

David Boyle

from *Orphan and Amorcé*

1

“What are you going to do, Matilde?”

“I’m going to make him sleep in the crib until he gets me a baby!”

“When I think of his feet. Toes straight up in the air and you expect him to father a child? He can’t even walk straight!”

“His mother comes over whenever we—”

“As if she knows.”

“Daniel is hooked up to something like a home security system, except it’s in his clothing. I try to unzip him and, by the way, Niles Montague came into the Pet Shiatsu Clinic and asked me out!”

“Really? The Pimp Foreman on *Assembly Line Call Girls*?”

“Where they weld by day and sin by night.”

“I would.”

“But I don’t know, Ophelia.”

“How long can you wait? You’re forty years old and your husband’s locked up in a jumpsuit.”

2

An article in the newspaper read, “Jarvis Pinley Taken in the Middle of the Night...All That Remains Are His Shoes,” but it was too dark to read in the outhouse and Daniel heard singing enough to distract him from the spread out paper on his lap.

When a chorus of miscreant children would gather, singing along with their sticks and fists to wallop on the privy, they turned an otherwise peaceful refuge into a place Daniel wished to avoid. Occasionally, their siege could last longer than an hour, and the children were for an unknown reason impervious to rain and snow so that on these days of cold and inclement weather, he was afraid to face them, preferring instead to put up with a stream that poured from a leak in the ceiling directly above the toilet, and when he sat down landed cold onto the bald area of his scalp. The concrete floors were damp and chilled his feet, and the walls and their thinness let in the February cold and made his crepitations a public event.

He blamed the cold and the leakage inside on those antediluvian building codes that the city continued to enforce, determining that any structure was deemed to pass inspection if it remained standing 12 months after it had been raised. This left the Tumblewood Construction Co. with eleven violations and when a home, an outhouse or another structure collapsed, often under the influence of a light breeze, they were fined but allowed to continue to exist and do good

business, since a terrible reputation made their prices 2 or 3 times cheaper than their nearest rivals and prompted Schmetta Girthborough, Daniel's adopted mother, to call on the Company's services.

Most likely the reason the outhouse had been standing now for two and a half years was owing to what was for Tumblewood Construction a recent innovation: the use of nails employed instead of glue. But still, the walls were almost as thin as the cheaper single-ply toilet paper that Schmetta purchased on sale – sixteen rolls for \$1.79 – and it wasn't certain how long they could withstand a battering from little children, or for how many months or years he would tolerate everyone knowing he was there because of the rumblings that could be heard fifty or a hundred feet away.

It bothered Daniel that whenever Priscilla Nettlesworth came to visit his adopted mother, she always had to stop by the privy and start a conversation.

“My mother's in the house!!!” Daniel would say.

“But I want to speak to *you*.”

“You ignore me if we run into each other on the street. But as soon as I sit down to well, you know, I could understand if you needed a roll of toilet paper, but this is ridiculous!”

Mrs. Nettlesworth replied, “Why did your mother settle for Tumblewood Construction? She certainly has money for a better outhouse.”

“Can't you see I'm on the toilet?”

“Well I can't exactly see you.”

“Whenever you come over here—”

“It's not whenever.”

“Couldn't you change the subject at least? Every time you come and speak to me, it's always the same. Let's talk about something more interesting, like the lingering aftertaste of Cod Liver Oil? I know how much you love Cod Liver Oil. You were in the hospital last week with Hypervitaminosis A, a common symptom of overconsumption.”

“I've only had the synthetic variety, though I'd like the real, but we'll have to wait until the Second Coming for fish oil, I suppose. In the meantime—”

“You know what I have to suffer through, but I have no choice. It's cold, miserable and wet in here. However, the decision wasn't mine, and it won't be in the future if she decides to upgrade.”

“That's why I've come, you know, to speak to your mother.”

“What do you care?”

“Oh, I care, alright. My outhouse is connected to the city sewer line, has insulation, soundproofing, a ceiling fan, lighting, baseboard heaters, 120V of electricity, and it’s guaranteed to hold up under any conditions for 25 years. Think about it. Good soundproofing is important, too. I won’t be able to bother you if I don’t know that you’re here.”

“Neither will those children!”

“So think about it.”

Before leaving him, she slipped her husband’s business card under the door, where Daniel already had forty or fifty tucked into a cubby with his magazines and newspapers:

<p><i>Royal Flush Outhouse Company</i></p> <p>Lou Nettlesworth, Owner</p> <p>2438 Plumber Drive.</p> <p>Open 9 to 7</p> <p>Monday through Saturday</p>

3

The news about Jarvis Pinley was wrapped around his legs to keep warm, but with no heat and Priscilla gone, he shivered in time to voices of the young ones, who from several backyards away were closer, perhaps thirty or forty feet, to where he heard what they were singing:

*A tiny little bird I saw
Sitting in a tree
Kerree Chir Chir
Deedle Deedle Dee
A tiny little wren
A little wren was he*

Wherever you would go in the City of Lachrimo, if there was a hedgerow, a cage might be spied there with the door open and a bit of food for a waiting bird. Mealworms, waxworms, some cheese or nuts or seeds. In particular, the cage and the food were suited for the kinglet, otherwise known as the wren. All of this attention to capture a wren was not for the rather drab-looking creature to be viewed through the bars of a cage while you ate your breakfast or to be taxidermied and set on your mantle or even turned into a Pickled Wren & Artichoke Tapenade, delicious as it was. No, the reason so much trouble was made to deprive this bird of its freedom came down to the need for a scapegoat.

It was an ancient custom in certain places for a wren to be put to death and carried around in a box by children who knocked on people’s doors and asked for change to pay for its burial. While the practice was still implemented where Daniel lived, its purpose had changed. Once, it was assumed by those who carried out this baleful act that it was

punishment for a wren that lived in the rafters of the Upper Room, defecating on the Last Supper in the middle of “Do this in remembrance of me.” Thereby delaying the salvation of man by a minute or so, as new bread and wine were presented and the prayer repeated.

Others said that the bird hid in Christ’s loincloth when Jesus went up on the cross and, due to its proximity, tried to receive credit for taking on the burden of original sin by saying, “It was I and not he who on the Day of Calvary broke the power of Satan, bearing upon my little wings and tail the cruel Roman spike, piercing feather and flesh, as Daddy in Heaven told me, so that my blood might atone for the sum of iniquities heaped on the world since Adam.”

But at some point this story had been forgotten, and replaced by another. No one remembered the deceiving wren or the wren who treated the original body and blood as a bird would any windshield. This was understandable because Lachrimo was such a strange and far out-of-the-way place that in the Church of St. Lucia, all memory of the crucifixion had been erased; above the altar, no cross was found, but in its place there was the sculpture of a fish with a side of broccoli and potatoes: a colliding of the person of Christ, the *Ichthys*, and an appreciation for fine dining came together to create a whole new theological discourse instructing that, on the last day, the Lord would come as a fish dinner; this food being unavailable and talked about, so elevated to a mouth-wateringly divine status that it was believed that the Son of God himself could incarnate in a tilapia with a citrus marinade or a pan-roasted trout with pomelo dill stuffing or gravlax.

The idea of the last supper and the crucifixion had been lost, and with it the original significance of having boys come around on the day after Christmas with a dead wren in a box, asking for change. There was no reason to punish a bird for a sin that no one person could remember, but the practice of killing the wren continued, though shed of religious intent, and its meaning reconfigured for an entirely different and secular order of fears.

The wren came to the service of a perpetual cloud of terror that hovered over the city in the shape of a revenant, less than human; in cowl and black robes, Darwin Taber’s face was never seen as he wandered through the streets picking up the few who lingered out of doors after midnight, and sometimes, though with less frequency, breaking into houses and apartments and stealing away the inhabitants. The creaking door was counted among a Lachrimoean’s greatest fears, especially among those who were too poor to acquire the as many as sixteen or twenty locks on a single door that the very frightened and well heeled residents were able to buy. With a bony finger tip, he was known to pick the most complicated systems; there was no deadbolt, supposedly, he could not undo. Though there was some evidence that he had an appetite for human flesh, and that of children in particular, the simple and provable fact was that he deposited those he gathered out past the walls of the city.

4

Lachrimo was on a binge, and its symptom a wet brain that impaired recall and rendered history and perception into a form metamorphosed by the intoxicant coursing through its veins. The liquor of choice poured down the gullet of this isolated community was not *Holy Mary Mother of God Turnip Brandy* or *Black Dog Ale* or *Fermented Meadow Fescue*, but fear, not of war or the knotted belly of hunger, but directed towards, of all things, a relatively unpopulated temperate deciduous forest named France that started outside the walls and supposedly went on for thousands of miles to the end of the world.

This France did not in the Lachrimoean conjure images typically associated with the name: Eiffel Tower, snails, *pâté de foie gras*, Champs-Élysées, Ratatouille. While the Necropolis Book Store on Minerva Ave. sold novels, philosophical tomes and theological treatises on the imagined life of someone forced to live in France, no one really knew what it was like who had a tongue to give an account, and so as far as most were concerned, “It’s not here” was the only answer

possible and expressed as well a feeling of xenophobia towards the place and its inhabitants so strong that those who went there were barred from ever returning, because it was a scientific fact, as Mr. Wrentwister stated, that a darkness entered their souls which could be passed onto those inside the city: “Everyone who leaves, industrious, hygienic and respectable, returns dirty, effeminate and infected with the souls of the dead, who crave a living body to dwell in.”

Any person, brought there by Darwin and returning, was subject to the most cruel form of punishment that could be inflicted upon another human being, and while no one liked to see a friend or relative undergo the Quarantine, as it was called, for their own safety it was a necessary evil.

In addition to the Quarantine, other ways of limiting the threat caused by the outsider returning allowed an entire industry to grow and many products were made available, like Miss Molly Perfume, made from the real urine of a female cat, for a woman to mark her territory in order to avoid a visit from a transgendered apparition that in particular people were most afraid of. There were also “Readers,” who claimed they could see in the ones who returned a pneuma that hovered around them, composed of three figures.

Known by their individual names, there was a castrato named Limpy with a riot of blond hair that looked like a wig and really wasn't. He had a terrible voice: his *a capella* version of the *Mass in B Minor* made it seem like the *Gloria in Excelsis* was being sung by a mezzo-soprano Tasmanian Devil with throat cancer. Methyl Ermine was an aging female impersonator who did terrible imitations of Ethel Merman and marvelous impressions of Bella Abzug as an oversexed teenager. Then there was Milo, an atheist Lithuanian homosexual who wore Fuchsia hot pants, smoked banned Cuban cigars and bathed in a bathtub full of bourbon every fortnight, pouring in bottle after bottle of *Four Roses* and *Wild Turkey*, *Grandma's Hairy Tongue* and *Pray for Us Sinners Now and at the Hour of Our Death Sacramental Bourbon*.

Mr. Wrentwister, who smelled on some days like cat piss and on others like rotting turnips and still on others like the smell of sex when a rutting bisexual antelope buck started dry humping a decomposed vulture carcass, said that “Limpy, Milo and Methyl enjoy leaping from the asymptomatic carrier to pass up the rectum of an unsuspecting passerby, and in this manner fuck the hell out of any man and occupy the wife or mistress to share in the pleasure she receives from her husband. Thankfully, I am selling at the low price of \$10.99, blessed by the Monsignor, a cork that is guaranteed to offer protection for seven days.”

People were willing to endure the discomfort of walking around with a cork or wearing cat urine to avoid being contaminated by incorporeal but highly salacious apparitions, even though there wasn't any evidence, aside from the verification of the Reader, that they were real, or that anyone had ever been harmed by them. But fear of those who came from the outside held an entire community in thrall, and made them, against anyone they suspected, deem it necessary to carry out the Quarantine.

5

The *Blaise St. Picayune* was printed out of Peter Ashen's basement on an arcane moveable type press that required hours of typesetting to ready for printing a newspaper of ten pages, more or less. Because he was the recipient of an inheritance amounting to seventy thousand dollars a year, after taxes, Peter had plenty of time for idle pursuits, did not rely on printing to furnish his livelihood and was without any concern as to the financial consequences that would result if an unregistered publication such as his was to be closed down.

City authorities were fairly liberal in regards to underground newspapers and other periodicals so long as no topic of controversy appeared which questioned individuals and institutions of significance. Even in those rare cases where this

event occurred, the printing press was removed from its owner's possession and, under normal circumstances, no further action was taken against the violator, though a refusal to quit at this point might be grounds for a more drastic punishment.

When Peter began to compose a series of articles that Darwin was not of a class of beings who have a second life beyond the grave, but a mortal inclined to take people from the street and from their homes for some reason of making money, not much attention was paid to it, except that, from the morning after his first article on the subject appeared in the *Blaise St. Picayune*, he would wake up to threatening notes written by Darwin, ordering him to stop, until the last message appeared on his door, January 8th:

Dear Ashen,

I find it flattering that you continue to investigate me, even though I have repeatedly warned you against it. Why do you want to see my face? I suppose it is because you are curious to find out who I am. I am for you as well. We will have many hours to discuss this, after which you might be inclined to hurry back to your press and publish your story for an impatient audience. I am certain of the fame you would receive and exciting opportunities for career advancement, if it weren't for the fact that, time and again, anyone who comes back to Lachrimo after their removal is without exception, Quarantined.

Let me take the time to steer you away prematurely from such a course, although in my heart (yes, I have one!), I feel less inclined to fear you will flee my company once you get to know me. I am curious about your strange habit of late to bolt all twenty-seven locks, and take it as evidence of a certain coyness, coupled with a desire to put up barriers in order to test my fervor, which indeed is greater than you can imagine. Who else would devote the time to go through all twenty-seven but me? A task of several hours at least, almost my whole working night. Think of all the people I could remove to France, but I am sure we will hit it off, and you'll want to stay with me because I am really quite handsome.

When I finally meet you,

Darwin Taber

Of those Daniel knew, friends and relatives, who were taken by Darwin, Peter was among the closest, and the following night, after all twenty-seven locks had been opened, every one of his children and wife were spared except for him. On his dresser, a hastily scrawled note signed by "Mr. Taber" outlined the different forms of sacrilege committed in the attempt to discover his true identity. It took several months for Daniel to hear a knock on his door, and there was Peter, reduced to a fraction of his once well-fed 237-pound body.

The danger of harboring a person who returned was equal in measure. In other words, the one who sought refuge and the person who offered it were to be given over to the authorities for Quarantine; not that the law was ever but rarely needed. Fear of Limpy, Milo and Methyl allowed even the most trusted friend to turn in a friend who came to him for

refuge. But there was an exception: among the populace, a sympathetic minority scattered here and there, who had once been outside, managed to return without being detected. They would take in anyone.

Daniel had come back from France as a little boy, and was adopted by Schmetta. As a young man, he told her that he heard voices coming out of strange places, like a sewer, a radiator, or even his navel, and worried that he might be harboring Limpy, Milo and Methyl beneath his skin as a result of time spent living in France. Schmetta replied that Daniel's imagination was inflamed by what they told him at school and by the incendiary rhetoric of Mr. Wrentwister who would give a speech before or after he performed the Quarantine in public. When he spoke, Wrentwister often said that he had "...an ear and a nose to seek out in the ones who returned Limpy's caterwauling and Methyl's perfume and Milo's Four Roses deep in the skin like rotten fruit..." Fortunately for Daniel, by the age of twelve the voices stopped, but for a long time he continued to fear their return. "I don't want Mr. Wrentwister to find them in me."

"Just don't let anyone know what we've spoken about, and I will protect you," she told him.

He sometimes dreamed about the time he was taken by the scruff of the neck to the city's edge, while Darwin sang into his ear the same song that the children with their moveable games, who were drawn to Daniel's fear by instinct as it seeped through thin walls, were inclined to sing while they danced around the circumference of the outhouse. He knew what could happen if he was discovered to have taken Peter in, but he couldn't let Peter put his trust in the wrong person, and so taking Peter's life to be as important as his own, Daniel allowed him to remain.

In the end, Peter Ashen remained for a week. At one point, Daniel asked him, "Do you hear them?"

"Limpy? No. I don't think they exist. I haven't for a long time."

Though Daniel offered to allow him to stay for as long as he wanted, these being the days before Daniel fell in love with Matilde, who probably would have turned in both of them, on the seventh day Peter departed on account that he missed his wife. "...the smell of *She-Leopard* perfume on her breasts. She'll be wearing it when I come home. Darwin smelled awful, didn't he?"

"She'll be waiting to turn you in," Daniel replied.

"How could you say that?"

"In her eyes, you are not the same person you were before this happened. Her fear is greater than her love for you."

Peter left at 5 in the morning, making sure no one saw him as he departed the Girthborough home, and by 10 am, word came around to Daniel that Peter was scheduled to be Quarantined at 4 in the afternoon. Crowds always showed up to watch as Mr. Wrentwister, who slept late and could not be relied upon to surface before two, used an instrument somewhere between a kitchen knife and a screwdriver to slice and dice and tear away the eyes and tongue. Then, as the victim, hands bound behind him, was covered in blood and writhing on the cobblestones of the main square, a weakened hydrochloric acid was poured into the nose and ears that destroyed their inner workings but went no further, leaving the victim effectively Quarantined with no sense pathways open to let the contagion lurking there find a way out.

There was always a fear that, at the moment before Quarantine, the victim would release Limpy, Milo and Methyl upon the observing crowd, so everyone who came brought with him or her a wren that, in the role of scapegoat, would absorb

any evil influence exuded forth and just in case the bird was now possessed in the moment after Quarantine, its neck was effectively twisted from its head.

Of all the people who came that day, Daniel alone failed to bring a wren, and while everyone else in the crowd did not look on directly as Quarantine was brought to bear upon Peter Ashen, Daniel saw everything. He watched as Peter began to sniff the air around Wrentwister and a look of recognition came into his eyes, which didn't last very long as the instrument found its way past the edge of the cornea, through the sclera, and with a delicate twist, securing a hold behind the lens, with a skill of an Aztec priest removing a heart, Mr. Wrentwister pulled the instrument slightly towards him and the eye came out, with the nerve and blood vessels trailing behind and reaching their full extension, tearing away from the socket as a fountain poured out of the severed artery. Wrentwister stemmed the flow down Peter's cheek with a cotton swab stuck into each empty hole as it became available. The cutting away of Peter's tongue was less nimble, as Mr. Wrentwister went to it like a wrestler until, with one knee balanced on Peter's temple, his assistant Mud Gringle held the jaw so Peter didn't bite off Mr. Wrentwister's fingers. Before it happened, Peter screamed out, "I know who you—" but he was cut off as Wrentwister stuck a large hook into the tongue so he could pull it out far enough to saw away in slightly under a minute. Then, putting on a welding mask, Wrentwister cauterized the entire open wound inside Peter's mouth with a blowtorch so that he wouldn't bleed to death and could as early as tomorrow join the ranks of Mr. Wrentwister's beggars, who each earned as much as a \$100.00 a day for him.

Near the end of this almost daily ritual, Mr. Wrentwister looked at Daniel, and seeing that he was the only one in the crowd who had his eyes open and who did not have a wren, smiled a wicked little smile and began to sing, "A tiny little bird I saw, sitting in a tree..." as he poured acid into Peter's nose and ears.

6

Maybe the only thing that saved Daniel was the fact that he was taken at the age of three and when he came back as an older boy, no one recognized him. Even if they had, his adopted Schmetta wouldn't have let anyone touch her son. Tomorrow, or a week or a year from now, the paper covering Daniel's knees might read, "Jarvis Pinley Was Discovered and is Scheduled to Be Quarantined this Evening." But he feared, sooner or later, that his own name would be there. Maybe with Schmetta no longer alive to protect him, the authorities might be directed to his outhouse by girls and boys who rang a steady beat upon the outside, everyone with a dead bird in a box, coming around after Quarantine. When they gathered the birds, it was *Kerree Chir Chir, Deedle Deedle Dee*, but with the wren in repose, they had a different song:

*As I was going to Killenaule,
I met a wren upon the wall.
Up with me wattle and knocked him down,
And brought him in to Carrick Town.*

*I have a little box under me arm,
Under me arm under me arm.
I have a little box under me arm,
A penny or tuppence would do it no harm.*

Mrs. Clancy's a very good woman,

*a very good woman, a very good woman,
Mrs. Clancy's a very good woman,
She give us a penny to bury the wren.¹*

Children beat on the doors in every neighborhood, and a coin was dropped into the coffin of a dead bird, but they did not bother to disturb the outhouses, except for Daniel's when he happened to be the occupant. He did not know if it was because the walls were too thin to keep sound or smell from the outside, or if they were attracted in some way with their fists and sticks to the fear engendered by his secret. It was hard to tell because he had never used a toilet except for the one in back of Schmetta's, and did not know if they would follow him should he choose another place for his relief. Their visitations in any case terrified Daniel and once or twice made him stay inside for several days.

No one cared if he was missing, except for his employer at the Tantamount Furniture Company, where he worked as a seat cushion tester. Schmetta knew where he was and always kept an eye on Daniel whenever he used the toilet, because she had the key to open and close his jumpsuit. She didn't want him to get away and go home and make love to his wife, so any time he refused to leave she'd padlock the latrine from the outside and check on him every few hours. Ever since Daniel came into her possession, she had a walk-in closet with a bucket where she'd go for her 1s, right next to the bedroom he slept in as a child. Since her 2s were frequently delayed, she sometimes didn't need to use the outhouse for long stretches, but when the urge built up within her and strangled every other priority except that one impulse, she opened the door, lifted Daniel from his seat, locked him in his jumpsuit and threw him out onto a patch of snow or grass, shivering and pale as a ghost in February.

For her part, Matilde didn't notice if he was gone for several days. She hated that his feet were deformed by so many nights sleeping in a crib because he was unwilling or unable to put out.

"So let him rot in the johnny," she said to Schmetta.

7

A flashlight allowed him to read until the children left (within thirty feet, the sound emerging, then fading, today they did not pound against the walls of the privy with their sticks). He took the paper from where it was wrapped around his legs. "According to Greiselda Plunkett, who advertises herself proudly as the ugliest bartender in Lachrimo, Jarvis exited the *Curly Ear* after having too many glasses of *Fair Whether Ale*. At ten to twelve, in spite of her offer to let stay him stay at her dwelling on the second floor above the bar, he seemed to prefer the dangers of being so late on the street...it is believed he has been removed by Darwin, and if anyone sees him back in the city, it must be known to the proper authorities or punishment for harboring Mr. Pinley will be quick and severe."

He enjoyed the time he had, when the children weren't around, to read the newspaper, even if it was an article like this, because it meant that he was allowed to enjoy what should be the most solitary of occupations. But moments of peace on the toilet were few and far between. Benjamin, who also delivered his mail, would occasionally slip a note under the outhouse door asking if he wanted to go out for a drink, and there was Mrs. Nettlesworth, of course, and there were the

¹ Part of a song that is sung by boys in Ireland on the day after Christmas, St. Stephen's Day, as they go from door to door with a dead wren in order to collect money to bury it.

mice and the bats, a barn owl once and Narlinda selling her anti-wrinkle grout and a special delivery, take-out intended for Mr. Goldman, from *Le Pâtisserie des Animaux Putréfiés* of mugwort and three-day-old possum pastries when they were brought once to the wrong latrine. Daniel gladly ate them.

But with all of the visitors who came to him, there was never any person who spoke from inside the toilet.

Daniel couldn't see where the voices were coming from when he opened his legs and stuck the flashlight in-between, down into the hole. However, he could hear them.

Daniel: I couldn't hear you!! Say it again!

The First Voice: I said, you look good from down here.

Daniel: You don't happen to be the chambermaid who fell into an outhouse, thinking it was a night commode when she had to empty the pots, do you?

The Second Voice: I wouldn't be caught dead in an outhouse. I prefer flush toilets.

Daniel: Where do you think you are then?

The Third Voice: I am singing *Palestrina* at *Our Lady of the Perfect Ascension* where they still accept male sopranos.

The Second Voice: He is going to be Our Lady of the Perfect Ascension up his Rear End when we're done with him.

Daniel: I would hardly call this a church.

The First Voice: They almost threw me out of St. Lucia's for wearing women's clothing.

Daniel: Almost threw you out? I'd expect they would have done far worse. It's a capital punishment.

The Third Voice: Hey Milo. Take a look up there.

Daniel: Where are you looking?

The Second Voice: I see. White as bone china. There's nothing. Not a word. Don't worry, Daniel, we won't tell them that you were never marked.

Daniel: Please don't.

The Second Voice: Is that why your mother never unlocks the jumpsuit? If your wife saw that, the last thing you'd look at before your eyes were blown out is a choir of wrens about to get their necks twisted off.

The First Voice: Where were you when you were three?

Daniel: Why do you want to know?

The Third Voice: That is the age when you get the marking on your hindquarters, in Latin. Those priests will add a custom or ritual; think of any excuse to fill their coffers.

Daniel: Monsignor Gregory sometimes called a boy or two into the rectory, just to make sure that he had it. The Reverend Monsignor said a ghost might seek residence up there and haunt your bowels and no Pepto-Bismol would cure it.

The Second Voice: I think the Monsignor had the same idea as those ghosts.

Daniel: Yeah. He never checked me. Good thing, I guess it was because I'm locked up all the time.

The First Voice: You're not now.

Daniel: So what are you thinking?

The Second Voice: Methyl. Do you want a first shot at him?

The First Voice: That is very generous of you.

Daniel: Holding off on my wife has been very difficult, and I don't feel like I've been preserving my innocence for all of these years, just to be taken advantage of by vagrants in my toilet!!!!

While Daniel was saying this, he almost broke the sound barrier in the time it took for his jumpsuit to travel from his ankles to his neck. He pulled the zipper shut, took his cane, closed the latrine and walked: his shoes were pointed skyward at their tips to accommodate a deformity of toes that were turned up, and this made it difficult, along with his osteoarthritic knees, to go on the slate pathway that led to the house. About halfway to that goal, he heard laughing and turned around.

Two boys, Shaun and Michael McFarland, 8 and 10 with identical blond bowl haircuts, had their ears to the outer wall on either side of the privy.

Shaun said, "We were listening in."

Daniel replied, "So what? I was having a conversation!!"

Michael, the older of the two said, "A conversation, Mr. Girthborough? With yourself!?"

Daniel realized that the children were not able to hear any voices in the pit even though, to him, the echo that was most likely produced by Limpy, Milo and Methyl upon the metal walls of the inner part of the toilet seemed louder than his own vocalizations. He decided against mentioning what he alone perceived to Shaun and Michael, for fear of being Quarantined.

"I get bored sometimes!", he told them, and cutting off further contact, he walked on to where Mother was standing at the kitchen door, holding a padlock she put on him so that what he wore could only be opened or closed with her consent. After she fixed the padlock to the puller and metal loops that hung off his collar, she yanked hard, three times, to insure its security and Daniel felt safe, at least until the next time he had to use the toilet.