Michael as I thrust in. "I can't believe it's happening," said Joel. His back muscles like a young deer's flesh only much paler quivered as I tugged him. "Love me, love me," said Joel. "I do," said Michael as I screwed, trying to make it hurt because at that moment I'd have felt safer had he been torn away from his true love and bound to my authority instead. But "I love you," he breathed, only "I love you" to Michael. "Darling, you're fucked," said Michael, his tone startling and almost eerie because it was a supportive, kindly sound, though full too of recognition, an almost wise paternal acceptance that this person he loved was someone who had to get fucked and, now, finally was getting fucked. The voice was so damn human. "Eeeeeeeh" was the sound of the sound Joel let go as I opened him way up, the very way I like to make a boy my bitch, but then I heard Michael say, "Oh my darling, you have the look of love at last." And he actually started singing the popular song. . . I can hardly wait to hold you, Feel my arms around you, How long I have waited, Waited just to love you. . . It seems so ludicrous now, so damn laughable. At the time it was extraordinary, heart-rending. That music. . . Now that I have found you, Don't ever go. . . Like an ethereal music that some bad music seems at certain potent moments to be. But the kids still didn't touch more than by just the smallest intimate clasp of their hands binding them in that same superlative fraternity of theirs. "Back away," I very nearly hissed at Michael, and I don't know if he then let go of Joel's hand, but I do remember covering Joel's whole back and feeling the rosy butt cheeks against me as I creamed inside him at last. I remember the spurt was a warm hot shot almost like I was pissing. And then I felt the anger, which I hid, I hid it completely, saying, "Good kid, good kids both of you, good sweet kids." The anger persisted but it was mixed with fear, and a sense of myself about to die, and wild love and longing passed through me too, longing for the other-worldly creature the boys had created between them with their love, and I was still way down deep inside the one boy the other boy loved like Mary loved Jesus, and I was shocked actually shocked that someone so loved like he was could have so much cock and cum inside him although isn't that what love is when someone truly loves you? It was while I was still inside him that the persuasive thought I touched on before came to me, that the kingdom of heaven was theirs right now but these kids might not only forget all this ever happened as they got older and paunchy, but maybe even now they couldn't compass the full significance of their own love, and maybe they never would, or, if they did, the knowledge would pass. It was I, I! who would remember the depth of it and preserve it and sanctify it, for I wasn't just a guy in love with a piece of meat, I was the one who'd mount the deer head and memorialize their lovely loving enactment for as long as I lived, or longer yet if I could get it down on paper so future generations would know all about true love, and it didn't really matter who felt the love versus who preserved it so long as it was preserved. A few minutes after I pulled out, they broke my heart again. I awoke after a thirty-second nap—one of those brief little relaxations of the self that produce the most jolting little dreams, and how I wish I can remember what it was at that point of all points in time I dreamed—and sensed the presence of both boys in the bathroom. When I ambled over there, in a scene no painter I can think of can do, Michael was cleaning his friend. His hand was on his shoulder and Joel rested his head on the nape of Michael's neck. They moved in silence as Michael, tissue in hand, worked the violated crack. Thank God I saw them or the scene would have been lost forever. They persisted in silence for five minutes or more. Joel finally said, "I didn't expect it to hurt so much or that it would be so messy." "You were beautiful," Michael reassured. "Thank you," Joel said, and Michael finishing up patted his balls. I backed off toward the bedroom, fixing again in my mind's eye the earlier moment when I fucked him. I saw Joel squat, I heard more now, I heard whimpers I hadn't heard while I was in him. Yet it still seemed a thousand years away, a legend of life already. We slept through the night and when I awoke the next day, I didn't touch Joel who was lying beside me on his stomach. For the first time, I noticed the freckles on his back, faint irregular designs. I didn't think to touch him. Instead, I got up and cooked breakfast, eggs and bacon. Michael, sleeping on the couch, walked into the kitchen bleary-eyed, cute, as if he were the one who had worked hardest of all the night before. They were talking about an English professor they knew who taught at Cleveland State named Leon Bieber. They admired him greatly, and were a little intimidated by him. He was a no-nonsense sort, didn't coddle anything that smacked of being sophomoric; his main love was Melville, and he taught Whitman only begrudgingly, despising, he could barely conceal it, all that open-souled stuff for its apparent formal laxity and, worse, absence of ambiguity. That kind of poetry was suspiciously easy to write, he warned, and he made fun of how Whitman favorably reviewed his own

Leaves of Grass under a pseudonym. "Poetry that's life-affirming and that really loves life doesn't do a thing for him," explained Joel, critically but not without respect. "He's one of a professional multitude," I said, "and I've known them all. If they can't abide Whitman, who's been sanctified by time and collective opinion, what chance does a contemporary Whitman like Kerouac have in academe!" They huddled over the eggs, impressed by my comment. I continued. "Now, you talk to us, to me or to Clellon Holmes or even Bill Burroughs, who's never written a joyous word in his life, and we'll tell you how great Jack Kerouac really is, greater in some ways than Whitman. But it will be another hundred years before guys like Bieber deign to see it." "You think Burroughs is a great writer?" asked Joel. "Sure, but sometimes I say, so what? So the whole world's on junk. So the Pope's a fucking junkie. So what! I tell you boys, the world is just dying for all the rhapsodies it can get. There can't be too many. One Whitman is better than none but two or three in the same generation would be glorious. Now finish your food, boys, time's a wastin'."

Email your subversions and perversions: [letters@corpse.org](mailto:letters@corpse.org)