

## SELF ABUSE

*You all know what it is to have at times a pleasant feeling in your private parts, and there comes an inclination to work it up with your hand or otherwise. It is especially likely to happen when you see a dirty picture or hear dirty stories and jokes.*

— 1st edition of Scouting for Boys (redacted text)



Cancer reaches into the shit-encrusted hole of the outhouse. The wood is sauna-hot and splintering on his knees. He feels along the inside, cringing at the slimy secrets pushing into his fingertips.

He wonders how big the pit is. If he fell in, would the fumes paralyze him? Would anyone find him before he suffocated? He imagines a bottomless shaft. It would be so easy to install an outhouse on one of those pits around the park that you don't see until it's too late, the uncaring unmarked entrances to the blind worming of the earth, hateful and endless—

His hand hangs in the dark, radiating, still aching, ever since it was struck by his instructor. It made it harder to ignore his body. This persistent throbbing.

He rips a page from the darkness. Pornolaga magazine, stuck to the inside of the pit. The punishment for possessing pornolaga is severe, so the scouts have evolved increasingly obscure hiding places.

### *ITEM | DIRTY MAGAZINE*

*It's very, very, dirty.*

The page is sepia, rich yellows and browns like an old movie. He gulps at—what is that? She's on her knees, just like him, arching up—are they going to have vagina sex? But there's another angle, and she's covering her vagina with her hand, which leaves—

He sinks onto his stomach and humps the floor of the outhouse, trying not to get splinters. He's too scared to take his pants off, someone might come, and if he was actually sitting on the toilet he might lose control in other ways, so he just softly desperately rubs into the floor and tries to see the page by slits of light in the plank wall, glimpses of juicy, retrofeminine meat. Her rear is frustratingly stained by water damage, forcing him to imagine surreal conjugations—

Heavy footsteps and he panics. The page flutters into the hole.



*The temptation may arise from physical causes, such as eating rich foods, sleeping on the*

*back in a soft bed with too many blankets on, or from constipation...*

— Scouting for Boys

He hides in a bush, spying through the foliage at the long suntanned legs of his classmates, nurse brigade in their skirts flapping in the coastal wind.

There is pressure in his guts, uncomfortably tender as if pressing against an aching button deep inside, pink as the candy drop uvula at the back of his throat which is becoming more and more visible, panting as he prays—

Please make me good.

Cancer inhales his knuckles. This is what he likes about praying, the simple smell of his own skin, the reassurance that he is alive and the dark bag hasn't come for him yet. But right now his wrist is burning and his knuckles are white-hot. The sting of that ruler—

Please make me good.

Please make me good.

Please make me good.

The prayer breaks, one hand sliding down into his shorts.

Please make me feel good.

When Cancer masturbates, he puts his finger in the crease between ball and thigh. When he feels his tubes or arteries or tendons or whatever clenching and pulsing as he starts to cum, it makes him cum even harder. He wonders if it's muscles or maybe tubes carrying his semen. But he's not masturbating, just adjusting himself. Because Cancer has a serious problem. He's incredibly sensitive. Just changing his underwear, or the tightening of a belt around his waist, is enough to make bad things happen. He can't pull his foreskin down all the way. Just trying makes him harder. So he adjusts, adjusts, adjusts, trying to fit in these tight shorts, hand bulging inside—

Is someone there? He turns over and zips himself up and pulls the buckle tight, crushing himself inside. He waits for footsteps to pass. Maybe he should just walk home. But it would be the same there. Worrying that someone will walk in or hear. Worrying about staining his clothes with white crust. So at home, he only does it on the toilet, with the fan on. But he stays hard so long after that he can barely urinate. It varies between spraying too high and hitting the wall or dribbling straight down, so he has to wipe down the wall and floor and all over the toilet. Sometimes he uses the shower, but he gets yelled at if he takes too long. He loses control really fast everywhere else, but it takes forever in the shower. This drives him crazy but he can't stop, doesn't want it to end. If he lets it out, he'll be empty. And he is, intrinsically, empty. All he can do is distract himself from that fact.

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## The Continnence Badge

◆            *Keep your mind and body pure.*

*[Crude drawing of a trash bag with lines coming from it. Why did he draw those lines? Dark lines for something much worse, all he had was dark, a chewed pen, ink bursts on his lip.]*

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When he doesn't have a dirty magazine, he looks at his ScoutManual.

### *SEVERE BLEEDING*

*Your purity ribbon can be used as an emergency bandage. Apply pressure to the wound and*

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Illustrations of the pink-red ribbon wrapped around body parts. Around the leg like a garter. Around the wrist. The upper arm. The foot, with bare toes exposed. Around the waist, tight between the stomach and ribs.

Gasp.

### *RESCUE BREATHING*

An illustration of a boy tilting back the head of another boy. In the next picture, his hand is placed under the chin, cradling the head. The neck cartilage is fully thrust out, and his hand lays on it. His mouth is on the other boy's mouth.

Cancer slaps the book shut. This isn't who he is. This is a disease. He rubs his wrist. The welt is a soft ridge under his thumb, humming at his touch. Not a scar. It will fade. Just like this feeling.

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Riparian hides in his office, the smell of his fear joining the rot of the life he stepped into.

Unwatered flower clippings. Something died in the aquarium, a murky yellow cloud. Petri dishes. Animalcules and minibeasts. Glimpses of infusoria, microscopic voyeurism.

Leech bucket. Ferret goggles.

A stack of notebooks, stained with swamp scum and coffee rings. Is that what the pain is from? Are we addicted to coffee as well?

What a sad, lonely life. A far cry from the palace we deserve. He gets worked up at the thought of something crying at a distance. The shore once shrieked with flying animals. What were they called? Not bats, not bugs...they shed feathers like angels. We missed the sound. But with a couple hundred greased stakes, by midday the treble of dehydration hits a pretty good approximation.

A far cry. But a close whimper. Fragrance lilts through the open window. The hopeless knot of this cluttered office is slashed. Vestigial memories peel like dead skin flakes. The reminder that he is a parasite, and all life can be shrunk to a hungry black hole.

Where are you?

The camp is designed like a prayer labyrinth. The very act of walking it brings you closer to God. Bright white concrete honors the sun, fringed by emerald green, light falling in cataract-inducing cataracts. At the center of the hanging garden, a priestess prays before the CrystalSpring, sheltered by fever trees and crystallizations. He always wanted to see it. He has seen it, so many times. A sapphire pool, unreal in its blueness. Or was that another pool, given that name by necessity? The saints find somewhere to live, just like him. Infesting bodies of meaning like maggots. Or was it a pair of eyes—

He grabs his hair, yanking it back in a dark corner, and this is a reminder: Whatever you possess will be taken twice. Killed once by time, then in memory. Particles remain like specks of glass, cutting just enough to say: something was here.

So don't get too comfortable, he whispers, forcing himself to look at the ceiling, his stringy black bitch-hair pulled so tight it's starting to rip out, but his greedy follicles are sucking it back in, saturated with the jasmine oils of his hair, each strand a tiny, tortured antennae. So there is only this endless ripping pain and this is another lesson.

Don't miss the sprinklers full of antiseptic. The mystical glow of bug zappers, making you flinch with each fly that bursts into ash. Their paradise is a fucking postcard. And I'll burn it with this body.

He finds an obscure door and it opens to the sea. The back entrance is his specialty. He lives in the fire exit, the hollow between shoulder blades, the fear you sit on. He passes through a picnic area, flies on all the sweet things the children discarded. He sniffs at an outhouse, and a black hole yaws within, fulminating with volcanic bacteria, horrid and promiscuous and sublime. He lingers at a bush. The scent is crisper here, but the sea is already taking it.

Creaky boards lead down to the beach. A bad smell follows him, joining weirdly with the brine. He checks his body. Embers nested in his armpits. A scent of dark incense. He wiped himself down in his office, so it's not that bad, especially outdoors.

His heel is on fire. He lifts it, leather burning with dogshit. How disgusting. He kicks it off even as his mouth is drooling, and he wipes that too. More leather scrapes his lips, dead and inhuman.

And then he is facing the sea and he hates it instinctively, he wants to bite it like a dog. Foam whirls around his shoes, soaking his socks, stinging to his marrow. The wave rushes away and dark sand bubbles below, staggering him with vertigo. The sand is like his mind, pouring through his hourglass figure. Stakes shoot from the beach like screaming bamboo and blood washes out with the tide. The armada flashes on the horizon, an invasion of solarized ships, and a wave lunges at him in a roar of sea fire, resinous flames sticking to the water, and he runs and trips and he is landing on the shores for the first time. He tastes gold, a coin nursed in his mouth like a lozenge. He has a sword and he is finding his land legs, he kisses the wet sand and he is hungry for fresh fruit and the fruit turns rotten and the sword rusts in his hand.

The sand is swept smooth. His mind is swept smooth. Up ahead, bunkers sink into the sea, concrete bells ringing in the pink tide, and drooling it out with eerie gurgles. Concrete. That orients him. This is a time of hiding. He stands up and wipes the sand from his knees.

A slow lightning of salt is cracking the bunkers open. But not for years. He is a fly dragging itself across amber, not yet sucked inside. Then he stops, seeing something he has never seen before, or at least, something that hasn't been tortured into his muscle memory. In the shade between walls, alien lights appear. Glowing discs wobble in vibrant colors, like spotlights shone through rock candy. The face of a beast, curling leaves and fire, vibrating like flashlights, something held by human hands.

