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Opening extract from

Spud

Written by

John Van De Ruit

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John van de Ruit
July 2005

Dramatis Personae

Family	Mom Dad Wombat
Crazy Eight	John 'Spud' Milton Robert 'Rambo' Black Charlie 'Mad Dog' Hooper Simon Brown Vern 'Rain Man' Blackadder Henry 'Gecko' Barker Sidney 'Fatty' Smitherson-Scott Al 'Boggo' Greenstein
Girls	Mermaid Amanda Christine
Prefects	Head of house – PJ Luthuli Julian Bert Grant 'Earthworm' Edwards Gavin, the weird prefect who lives under the stairs
Teachers	Headmaster - Mr Glockenshpeel (The Glock) Housemaster - Mr Wilson (Sparerib) English – Mr Edly (The Guv) History – Crispo Drama – Mrs Wilson (Eve) Play director – Mr Richardson (Viking)
Sports coaches	Under 14 D/E rugby – Mr Lilly and Mrs Bishop (Reverend Bishop's wife)

When I consider how my light is spent,
Ere half my days, in this dark world and wide,
And that one Talent which is death to hide,
Lodg'd with me useless, though my soul more
bent
To serve therewith my maker, and present
My true account, lest he returning chide...

On his blindness
John Milton

1990

Monday 17th January

04:30 I am awake. The first streaks of light peep through the sides of my old-lady curtains. I think I feel nauseous. The sheet under my legs is sticky and my heart is beating like a bongo drum. I can't get up yet.

04:48 The neighbours' dogs seem to be the only ones awake as they bark savagely at the rising sun.

04:50 Dad's awake. I just heard a loud shout come from his bedroom window. The dogs bark even louder. Dad stomps down the passage muttering to himself. (He hates our neighbours because they never seem to notice their dogs barking all night. He's always threatening to sue them or thrash them within an inch of their lives.)

05:00 The neighbourhood erupts as Dad fires up his supersonic heat-seeking rose sprayer (which sounds like a ski boat hitting a sandbank at full throttle). The machine is so powerful that it blew Wombat's (my grandmother's) Queen Elizabeth rosebush out of the ground on its first tryout. Dad, wearing only his Cricketing Legends sleeping shorts (my Christmas present) and a surgeon's mask, to protect himself from the deadly chemicals that he's now spraying into the atmosphere, points his machine at the neighbours' yard and dances like a loon on the lawn in front of my bedroom window. Maybe boarding school won't be so bad after all.

05:01 I watch from my window as my mother stalks into the garden in her granadilla nightgown and screams something in my father's ear. He stops his loony dance

and switches off his supersonic rose sprayer. He follows my mother inside. Seems like the neighbours' dogs got the last bark after all.

05:30 My father's exhausted after his early morning madness. I can hear him snoring loudly while my mother verbally abuses the policemen at the gate. The sight of my mother in her granadilla nightgown must have frightened the policemen because they end the discussion by heartily apologising to her and scuttling off to the protection of their police van.

06:00 It's time. I get out of bed. Next to the door stands my huge metal army trunk, my cricket bag and my trusty Good Knight duvet. My uniform hangs from an old wire coat hanger. I reach for the blazer – it feels hot and heavy.

08:00 I'm courageously trying to swallow a mouthful of greeny scrambled eggs (including shells). I would have thrown it out of the window but Mom was watching me like a hawk. She said I should have some nourishment before leaving for boarding school. Mom's notorious for her dreadful cooking – Dad refused breakfast as he's nursing a bout of the runs after last night's roast pork. (I think it was roast pork.) I'm too nervous to eat anyway and manage to scrape most of the egg into my serviette, slide it into my pocket and then flush it down the toilet.

08:30 Dad's put his back out trying to load my trunk into the boot of the car. He clutches at his back like he's just been stabbed, collapses on the grass and then squirms around in agony. With the help of Innocence (our trusty maid) I lug my trunk to the car and squeeze it onto the back seat. Mom gives Innocence a shifty-eyed look when she plants a big goodbye smooch on my lips.

(Mom's convinced Innocence is running a brothel from her khaya in the back garden.)

08:36 My father's ordered to change his clothes as it seems he's rolled in something smelly during his dramatic writhing on the grass.

We're now running late. Mom taps at her watch and glares at me like it's my fault. Suddenly my terror overtakes my excitement and I start wishing that we could just cancel the whole thing and all go back to bed.

08:42 All set – Mom in her bright red smock, Dad in a tweed jacket and bow tie, and me in my new blue blazer, charcoal pants, red tie and white shirt (which felt too big in the shop but now seems to be strangling me). Dad blasts the hooter as he reverses our 1973 Renault station wagon into the road – the neighbours' dogs hit back with some ferocious barking. Dad throws his head back and laughs maniacally, and then screeches us down the road into the oncoming traffic. There's no going back now.

11:00 An African guard salutes us and then opens the huge white school gates. We pass through and drive along a beautiful avenue of trees called Pilgrim's Walk towards the school's gigantic red brick buildings which are all covered in green moss and ivy. My father is so busy pointing out a pair of mating dogs to my mother that he doesn't spot the speed bump that savages the underbelly of the car. Our station wagon limps up to the school and slides in between a Rolls Royce and a Mercedes-Benz. To announce its grand arrival our rust-infested jalopy vomits up a couple of gallons of oil onto the ancient cobblestone paving.

We are met by two older boys wearing the same red tie as I am. They introduce themselves as Julian and

Bert. Julian is skinny and confident with blue eyes and wavy hair. He has a skippy walk and a cheery manner. Bert is massive ... really massive (he looks nearly as old as Dad) with crooked teeth, vacant eyes and a snorting guffaw of a laugh. Julian explains that they are prefects in the house in which I'll be living.

As they carry my trunk through the giant archway into the perfectly trimmed quadrangle, my mother trots out a long list of my amazing talents. (Scholarship winner, cricket star, prefect at primary school ...) When she tells them about my beautiful soprano singing voice, Julian licks his lips and assures my mother that he is very fond of choirboys. Bert lets out a giant guffaw and elbows Julian in the ribs, making him drop the trunk on my father's left foot. Dad makes a funny squeaking whine and then assures everyone that he is 'tough as teak' and 'right as rain.' I do my best to blend in but it feels like the Boswell Wilkie Circus has just pulled into town.

The main quadrangle is surrounded by buildings, which remind me of those medieval castles in our old history books at primary school. We head towards a building that looks older than the rest. Its red brick has faded to peach brick and the moss and ivy are as thick as a hedge. The prefects lead us up a dark narrow staircase, through a long dormitory containing about fifteen empty beds and into another dormitory, this one dark and creepy with low hanging wooden rafters and dark brick walls. It is small and cramped with just about space for eight beds. It feels spooky and smells like old socks and floor varnish. One of these eight beds is mine.

The dormitory is divided into cubicles by five foot wooden partitions which separate one cubicle from the next. Each cubicle has two wooden beds, two cupboards, two footlockers, a blanket, pillow and mattress. Under each bed there are two drawers with golden doorknocker

handles. A few new boys wearing the same red tie as me are unpacking their clothes into their lockers under the watchful eyes of their mothers.

We arrive at a bed which has my name pasted onto the locker. The bed next to mine says Blackadder. At least I have a window.

My father, still limping around, and my mother, still puffing from the exertion of climbing the stairs, then have a huge argument about which drawer will house my socks and which my underpants. All the other parents stop what they are doing to stare at us. I kneel down and pretend to pack something into my footlocker.

On the way down the stairs we pass the whitest human being I've ever seen. In the dim light of the stairway, his paleness creates a strange luminous light. He is also wearing a red tie and he studies the floor closely as I pass by.

After a short sparring session between my parents in front of about twenty people outside the house, we make our way to the Great Hall, where we are addressed by various VIPs, including the local government official, our head boy Marshall Martin, and our rather frightening looking headmaster named Glockenshpeel. At first I think his name is a joke, but judging by the expression on his face his name is no laughing matter. Glockenshpeel keeps referring to the school as an 'institution' and the boys as 'subjects'. He also keeps repeating himself about discipline and stern punishment for wayward subjects. My father, nodding in agreement, eventually lets rip with an embarrassingly loud 'Hear, hear!' This causes a moment's hesitation whilst over four hundred people stare at my nodding father and mother and a schoolboy who has turned beetroot red and is desperately thinking up a plan to dissolve into the covering of his seat. The school chaplain, who goes by the name of Reverend Bishop (destined for greater things?), makes a speech about the spread of Christianity in schools and the

need for an open heart and an open mind. My father and mother agree that the Reverend Bishop is either homosexual or a communist, or possibly both.

13:00 Yet more embarrassment follows at the buffet lunch on the green lawn outside the library. My father, after seven gin and tonics, sneezes terribly loudly and then opens Mom's handbag to look for a tissue. As he unzips the bag, three sausage rolls, two gherkins, a string of Russian cocktail sausages and a round of egg sandwiches launch themselves onto the lawn in full view of the headmaster who coughs politely and pretends not to notice. I sidle up to some other people and pretend that they are my parents instead.

15:00 At last my parents depart, my father now in the passenger seat, and Mom cramped up behind the wheel with a long strip of red smock caught in the door. After a hundred and fifty metres of pushing, the engine fires and they disappear around the bend in Pilgrim's Walk. I stand on the cobblestones staring at the driveway. I look around at the massive buildings and tall trees, which seem to surround me. I've never felt so small in my life.

18:00 Julian leads the eight new boys in our house down the stairs and into the common room (moth-eaten carpet, a few old red couches, a TV and a noticeboard). There's a boy called Sidney who must weigh over a hundred and fifty kilograms and the luminous boy that I saw on the stairs earlier who still looks like he's on the verge of death. (There must be healthier looking corpses...) Thanks to this sickly looking dude I escape being the smallest boy in the house. It turns out that the lumo guy's name is Henry Barker. Our head of house is a black boy called PJ Luthuli who looks incredibly serious and is neatly dressed. He gives us important

tips about the school like 'Don't run in the quad', and 'Stay off the grass'. He then tells us to get ready for bed. I think this is the first time I've ever taken instructions from a black person.

21:00 Lights out! My first night away from home. A big muscular fast-talking boy with dark eyes and jet black hair called Robert Black seems to have appointed himself the king of the dormitory. He includes enough swearing in every sentence to satisfy the group that he means business and is to be heartily respected and hero-worshipped.

I'm sleeping next to a deranged individual called Vern Blackadder who looks slightly brain damaged. He also has the nasty habit of pulling out large clumps of his own hair with a loud thunk.

I lie in bed listening to assorted snores and mutterings, the odd thunk of Vern's hair being ripped out, and the never-ending trickle of Pissing Pete (the concrete statue of St Peter) who stands proudly in the fish pond in the quadrangle with water dribbling out of his sword.

Tuesday 18th January

06:15 Awoken by a terrifying siren. I jumped out of bed and called out 'Mom' before I could stop myself. Thank God nobody heard me. I followed the long line of boys stumbling their way down to the showers. As I reached the foot of the stairs a door opened, revealing a tiny room filled with smoke and candles. A strange looking guy staggered out, stark naked, with a towel draped over his head and his willy pointing at the ceiling. A pimply boy called Al Greenstein said he's a weird prefect called Gavin who lives under the stairs.

The bogs (toilet area) consist of ten showers on a grey concrete floor with six basins and four toilet stalls. The floor felt slimy under my feet and the smell was foul. Julian

and Bert, the two duty prefects, watched us showering and Julian made comments about everybody's willy. He described mine as 'a runty silkworm with an eating disorder'. I was shocked to see that every boy had body hair except me. Even Mr Lumo has sprouts of black hairs around his groin. Bert shouted something that sounded like 'Vulva' which means that our showering time was over. I got out quickly with my back still covered in soap.

Robert Black has the hugest willy. After his time was up, Bert shouted, 'Vulva' and Robert ignored him. Julian then shouted, 'Time's up, Meatloaf!' much to the delight of Bert who screeched out a song called Bat Out of Hell (which was about the speed that everybody charged out of the showers).

06:30 Roll-call. (We have to start every day with this just to check nobody has run away or died in their beds.)

I nearly missed roll-call because an older boy told me it took place in the common room and that I should report there immediately. When I arrived in the common room I found it completely deserted. Stupidly, I sat on one of the old red chairs thinking I was the first to arrive when actually it turned out that roll-call was taking place outside in the quad. Luckily, I heard two boys run past in a blind panic and followed them out to where the house was lined up. It seems that when your name is called out, you have to shout 'Sharks' in reply (nobody can explain why). PJ Luthuli read out a name and then glared at its owner for some time before reading out the next. I waited nervously until ... 'Milton ... John?'

'Sharks!' I squeaked. Everyone laughed.

Luthuli has a faint lisp, which was severely tested by the name of the fat boy Sidney whose surname is Smitherson-Scott. After a number of attempts at getting it right he glared at Sidney and re-christened him Fatty. (Most people call each other by nicknames here. Not

sure how or who decides your name and if I've been given one yet.) The roll-call then moved on to the older boys but my brain was already panicking about finding the dining hall again.

The tall blond boy with railway braces called Simon Brown told us a story about an abattoir over a breakfast of egg and sausages. Luminous Henry (already nicknamed Gecko) turned a pale green, ran outside and vomited in the flower bed. This brought on a loud cheer from our section and a stern look from a miserable looking teacher seated at the top table.

Bert, Julian, Luthuli and Gavin (the weird prefect who lives under the stairs) spent the day showing us around the school and telling us what everything meant. The school consists of years one to three, matrics and post-matrics, who only do university subjects and play sport. There are seven houses. Every house has four prefects and a head of house. The head of school is always a post-matric and he spends most of his time making speeches, meeting parents and old boys and raising money to make the school richer.

It seems that every room has a code name and every quadrangle is identical, no doubt designed to completely confuse new boys. Our lesson timetable was like reading a page of hieroglyphics and I had to ask Julian to write down my lessons for me. My first lesson is English which starts at 06:40 tomorrow.

17:00 The entire house gathered in the common room. About fifty boys stared at our cartoonish housemaster, Mr Wilson, who's just like a goblin. He has big bulging eyes (one of which is squint) and a shoulder that looks like something's taken a huge bite out of it. He speaks in a rasping voice through clenched yellow teeth and despite his small size he looks wickedly fearsome. He announced his seven commandments with a flourish of his cane:

1) Thou shalt not disobey those in authority.
2) Thou shalt not behave in a depraved fashion.
3) Thou shalt not tease my cat. (This is apparently a Siamese called Roger.)
4) Thou shalt not waste toilet paper.
5) Thou shalt not play with yourself (or others) after lights out.
6) Thou shalt not go night swimming.
7) Thou shalt not play darts (a bit strange considering the lack of a dartboard).

Robert Black, who's nicknamed himself Rambo, told us after lights out that Wilson's nickname is Sparerib and that a savage lion in the Kruger National Park bit off half his shoulder when he was a youngster. The doctors then took out one of his ribs to repair his shoulder. Everybody whistled and looked impressed.

Vern, my cubicle mate, has developed a nasty habit of going to the bogs every half an hour for a slash and a sip of water. This wouldn't be a problem if he didn't set his alarm clock every time.

A tribunal made up of Fatty, Simon, Rambo, Al 'Boggo' Greenstein and myself found Vern guilty of moggy behaviour and confiscated his alarm clock. Boggo Greenstein (a greasy looking boy with big teeth and a bad case of pimples) has also rationed Vern to three visits to the bathroom per night. Vern didn't defend himself and handed over his alarm clock.

Can't sleep. I lie in bed, homesick. (I even miss Mom's cooking!) It feels like there is a lump of lead in my tummy. My new home is like a war zone and while I take heart in the fact that there are two easier victims than me in our dorm (Gecko and Vern), I have the uneasy feeling that my time is coming. Every siren terrifies me because unlike everybody else I never seem to be sure what happens next. I spend all my time looking for and following familiar faces around the school in the

hope that they know more than me. I wonder what my parents would say if I gave up my scholarship and came home. Tomorrow school proper begins. Maybe I'll die in my sleep and miss it completely.

I dreamed lions were trying to bite my shoulder off.

Wednesday 19th January

05:50 Vern wet his bed during the night. His desperate attempt to change his sheets before the rising siren was foiled by Charlie Hooper (nickname Mad Dog) returning from an early morning bat hunting expedition with his catapult. Mad Dog hasn't spent much time in the dormitory and seems to do a lot of hunting. Mad Dog stole the yellow stained sheet and hung it up from the rafters out of Vern's reach before raising the alarm.

When a snivelly Gecko returned from the phone room after a chat with his mom, he discovered Vern's soiled sheet hanging above his bed and charged down to the bathroom with his hand over his mouth. Mad Dog and Rambo exchanged a high five and some raucous laughter.

06:30 Roll-call. Bert referred to Vern Blackadder as Vern Slackbladder, which dissolved the entire roll-call into chaos. The hysterical backslapping and chanting was brought to an abrupt halt by a high-pitched cry from Sparerib who looked like he was quite keen to slaughter someone.

06:40 Our first lesson was English with an extraordinary teacher called Mr Edly (nickname The Guv – a nickname he said he was given when he was a boy at the school). He has a very posh English accent and strides around with a walking stick, swearing like a maniac. His long legs and bulging eyes make him look like a giant praying mantis. He had some spectacular outbursts

(within five minutes he'd threatened to shoot off Boggo's head with a shotgun). The highlight of the class was when he threw a pile of Henry James novels out of the window and called the author 'a boring faggot'. We all applauded, he bowed and then told us to get lost.

I like The Guv – and strangely enough he seems to like me. After class he asked me to stay behind. His great bulging eyes studied me closely over the top of his old-fashioned horn-rimmed glasses.

'So, Milton,' he said, 'welcome to paradise lost.' With that he roared with laughter and told me that anybody named after the greatest writer that ever lived must have fine literature in his blood. He presented me with a play called Waiting for Godot written by an Irishman called Samuel Beckett. He prodded the book with his finger and said, 'Nothing happens, old Johnno, but it's a raving blast. Now piss off, it's breakfast time.'

I couldn't help smiling; it's the first time I've been called by my name since I've been here. (Everyone else calls me Spud because my willy is tiny and my balls haven't dropped yet.) Made a mental note to check out this other John Milton character and his book Paradise Lost.

08:30 Mad Dog told me that I was in his class for maths. I followed him down a series of corridors until we reached our classroom. The teacher was a kindly looking man called Mr Rogers. Unfortunately, it turned out that it was the remedial class. Mad Dog snickered into his rucksack as I packed my things, excused myself and sprinted around in a blind panic looking for my maths class. All the buildings and quadrangles look so similar that it's easy to become completely disorientated (which I did).

Ten minutes ticked by on my old Remex stopwatch. I felt a huge lump in my throat – I was about to start sobbing. I wanted to go home. I wanted to run out of the school and keep going until I saw those old rusted gates

and the giant acacia tree in our front garden. Suddenly there was PJ Luthuli, marching along the corridor, looking important. Half sobbing, half panting, I asked him for directions. He patted my shoulder and led me to my maths classroom.

As I entered I was faced with the most shocking silence. I stared at the dark figure standing at the blackboard and recognised the scowling face of the miserable looking teacher from breakfast yesterday. He grinned a mean, thin-lipped grin and then said in a low, cold voice, 'Milton, you're late. Report to the staff toilets after lunch.' With a flick of his academic gown he continued with his lesson on the basics of algebra. The teacher's name is Mr Sykes (nickname Psycho).

16:20 After spending the afternoon cleaning the staff bogs with a scrubbing brush and an old pair of underpants (with the name Brett Ballbag scribbled on them with an ink marker), I returned to a completely deserted house. My heart sank – what had I missed this time? Then I saw the message on the noticeboard:

Touch Rugby 16:00 on Trafalgar!

Where the hell was Trafalgar?

I eventually made my way to the rugby field after getting lost again and ending up at the workshop instead. A greasy looking mechanic in blue overalls gave me directions.

Trafalgar is surrounded by huge plane trees and smells of freshly cut grass. Spread out across its length was the largest game of touch rugby in history (easily fifty a side). I joined one of the teams without anyone noticing. The only recognisable face nearby was Gecko's, who was desperately trying to avoid the action by sprinting away from the ball as fast as his toothpick legs would carry him.

After what seemed like forever, the ball was hurled across to our side of the field and by some freak chance (and I mean freak!) it landed in the hands of Gecko. Gecko hurtled off without even realising that he was in possession and darted through a gap between two third years. A circus ensued as about twenty boys galloped after the terrified Gecko who was making a beeline for the swimming pool. Eventually it was Mad Dog who flattened him with a crushing tackle just a few feet short of the pump house. Gecko hit the ground with a thud and immediately started writhing around on the concrete shrieking with pain. Bert helped him to his feet and it was then that we saw Gecko's left arm hanging limply at right angles to his elbow. Bert picked him up and sprinted off to the sanatorium.

18:00 Gecko's left arm is broken. Mad Dog returned to the dormitory after a series of 'meetings' with Spare-rib, looking depressed. In the morning he has to see the headmaster, Glockenshpeel – he's worried he'll be expelled. Boggo reckons that Mad Dog could set a record for the fastest expulsion ever – after only three days at the school.

Couldn't sleep because Mad Dog kept whining and groaning.

Thursday 20th January

08:00 Mad Dog is still with us. Glockenshpeel has given him a severe warning and he has been ordered to write a letter of apology to Gecko's parents.

08:45 Had our first history lesson with Mr Crispo. He is wickedly old – Simon reckons he may be ninety. He told us he fought in North Africa during the Second World War. This term we are studying the Anglo-Zulu wars of 1878-9 but instead Crispo showed us an old

Second World War video on Dunkirk. Halfway through he blew his nose like a foghorn and then shook his head and muttered something to himself. At the end of the video he switched off the television and let us go five minutes early. From where I was sitting I could see his eyes were full of tears.

14:30 Cricket Trials. Although I was the best cricketer at my primary school (not that difficult considering most of the school was girls), I felt very nervous about my first go at high school cricket. The under 14 cricket coach is The Guv (much to my delight). He stalked around with his pipe and a shooting stick, making crazy comments like, 'Greenstein, that forward defensive is about as porous as a whore's drawers!' Simon is an excellent cricketer and he smashed my first legspin delivery out of the nets and onto a nearby field. To my horror I realised that the ball had come to rest in the middle of the first team practice session. The cricket gods all stopped and glared at me as I picked up my ball. I just about managed to squeak out an apology and then tore back to the nets.

Mad Dog is a fearsome bowler (fast and wild). He nearly killed Vern with a vicious bouncing delivery that reared up at my terrified cubicle mate. Rambo charges in to bowl with real aggression and savagery but lets the ball go rather slowly. The Guv told him he should take the fridge off his back, which made us all laugh. Rambo glared at me and my laughter fizzled out instantly. (This school is turning me into a coward.) At the end of the practice The Guv told us we were the crappest bunch of cricketers he'd seen in years. The first match is at the weekend and the side will be announced on Friday. Holding thumbs.

18:30 Prep (two-hour nightly homework session) was interrupted by Fatty's farting, which led to a complete

classroom evacuation. Fatty pleaded that the beef stroganoff was off, and the terrible smell was not his fault. Bert was so livid that he ordered Fatty to shut up and then beat him savagely on the fingers with a blackboard duster. This form of torture is called 'finger-tongs'.

Mad Dog handed me a first draft of his apology letter to Gecko's parents. He reckons that because I won the scholarship I was the ideal person to check his effort. Here follows the original:

Dear Mister and Missis Geko
I am sorry about what happend to yor son Gecko. I broke his arm buy mistake with a wiked crash tackle. It's not my folt Gecko is bilt like a twig but I'm sorry for Mongreling his twig (his arm)

Sinserily
Mad Dog

21:15 I rejected Mad Dog's first draft and we composed a new draft together. (Mad Dog held the torch, I did the composing.)

Dear Mr and Mrs Barker
I wanted to take this opportunity to profusely apologise for accidentally breaking your son's arm. However, in spite of the damage and pain that our friend Henry has gone through I am still convinced that I saved him from further, and possibly life threatening, injuries. It is my belief that Henry panicked in possession of the rugby ball and sprinted towards the pool in a blind panic. I brought him down, metres short of deadly danger, unfortunately causing him some pain in the process.

Once again I apologise.

Yours sincerely
Charlie Hooper

PS If Henry is there, tell him to get back quick – school just isn't the same without him.

Mad Dog was wickedly impressed with the new version. He especially liked the pool bit and how it sounded like he'd saved Gecko's life. He wasn't sure about the PS because it's common knowledge that Gecko's in the sanatorium and not at home. I told Mad Dog that this was a perfect example of emotional blackmail. He seemed blown away with this and has vowed to call me 'Brains' from now on. To repay the debt, he invited me on a pigeon hunt at 05:00. When I declined he looked dangerous, so I told him that I loved eating pigeons but that I'm getting a sore throat.

On his way to bed Mad Dog poured a glass of water over Vern's sheet and then woke up the dormitory who all sneered and mocked poor Vern while he changed his bedding again. I remained silent and then felt guilty for hours for being a coward and not standing up for my cubicle mate.

Friday 21st January

Vern tripped over somebody's foot at breakfast, which sent him and his mince on toast flying across the floor. There was riotous laughing and chanting until a grumpy old biology teacher called Mr Cartwright banged the gavel and announced that there would be no condiments for two days. Fatty was distraught at the thought of no butter on his bread, no jam, honey, salt, vinegar and tomato sauce. He has vowed deadly revenge on poor old Vern.

11:00 Checked out John Milton in the library. Actually, I first walked into the staff room by mistake thinking it was the library – only to see a big bearded teacher tossing peanuts into his mouth. He glared at me, so