

A Special Place

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Part Fifty-one

Mary Kathryn

Every three days I got a general e-mail from Michael, written to the whole Fellowship. He was having a grand time. He wrote about his talks with the Abbot, working, playing and the services. He also said he was learning much about prayer which he was anxious to share with all the Fellowship. In the personal letters, he told me how happy he was, how excited about the future and never once mentioned what I wanted to hear about, his decision about the priesthood. I had once written to ask him about it, but thought better of it and deleted the question before I sent the e-mail. I guess Michael's not talking about the priesthood was ok because I didn't say very much about what I had observed about clergy wives. I mean, they were just like any other bunch of people. Some were great and one at least was an asshole.

I had always thought Bill was the most outgoing person I knew, well, Jacob equaled him, but I had never seen him as alive as he was the second week, during third and fourth grade camp, except maybe on the basketball court. The kids, boys and girls, worshipped him and he was truly amazing as he worked with them. He became a kid himself, but at the same time was very much the adult among his campers. His cabin was teamed with mine and we often did things together so I got a chance to really know him.

It was also obvious to me that Linda's and his relationship was growing in depth every single day. They often took a walk together after supper and while the whole camp was engaged in a common activity which did not require that all counselors be present. Linda had told me they had discovered a glade with a brook some distance from the camp and the camp trails. "It's a great place to talk and make love, no, not yet," she had quickly added.

Thursday afternoon, the central staff had arranged to take the campers into town for a movie which fit the camp theme. Counselors were told they had the afternoon off, but any who would volunteer to help shepherd the group were more than welcome. Linda and Bill had said at lunch they were torn two ways. They wanted the afternoon to themselves, but felt they needed to help out. "Look, has the central staff ever given us any real slack?" I asked. "If they wanted us all to go, we would have been told to go. If they have some hidden agenda concerning who is and who is not responsible, then I don't accept it. We have all done a good job and they have to know that. I'm going simply because I have nothing else I'd rather do. I think you two are crazy if you don't stay here."

When it was time to leave, Bill and Linda marched their campers into the staging area and Bill asked, "You'll keep a special eye out for my boys?"

"Promise. You two enjoy the glade," I added with a grin.

Bill gave me that smile that sends Linda into seventh heaven and said, "You better believe it," as he and Linda, holding hands, walked away. As the bus

pulled out of the camp area, I saw Bill and Linda walking toward the glade. Bill had a blanket over his arm and the two were walking without looking where they were going since they were gazing into each other's eyes.

The movie was nothing special, but the kids enjoyed it while I daydreamed through it all. I was imagining that Michael and I, instead of Bill and Linda, were in a forest glade beside a brook.

As we were loading a bus to get back, I heard one of Bill's campers say, "I know Bill will be proud of us. We were the best-behaved cabin." He was right.

Linda

While the bus was loading, Bill had gone to his cabin for a blanket and as the bus pulled out, we walked down the trail toward the glade. It was a beautiful, sunny afternoon and it was good to be alive, even better to be alive with my man walking beside me, holding my hand and giving me a gentle, soft kiss from time to time.

We left the trail and walked through the woods. There was life all around us. I could hear small animals scampering away, there were birds overhead and in the distance I heard the pounding of a woodpecker. As we approached the glade, Bill suddenly stopped and placed his hand over my mouth, then pointed. A doe and her fawn were standing in the center of the glade. We watched them for several minutes, then the wind changed and they caught our scent and bolted into the forest.

We walked into the glade where there was a bright spot of sun and Bill spread the blanket on the ground, dropped to it and pulled me to himself. The day we discovered the glade Bill had said, "One day I'm going to make love to you, all of you, heart, mind, body and soul, here". We had talked about having sex almost from the time we got together. Bill had made it very clear that he was not inexperienced in that department, but had also said it had always just been fucking. "There was never any real love involved," he had told me. "Don't get me wrong, I liked it and I miss it, but that's not what I am about with you." And he had meant that.

We had been together for a while before I told Bill I had also had sex before. Last year I was with a guy for a month or two and we had sex twice. "Believe me, Bill, it was nothing special."

Bill and I had many really hot make-out sessions since we got together and there were many times I was ready to go all the way. It had always been Bill who had backed off. Sometimes I was pissed when he did. He had me so hot I was ready to go gangbusters and he would back off. I even asked him once if there was something wrong with me. He had said, "No, Baby, that's the problem. Everything is right with you and our first time together has to be right too.

I knew the time would come and I had gotten myself on birth control several weeks ago. At least any time was the right time so far as I was concerned. I told Bill that and he had said, "Thanks, Baby". Well, we were alone

in the spot Bill had picked, but we just sat talking, well, actually, it was very strange for me because I sat listening while Bill talked. He told me all sorts of funny things that had happened with "my boys", and how much he enjoyed being with them. "They are young and innocent and so full of life. I can just forget everything except enjoying being alive when I am with them."

"Well, I like that," I said and pounded him on his hard arm.

"You know what I mean," he laughed as he kissed me. "I never forget about you, day or night." His kiss led to another and then more and more. We were lying side by side, our legs intertwined, as our love-making became more intense. Bill reached out and took off my shirt, unhooked my bra and started kissing my breasts. As he looked into my eyes, his hand covered a breast as he said, "Linda, I love you, girl. I really truly love you. You know that, don't you?"

I answered by covering his mouth with mine as I unbuttoned his shirt. I have a thing about men's bare chests and a special thing about Bill's. It is hard, well-defined and smooth. His nipples are beautiful brown circles which are enough to make me want to eat him alive. When his shirt was off, I pulled his body atop mine and our bare chests met. I swear a bolt of electricity shot through my body as I felt his nipples against my breasts. My hands found the snap on his shorts and I unbuttoned them and reached inside. My hand found what I was seeking. Bill's man's tool was wet and, as I grasped it, he groaned as he raised his hips and I slid his shorts from his long, strong legs.

Bill rolled to one side and I saw all my man's hard body beside me. He pulled my face to his and placed his lips against mine in a passionate kiss as his hands unbuttoned my shorts and took them from my body. We lay side by side, admiring the beauty and wonder of the one we loved. As I looked deeply into his eyes, I saw a question. My own eyes gave him his answer, "Yes". Bill's hand moved down my body, leaving a trail of tender touches until it found the soft hair surrounding my womanhood. He then touched lightly that spot which gives a woman great pleasure. As my hands explored his hard body, my lips covered his. When he touched that special place, I sucked his tongue deep into my mouth and took his manhood into my hand and an orgasm shot through my being.

Bill's love-making was ever so gentle and tender, his eyes telling me of his love, not lust. Unlike the boy with whom I had sex last year, Bill was in no rush. He was not all over me, but caressing my body, rubbing his face against mine, loving me. Again, I looked into his eyes and saw a question and, again, my answer was "Yes". Bill entered me slowly, gently, lovingly. As his manhood entered me, it filled an emptiness I had not known was there. I felt complete, loved, joyous. Having entered me fully, Bill was very still. I, too, lay still, enjoying the fullness I had not felt before. When he began, slowly, to move I thought I would pass out as wave after wave of pleasure and love filled my body. Another orgasm consumed me as Bill's thrusts became long and deep. He was moaning, "Linda, I love you, God I love you. I love your body, being united with you." His breathing was becoming heavy and his thrusting faster when, suddenly, his body shook and I felt his seed pouring into me. His pulsing sent another orgasm

coursing through my body as I crushed his lips against mine. Careful not to put his full weight on me, he collapsed atop my body, his manhood still inside. His breathing gradually returned to normal and he started kissing me tenderly as I felt his now-limp manhood slip from me.

We again lay side by side, our legs interlocked, our arms about each other. Finally, he withdrew an arm and raised himself on an elbow and looked into my eyes. His were aglow, and he had that special "light up Linda's world" smile on his face. "Linda, you have made me so happy. I, now, for the first time, know what real making love is like and it is a thousand times more than I dreamed."

"Bill, I love you so much and you have shown me what it is to make love and to be made love to. And, yes, it is a thousand times more than I had dreamed it would be, and I have dreamed of it often!" I laughed and then kissed my lover, the love of my life.

We lay, naked, in the sunlight, silent, each just enjoying the presence of the other and the feel of our two bodies touching. As we lay silent, the doe and her fawn ventured in the glade, looked at us and turned and walked away. "She came to give us her blessing," I said to Bill who looked at me and smiled.

Well, we were two nearly-eighteen-year-olds in love, so what might have been predicted, happened: we made love again. There was no rush and everything we did leading up to Bill entering me a second time was beautiful and loving.

Too soon it was time to go. We had spent all afternoon in the glade and I could have stayed forever. When I said that to Bill, he smiled and said, "Lin, there are other places and other times. This was just the beginning of our making love." We dressed and, holding hands, walked out of the glade. When we were at its edge, we turned and looked back. The sun was still lingering on the spot where we had been united and consummated our love.

When we got back to camp, the kids had not returned and there was no one else in evidence. Bill looked at me with an evil grin on his face, grabbed my hand and raced toward the bathhouse. When we reached it, he pulled me into the men's showers with him and we had a wonderful time washing each other's body. When we heard the bus come into the camp, we grabbed towels, quickly dried and dressed, and raced to the area where the kids were piling off the bus. When Mary Kathryn walked up to us, she smiled and said, "I think I detect a glow about you two I haven't seen before".

"Might well be," Bill said.

Later, as we were walking to the cabins after the day was over, Mary Kathryn said, "Well?"

I knew there was no use playing games with Mary Kathryn, but all I said was, "Mary Kathryn, never, never, ever do anything that would not make your first time with Michael special. It is magic, pure magic." Mary Kathryn smiled and said nothing.

Saturday, Bill left for basketball camp and I knew I would miss him. We hadn't had an opportunity to make love, I mean beyond some heavy making out when we could escape the campers and staff, but, as he got in his car, he said, "Love you, Lin, see you next weekend. I'll leave basketball camp as soon as I can Saturday and pick you and Mary Kathryn up. I don't have to be back in basketball camp until Sunday night.

It didn't turn out that way since his camp's director had arranged a couple games between camps for the weekend so all I got was a phone call. Dad came to pick up Mary Kathryn and me.

After a week with middle school girls, we were both convinced that was where we should be headed. Middle schoolers have so much trouble being adults and children at the same time that they are always interesting.

By the way, Mary Kathryn had met more clergy wives and was finally convinced she could handle being one since, as she said, all it took was being yourself.

We got home late Sunday afternoon and had decided we would volunteer to work with the day camp at St. Mary's while we were waiting for Michael and Bill to get back.

Bill got back the following Saturday and we spent a good part of Saturday night at the falls. Our first time had been special, but so was our second time in that special place. Sunday, after church, Bill and I invited Mary Kathryn to go to Lexington with us to hang out at the mall, have dinner and take in a movie. Afterwards, she stayed over with me and we went to St. Mary's as usual Monday morning. Bill came by and was immediately roped into helping with the day camp. Needless to say, he headed for the third and fourth graders group.

Michael

I was in my last week at the Abbey. I had really missed Mary Kathryn, but I had also really enjoyed my stay. I had loved working, playing and, yes, praying with the monks. My talks with the Abbot had covered just about every topic under the sun except one. We had not talked about my becoming a priest. It just hadn't seemed important for some reason.

My e-mails to the Fellowship were about what I had been doing, but mostly about what I had been thinking. The Fellowship kept me posted on what was going on with them. I was sorry to hear Millie had had an accident, but couldn't help but laugh when I read how it had happened. I was interested in the direction Paula and Jacob seemed to be headed. It sounded good. I did some worrying about Matt as I read between the lines about his roommate. Eugene had decided, encouraged by Larry, to go to band camp for two weeks after the trial was over.

I got a real kick out of Mary Kathryn's discovery that priests' wives were just like regular people. She had said Linda's and Bill's relationship had

deepened greatly. Luke had written about a girl's attempt to seduce him, but then they had become great friends. All in all, things seemed well.

The Saturday before I was to leave, the Abbot sent word he wanted to see me. When I reached his office he said, "Michael, you will be leaving Monday after Mass. I will not be here. I'm leaving this afternoon to do some work with a parish in Chicago and I wanted to see you before I left. You've lived here a month and we have talked about everything except the reason you thought you came here. Have you made a decision?"

"Father, I don't think I am any closer than the day I arrived. I have learned a lot. I see theology and religion, and you know what I mean by that, much clearer but, no, I haven't made a decision. That's not quite right, I have made a decision, maybe just strengthened my decision, to strive to be a spirit man, but how? I don't know.

"Good. You have two more years of high school and four years of college before seminary should you choose to become a priest. Those should be years of exploring, wondering, thinking, living. If it is intended you should be a priest, you'll know it. I don't mean you'll see writing in the sky or anything like that. Nor, I suspect, will it be a choice like deciding whether to become a doctor or lawyer. You'll know. There's something special about you, something I don't understand and have never experienced before, but it's there and you will know. We, I, will miss you around here. I said when you came you would be a breath of fresh air and you have been. I only hope you have received as much as you have given." He stood and so did I. As I stood, he walked toward me and hugged me. I then knelt and he placed his hand on my head and blessed me. It just seemed so natural.

I woke up early Sunday morning, long before time, with a strange feeling. Something was wrong but I didn't know what. I went back to sleep and had very disturbing dreams, but when I woke up I couldn't remember them. I went to Mass and prayed that all was well with the family and the Fellowship, but all day I was haunted with a feeling of uneasiness.

After Mass Monday, Brother Gregory and Brother Anselm took me to the airport for my flight home. When I reached the hub, my flight had been cancelled because of fog and I couldn't get a flight until mid-afternoon. I phoned home and Yong Jin answered the phone. "Everything all right?" I asked, with a strange feeling it wasn't.

"Everything's under control," she said. I told her my flight had been delayed and she said someone would meet me in Jackson.

Greywolf

"Transportation is quickly becoming a problem," I thought as I got ready to go pick up Luke in Jackson. Michael had been due shortly after I was to pick up Luke, but his plane had been delayed and wouldn't arrive until early evening. From my conversation with Taequo, I was sure Luke didn't need to hang around Jackson waiting for him, and all the Fellowship were scattered to the four winds.

David and Margaret were both on duty and Yong Jin needed to be with Matt. Finally, I called Fr. Tom and he volunteered to pick up Michael. With that settled, I took off for Jackson.

I had been waiting a very short time before the eighteen-wheeler pulled into the parking lot. Taequo sent Luke on an errand and, in the short time we had, said, "Greywolf, we don't have time to talk but I can tell you Luke is in bad shape. I don't think he has any idea how serious it is. You know he has power?" I nodded. "There is a struggle going on to destroy that in him. Don't let it happen."

I caught sight of Luke out of the corner of my eye and said, "Here's my phone number. When you get a chance, give me a call."

"I'll call when I stop for the night." He hugged Luke and left.

Luke said nothing for a long time after we got in the car. It was going to be a long trip, I thought. Finally he said, "Greywolf, did Taequo tell you?"

"Tell me what?"

"What I did."

"No, he just said you were hurting."

"I am, but I don't think I can talk about it. That's strange because yesterday and last night I talked to Taequo and two of his friends and felt better."

"Sometimes it's easier to talk to someone we have just met than to someone we know," I said.

"I hadn't thought about that, but it's true. On my way down to Sarasota I sat beside Janet, a girl who was going to Ringling too, and I told her everything."

"Luke, when and if you are ready to talk to me I am here, otherwise, I'll ask you nothing."

Again we were both silent for a long time. I looked sideways at Luke and saw tears running down his face. "Greywolf, I have betrayed Matt. I was unfaithful." The words started tumbling out and the tears flowed freely. Luke talked without stopping until we had passed Lexington. When he became silent again, I looked at him and saw that his talking had not helped him. He was obviously miserable. Before I could say anything Luke said, "Greywolf, please keep all that between us. Maybe I will tell someone else but not now and, please, please don't tell Matt."

"It's safe with me," I said, "but I think you should talk to Matt."

"Greywolf, I am not sure I will ever be able to face Matt again, much less talk with him." I started to say something about their love and the power it had, but didn't. At that point I think Luke was unable to hear it.

When we passed my place, Matt's Jeep was in the drive. Luke was carefully not looking in the direction of our house and I said nothing.

When Luke reached his place, he spoke to Margaret and David briefly and went upstairs. "I hope you won't leave him alone tonight," I said. "He is a very

sick young man, emotionally." Margaret nodded and said, "I'll check on him later. Jens and Gabrielle have taken care of things in Florida and will be back tomorrow. I had to give Matt a very strong sedative and David and Yong Jin took him home. He, too, is an emotional wreck. My heart bleeds for both of them, but right now I don't think there is anything we can do." I agreed and left for home.

Yong Jin met me at the door and started crying. "Greywolf, our baby is hurting so bad. He blames himself for everything that has happened."

I went upstairs and saw my Beloved Treasure lying on his bed in a fetal position and, even in his sleep, sobbing.

Taequo called a couple hours later and we talked at length. He asked me if Matt knew that Luke was special, that he had power. I told him about what had happened with Michael and the fact that Matt had Korean shaman ancestors as well as Lakota ones.

"Then you know that both are in great danger. Twice their power has almost led to death, twice Luke has attempted to take his life, and if he dies much of who and what Matt is dies as well. It is going to take powerful medicine to prevent their power being taken from them."

"I know. And I will do all in my power to protect them. And they have protectors, else why would you have been there to save Luke?"

"I have thought about that. I shouldn't have been. I should have taken a different route that night but, when the highway forked, I took that route and only after I was on it did I realize I hadn't intended to be. I will be in touch and if you need to contact me, give me a call." He gave me his cell phone number and we said goodbye.

The next morning I checked on Luke and Margaret said he had woke up screaming and she had given him a sedative and he was still asleep. "What are we going to do, Greywolf?"

"We are going to wait. There is little else we can do right now. Tonight we will all be home. Maybe we can make some decisions then, but I think it is really out of our hands. Does Mary Kathryn know, or what does she know?"

"All I told her was that Luke had decided to come home and was not well. I suggested she not try to see him so she went on to St. Mary's. David is off today and is going to pick up Jens and Gabrielle. We asked Fr. Tom to have Michael stay over with him last night under the pretence of their having a talk this morning. Fr. Tom will tell him, briefly, what has happened and suggest he might want to stay with Mary Kathryn at the day camp until she is ready to come home. Frankly, Greywolf, I feel in over my head."

"So do I," I replied.

Luke

When I got home, the whole mess I had created piled on me again. I was hardly civil to David and Margaret and didn't even ask about Mom and Dad and

why David and Margaret were at our place. I went to my room and flopped on my bed and cried until I was so exhausted I fell asleep. As soon as I was asleep, I had the same nightmare, Rich had his cock up my ass and I was screaming for him to fuck me. I screamed so loudly I woke myself up and dissolved into tears again. Once again I fell asleep and the same nightmare returned. This time my screaming was loud enough to be heard downstairs and Margaret came up and tried to comfort me, but I could not be comforted. Finally she gave me a shot and I sank into blackness, no dreams, no nightmares, nothing.

Margaret

Tuesday night there was a family meeting at our place. The whole family was there except Luke and Matt. No-one wanted to leave them alone so we called on our old standbys, Chelsea and Gladys. Jens had told them briefly what had happened and asked if they could come to stay with the two. "There will be no need to do anything since neither will get out of bed. They just lie there in a fetal position and cry from time to time. Margaret will leave shots should they be needed. Luke seems to have nightmares which terrify him, but Matt just lies there." Of course they were there in minutes, Gladys at Luke's, Chelsea at Matt's bedsides.

When we had eaten, sandwiches and not much of them, Jens and Gabrielle told us what they had found out. "From what Douglas and Janet told us, we can pretty much guess what we don't know. Matt had written Luke an e-mail, which Luke had only partially read, getting the impression Matt and his roommate at Sewanee had engaged in sexual activity, mutual masturbation. Luke became angry and accepted an invitation from his teacher to go to a gay night club where he had gone the week before. Luke had a fake I.D. and had gotten drunk the week before, but Saturday night he really tied one on. They went back to the teacher's apartment, the teacher is gay, and here I'm just assuming, where Luke and the teacher engaged in sex, one way or another. Luke went back to the dorm and discovered a printed copy of Matt's e-mail and realized that Matt had called a halt before he and his roommate had actually completed what the roommate started. Realizing Matt had not been unfaithful to him, but he had been unfaithful to Matt, Luke ran away and was caught just before he drowned himself. Now both are blaming themselves for what happened. I don't think there's even a question of forgiving each other because both see the other as innocent. Well, Matt may not see Luke as innocent, but sees himself as the cause of Luke's being unfaithful, which amounts to the same thing. It's one hell of a mess."

There was a lot of talk, but no-one had a clue as to what could be done. Michael finally said, "Look, it's something they are going to have to resolve. Maybe we can help, but they have to resolve it. I think anything we try to do will only backfire." I knew he was probably right, but I didn't like to hear it said.

"Margaret, how long can they go on as they are?" Yong Jin asked.

"Longer than I like to think," I responded. "But I'd say if there is no change in a day or so, then we'll have to take some action. Right now, I think we can just

help when they are overcome by their demons, I mean sedation." And that was the way it was left.

There was no change in the two Wednesday. Both stayed curled up in bed, getting up only to go to the bathroom. I hoped they were at least drinking water when they went. Thursday, when I checked mid-morning, there had been no change. Matt slept, now crying in his sleep, and Luke had to be sedated to keep the nightmares away. I decided that unless there was a change Saturday morning, I was going to hospitalize them.

Yong Jin

Margaret had said that if there was no change in the boys Saturday she was going to hospitalize them. Well, there was no change in Matt when I checked on him when I got up. I couldn't see how he had any tears left, but he was curled into a knot in the middle of his bed, with tears rolling down his cheeks. He was asleep, but still crying. Since I didn't know what to say, I said nothing, but thought, "Sarang Hanun Pomul, I would take your place if I could take the hurt away," and went back downstairs. Matt hadn't spoken since Monday night when Margaret had given him a shot other than to whisper, 'It's my fault, Luke, it's my fault.' Luke, so far as Gabrielle knew, had not spoken at all.

I went downstairs and took the cup of coffee Greywolf handed me. His eyes asked a question and I just shook my head. We sat in silence then Greywolf looked up as if he had heard something, got up and walked to the front door. I heard him speak some words in what I was sure was Lakota and when he came back into the kitchen, he was accompanied by an ancient Indian. Without being told, I knew it was Red Hawk, the medicine man who had helped Greywolf overcome being abused. No wonder he looked ancient. He had to be over a hundred, I was sure. Greywolf handed him a cup of coffee and he sat down.

I don't know what I expected, movie Indian language I guess, but after Greywolf introduced us, he spoke beautiful, if amusing at times, English with the lilt of a Lakota. "The gray wolf came to me in a vision Monday," he said, "and told me to come".

"How did you find us?" I asked.

He laughed, "The gray wolf told me. Well, actually, he told me to go to the library and use the Internet. Not many Patanka St. Michael Greywolves so it was easy. Getting here was the problem. I am a warrior 'most all the time, but this Indian is not getting on a plane. So tell me, Greywolf, why am I here?"

Greywolf told him the situation and of his conversation with Taequo. When he finished, Red Hawk said, "So we have two medicine men who don't know it..."

"Not sure about that," Greywolf interrupted and told him about Michael.

"...who have power and were led to use it, but not understand it. They are linked and, when separated, the no-good spirits can get at them. Greywolf, you never have given me an easy task. This is going to be tough. Mrs. Greywolf, you

might whip up some bacon and eggs 'cause I'm going to need to eat," he laughed.

Eat he did. And after a few more cups of coffee, he said, "Well, I guess I need to earn my keep. The gray wolf told me there was a sacred place here."

"I know," Greywolf said. I looked at him in surprise and he merely shrugged.

"I'll need a sweat lodge there this evening. There's another young man around here somewhere who has received power from Matt. Now that's a strange kid, Mrs. Greywolf..."

"Yong Jin, please," I said.

"Korean, right?" he asked. I nodded. "Thought so. Shaman family?" I nodded again. "That's what the gray wolf told me, but I didn't believe him. He likes to play tricks on this old Indian sometimes. That's why Matt can give power to others, the Korean shaman side, I mean. Greywolf, he's to help you build the sweat lodge, the other one I mean, Michael. Yong Jin, call that doctor and tell her I'm here and no drugs for Luke today. Also, we're going to need one hell of a supper about 10:00 tonight. Right now I'm going to take a nap. Can't sleep on a damn bus." With those words, he went into the living room and curled up on the floor and was asleep in thirty seconds or less. It was then that I noticed a large pack he had left by the front door.

"It's going to be a long day," Greywolf said, "but it will be a great one."

Greywolf called Michael and told him they had a job to do, kissed me and walked out the door. As he left, I thought to myself, "I wonder if living with Patanka St. Michael Greywolf will ever get dull?" then shook my head because I knew it wouldn't, even when we were as old as Red Hawk.

Michael

I was still asleep when Greywolf called. Mom yelled upstairs the phone was for me. "Holy shit, who's calling me before God and I got up? It was as bad as being at the Abbey. That early morning business," I thought, "was about the only thing I had really disliked, well, there was washing the pots and pans in the kitchen too." I picked up the phone, dropped it and, when I had retrieved it, said, "Hello".

"Michael, what are you doing in bed? The lark is on the wing, day is at hand," I heard Greywolf say.

"Greywolf, you commune with the frigging larks, I'm communing with my bed."

Greywolf laughed and then sounded very serious when he said, "Michael, you and I have a job to do today, an important one. Can you come over in, say, an hour?"

"Of course I can, Greywolf," I answered, wondering what this important job could be, "if it's important. What's so important?"

"Think I'll wait and let someone else explain. Sharpen up a hatchet and bring it. See you in an hour."

I was still half asleep and almost turned over and went back to dreamland but, just before I did, dragged myself out of bed, went downstairs and told Mom and Dad what Greywolf had said.

It was Dad's turn to do breakfast and it was about finished, but he added more bacon to the skillet and broke three or four more eggs since I would be eating. As he worked at getting breakfast ready, Mom was sitting at the kitchen table drinking coffee. I grabbed a cup and joined her. "Why are you up so early?"

"It's Greywolf. He said we had an important job to do today, but wouldn't say what it was. Said someone else would tell me later. Don't you know what is going on?"

"No. I called a few minutes before he did to check on Matt and Luke. Greywolf said both were the same, he had talked to Jens who is really beside himself, but that the boys weren't going to the hospital today and asked me to come by after work to discuss what was going on. He was pretty mysterious about it."

We ate and Mom and Dad left for work. I showered, still hadn't shaved and had a good start on a beard, of course it was so blond it didn't show up very well, but Mary Kathryn loved it, and got dressed. I went to the workshop and checked the hatchet. As always it was already sharpened. Dad was not really rigid about most things, but taking care of tools wasn't one of them. His tools were always where they were supposed to be and in good shape.

I decided to run to the Greywolves' since I wasn't getting much running in, but thought better of it when I looked at the hatchet, but I did walk.

When I opened the door and walked in, there was an old, and I mean old, Indian lying on the living room floor. As soon as I stepped inside he sat up, wide awake, and said, "Good morning, Michael, glad you could come". I knew Greywolf might have told him something about me, but how did he know my name? How did he know who I was? As if in answer, he said, "Oh, I know a lot about you Michael. The gray wolf told me. I'm Red Hawk."

We walked into the kitchen and Greywolf said, "Red Hawk, this is..."

"I know. Michael. I sent for him you know." He sat down at the table and said, "Yong Jin, I'll have another cup of coffee". Yong Jin prepared fresh coffee and Greywolf, Red Hawk and I sat at the table, silent, until the coffee was made and we each had a cup.

"Michael, you know you share in Luke's and Matt's power, don't you?" I had a feeling there was something which connected me to Luke and Matt more than just being brothers, and at times I had a sense of something strange about myself, but I never thought much about it.

"I never really thought about it a whole lot," I said.

"Michael, you know what Matt and Luke did for you. The circle has moved and now it is time for you to help heal them. They are in as much danger as you were, but it's not physical, well, there may be physical results, but it's not physical. Luke would have drowned had his protector not sent someone, but his drowning would have been more than physical. Do you have any idea of what I mean?"

"Yes," I replied because I did. I didn't know how, but I did.

"Matt once told you, you were a spirit man and you are. You are a real spirit warrior and we have a great battle on our hands. I think maybe we can win, but it's going to be a rough weekend so let's get started. Yong Jin, we will be fasting the rest of the day," he said and got up and walked toward the door headed, I knew, straight to the falls. Both he and Greywolf picked up shovels lying by the front walk and Greywolf handed me a pitchfork. As he handed it to me, I asked, "Could I please just know what the hell is going on? I'm in the dark."

"Not as in the dark as you think," Red Hawk replied. "You'll know when it is time. There is a time for everything." After that, I kept my mouth shut and we three walked to the falls. When we reached the falls, Red Hawk nodded several times and said, "Yes, this is the place the gray wolf showed me. Now I will pick the spot. Chanting under his breath, he walked around the beach surrounding the falls for several minutes. This whole process got stranger and stranger. Finally he stopped, marked a spot on the ground with his shovel and nodded to Greywolf. He then walked several feet to the east of the spot he had marked and made another mark. "We have found the place. Now it is time to pray by working. The spirits and protectors can't do everything." I was ready to go to work, doing I didn't know what, when Red Hawk sat down and Greywolf and I joined him.

"Michael, we are holding an Inipi, a sweat lodge ceremony, here tonight," Red Hawk said. I had once heard Greywolf describe the Inipi, but at the time it was just something Indians did and I hadn't paid that much attention to what he had said. Now Red Hawk explained the ceremony in detail.

When he finished, I asked, "This is for Matt and Luke?"

"No, it's for me, you and Greywolf. Matt and Luke are not ready."

"But who's going to be the gate keeper and the fire keeper?" I asked.

"I'm not sure, but he will be sent," Red Hawk responded. "Now let's get the lodge ready. Greywolf will take care of the fire pit, I'll construct the lodge and, while I dig the pit for the stones, you are to cut willows. We need eight straight willow saplings at least twelve feet long and another dozen or so eight to twelve feet long. Search for them along the river."

I walked along the riverbank, finding willows of the size Red Hawk had specified. When I had eight long ones, I dragged them back to the falls. When I got back, Red Hawk had dug a pit where he had made the first mark and Greywolf had dug a pit at the second mark. Both men had gathered wood and

started a fire in the pit Greywolf had dug and were bringing stones and putting them beside the fire pit. When I returned with the second load of willows, Red Hawk had arranged the eight I had brought previously in a circle and was tying them together to form a dome. He took the ones I was carrying and I helped him tie them to the ribs of the dome, holding it all together. More wood had been added to the fire and it was rapidly becoming a bed of red-hot coals. Greywolf appeared, just as we had completed the framework of the dome, carrying several tarps. He and Red Hawk quickly attached them to the framework. When I looked inside I saw that the only light visible was that from the opening where I was standing, where the flap was turned back.

"I guess that's it," Red Hawk said, "except to add more fuel to the fire". He and Greywolf quickly added more wood to the pit.

"Time to break for lunch," I said.

"We're fasting," Red Hawk said. "Remember?"

"We're fasting?" I asked. Red Hawk smiled and nodded.

"Time to attend to the two boys," he said. "Greywolf, will you tend the fire until the fire keeper arrives?"

Greywolf nodded and Red Hawk motioned to me and we walked to the Greywolves' place. When we arrived, Yong Jin was in the kitchen. "Yong Jin, I need your kitchen," he said. Yong Jin nodded and left. Red Hawk put a pot of water on the stove and, when it was boiling, took several bundles from his pack and placed some from each of them into the boiling water. "Matt and Luke need to be nourished. They haven't eaten in almost a week." When the pot was boiling again, Red Hawk handed me another package and said, "Add this, stir well and, when it has boiled again, take it off the stove, put half of it in a bowl and bring it up". He then went upstairs.

Shortly after he was gone, I smelled the scent of burning cedar and sweet grass and heard, very faintly, Red Hawk chanting. I did as Red Hawk had told me and took the steaming bowl upstairs. When I opened the door to Matt's room, it was filled with smoke from a bowl of smoldering sweet grass and cedar. Matt was lying on his back, naked, as if he was sleeping peacefully in the middle of his bed. Red Hawk was chanting and waving the wing of a large bird over him, fanning the smoke over his body. Since I hadn't been told to do anything other than bring the bowl up, I just stood holding it. I remembered how hot it had been, but it wasn't burning me. I guess the thick bowl prevented that. I stood, holding the bowl for what seemed like an hour and I know it was at least half an hour. Red Hawk finally stopped chanting, leaned over and blew into Matt's face three times. As he did, Matt slowly opened his eyes. Red Hawk motioned to me and I took the bowl to him. He put his arm under Matt's neck and lifted him into a sitting position. He placed the bowl to Matt's lips and said, "Drink!". Matt started drinking the liquid and might have stopped, but Red Hawk held the bowl to his lips and had his arm firmly around Matt's neck. To tell the truth, Matt had two choices: he could drink or he could have his naked lap filled with hot liquid. He drank.

The bowl was empty when Red Hawk took it from Matt's lips. When he took his arm from around Matt, Matt started to lie down. "Sit up!" Red Hawk said in a voice that allowed no options. Matt sat. Red Hawk indicated Matt's desk chair and I brought it to him. He placed it by the bed and sat down. He sat, watching Matt, for several minutes and then said, "Ok, you now have something to start you back on the road to being a human being. Go to the bathroom and take a shower. No hot water and no soap, just cold water." When Matt made no move to get up, Red Hawk said, "Do it now!" Matt obeyed.

While he was gone, Red Hawk opened the windows and allowed the smoke to escape but, of course, the room was still filled with the scent of burning sweet grass and cedar. Matt returned, wet and shivering. "Get a towel," Red Hawk said to me. When I brought one, he dried Matt, rubbing his body vigorously. When he finished he said, "Get dressed". Matt still had not spoken a word, but he got dressed. "Come downstairs with us," Red Hawk commanded. Matt followed us down the stairs. When we reached the kitchen, Yong Jin was there and Red Hawk said to her, "We're fasting, he's eating. Feed him. Matt, you can go where you please except you are not to see Luke until 10:00 tonight when we have dinner, and you are not to speak to him until I say you can." Matt nodded. Red Hawk turned to me and said, "Bring the pot. We have another man to tend to."

At the Larsens', Red Hawk just walked in the way any member of the family would do, nodded to Gabrielle who had been staying home with Luke, and gave her the pot with instructions to heat it to boiling and pour it into a bowl. "Michael will come for it when it is needed," and, with those words, he went upstairs straight to Luke's room.

Luke lay on his bed, curled into a fetal position. Occasionally he would cry out, but I didn't understand what he was saying. Red Hawk started chanting as he placed the bowl he had used before on Luke's bedside table and lit braided sweet grass and strips of cedar. As the smoke began to rise from the bowl, he used the bird's wing to fan it over Luke's body. Gradually Luke uncurled, turned to lay on his back and looked as Matt had when I had gone into his room. Red Hawk continued chanting and waving the smoke over Luke, I am sure, much longer than he had over Matt, but finally he gave me a signal and I went downstairs for the bowl. He did exactly the same thing for Luke as he had done for Matt, and got the same results. After telling Gabrielle to feed Luke, and after saying the same thing to Luke as he had said to Matt, we left.

I started to not ask him what he had done, but I wanted to know. Red Hawk laughed, "Well, I guess I could make up some mumbo jumbo but it's fairly simple. "The chanting and incense were to calm the boys' spirits. Kind of like a Lakota tranquilizer, but more spirit than drug. The liquid had some herbs to make sure their stomachs wouldn't object to food after being empty so long, and a kind of Lakota energy bar soup. They are very weak, but that food will keep a healthy man going for a very long time. There's also a little something to make them hungry so they will eat even if their emotions tell them not to."

"But neither of them spoke, and you told them they weren't to speak to each other until you said they could. Why's that?"

"Because they don't want to and don't need to. Right now their words would only wound, themselves and each other. Let's check on the sweat lodge."

Greywolf was tending the fire, which now, was a huge bed of hot coals. The rocks could not be seen since they were now buried under the coals. Red Hawk answered the unasked question on Greywolf's face, "The boys are up and their mothers are feeding them. They are ok for the time being. Everything looks ready. The fire tender should be arriving soon."

The words were hardly out of his mouth when an Indian walked out of the canebrake. He was dressed as an Indian, unlike Red Hawk who was wearing a pair of very old jeans and an ancient checked shirt. "Taequo, I knew it would be you who showed up. The gray wolf told me."

"You old son of a bitch," Taequo said as he hugged Red Hawk. "I was looking forward to a good long weekend of fun and instead I had to hop a plane. You Lakota sure know how to ruin a fellow's playtime."

"Someone should have ruined some of your playtime years ago so you're having to pay now," Red Hawk laughed. It was obvious the two were old friends and loved each other very much. I never thought you could call someone a son of a bitch and show deep, deep respect, but Taequo had just demonstrated that it could be done.

Taequo turned to me and said, "Michael, I'm Taequo. I pulled your brother's ass from the brink of destruction but, apparently, didn't complete the job. I am glad to meet you. Understand you just got back from a month with a bunch of monks and walked into this mess. Well, I guess you white folks are just going to have to learn that being a medicine man means you no longer belong to yourself. Hope that wild woman understands because she may as well get used to it."

I was wondering how Taequo knew who I was, my name and, it seemed, everything about me. Red Hawk said, "Luke told him much of what he knows, but I told him what the gray wolf told me." The old Indian was a mind reader? "No, I just listen when I am told something," he answered again, even as the thought formed in my mind.

I finally had had enough and said, "Ok, I've gone along with all this and I have seen results, but can I have some answers. For starters, who is this Greywolf guy who has been telling you things. I mean, has Greywolf been talking to you?"

Taequo laughed and said, "Not a person named Greywolf, but the gray wolf. It's Patanka's and Red Hawk's protector. Probably an ancestor or it may be a spirit gray wolf. Doesn't matter."

"He came to me in a dream, well, not really a dream, it was a vision, and told me I was needed here and told me the situation pretty much. He also told me

about you and your connection with Matt and Luke. You'll never have the power they have, but you have much, very much, and anyone with power can use it for good or bad. There are bad spirits who try to make you doubt your power, use it wrongly or, perhaps worse, deny it and not use it at all. Your brothers may think only they are involved in their present trial, but much more is at stake. Twice the bad spirits have almost destroyed Luke knowing that, if they can, they will also destroy Matt and make your power so weak as to be useless. Yes, much is at stake here. My heart rejoices that you are here, Taequo, my brother," Red Hawk said, and embraced Taequo again. "It will be a good sweat. Let's swim."

I thought to myself, "I hope to hell Red Hawk doesn't drive the way he makes turns without signaling!" He looked at me, winked, stripped and dived into the water. We all quickly followed suit and I was surprised how refreshing the swim was. Red Hawk, Taequo and Greywolf were acting as if they didn't have a care in the world, strange. At least it was strange until I realized I felt the same way. By the way, don't ever try to duck an old Indian medicine man. I thought I was in good shape, but when we were horsing around, I tried to duck him and he immediately put me ass over head into the water and held me there until I came up spluttering. When I did, he laughed a deep, roaring belly laugh. "Indians one, white man zero," he shouted and laughed again.

After we had swum for a good long time, we got out of the water and sat in the late afternoon sun. "Ok, now here's what we're going to do," Red Hawk said. "Tonight, Greywolf, Michael and I will do a sweat while Taequo is fire and door keeper. When we finish the sweat, we eat. Tomorrow morning, we greet the sun, swim and get dressed for church."

"Get dressed for church?" I asked, not believing what I was hearing. "After all this Lakota stuff, we're going to church?"

"You got a problem with church, Michael?" Red Hawk asked.

"Well, no, of course not, but I mean you are a Lakota medicine man."

"I'm also an ex-drunk, a father, grandfather, great-grandfather and maybe a great-great-grandfather. I also happen to have been a damn good Episcopalian since I was a week old or so. Even tried being a monk for a year, but I do love women. Of course, I had to pick one that didn't understand why I should share myself so there were a lot of disappointed, beautiful women when I was young, like sixty or so." He then laughed that great belly laugh. "Anyway, tonight is to purify the three of us and to pray for our own healing as well as for the healing of Luke and Matt. Tomorrow church. We need all the help we can get."

"You're assuming Luke and Matt will go," I said.

"They'll go," Taequo said. His voice left little doubt. "That's a worry you can put out of your mind."

"They'll get fed well tomorrow and fast Monday. Monday night we will do a sweat with them. Greywolf will be fire and door keeper and you, Michael, will do the ceremony. I will be occupied otherwise I fear. Taequo, you will still be here?" Taequo nodded. "Good, I think I'm going to need help during the sweat. Michael,

I'll teach you the ceremony between now and then. Also, you'll need to bring Mary Kathryn with you because a sweat really does need a woman. Tonight Yong Jin will do the woman's part."

"Problem," Greywolf said. "Yong Jin is on her moon."

Once again I felt like a stranger in a strange land and even more so when Red hawk asked me, "How about Mary Kathryn? Is she on her moon?"

"How the hell would I know? I don't know anything about being on the moon!"

"The kid has a temper," Red Hawk laughed. "On her moon, you know, having her period."

"And just how the hell would I know that?" I was still hot under the collar.

"Sorry, I guess I assumed you two were playing around. If you were, you'd know, especially if she was supposed to be and was not," Red Hawk laughed again. "Check that out for us and let us know. I'll need to instruct her about what to do. "Well," he said, looking at the sky, "we have two hours by the sun before we begin. Taequo, you need to meet Matt and Yong Jin, then Luke and his parents. Greywolf, you need to talk to the Larsens and Andrews. Michael, check on your wild woman. If she's not on her moon, come back in an hour and a half. If she is, maybe Luke's mom can do it, but I rather not. She might be too involved in what's going on with Luke. Yong Jin has enough Shaman in her background to put such concerns out of her mind. I'm going to take a nap." Red Hawk immediately stretched out on the sandy beach, still naked, and was asleep before his head hit the sand.

Taequo went to the Greywolves' and Greywolf and I headed for the Larsens'. Greywolf stayed downstairs talking with Jens and Gabrielle. As I passed Luke's room, I saw he was stretched out on his bed, looking at the ceiling. I did not disturb him, but went to Mary Kathryn's room. She was sitting on her bed, reading, when I walked in. I walked over, sat beside her and gave her a real kiss. Before things got out of hand, and I knew they could and would quickly, after all, we had been separated a month and now had a mess to deal with, I asked, "Mary Kathryn, are you on your moon?" half expecting her to look at me like I was crazy.

"No, why do you ask? Afraid I had gotten pregnant while you were gone?"

I was taken aback a bit and stammered, "No, I hadn't even thought about that. And, frankly, I didn't expect you to know what I was talking about."

"Well, I'm not, but what difference does it make?" I explained to her there was a part that a woman should play in a sweat lodge ceremony, but could not if she were on her moon and Yong Jin was. "Red Hawk planned to have you do it when we do a sweat for Luke and Matt, but said you could do both. We'll go in an hour or so and he'll give you instructions. Meanwhile..." I was ready for some serious making out but Mary Kathryn said, "I know that having sex before a ceremony is a big no-no. I read that somewhere. I'm not sure if that means heavy

making out as well, but I think we need to be on the safe side." I couldn't believe it! Wild Woman was calling a halt before anything got started AND she wasn't making a fuss about our first Saturday night after I got back being involved with something I think very much like priesthood. "Tell me all you know about a sweat." I did and she was listening very intently.

When it was time to go, Mary Kathryn and I went to the falls. As we walked out of the canebrake, Red Hawk sat up instantly, he had put on his shirt and jeans sometime, and patted the sand beside him, indicating we should sit down. He explained the sweat ceremony to Mary Kathryn, including parts I had missed, and what her part would be. "You will open the lodge because you are woman and hold a position of honor. Only a woman can truly represent White Buffalo Calf Maiden, the strongest of the spirit guides." I had never seen Mary Kathryn so serious, so solemn, as she was as she listened to Red Hawk.

By the time Red Hawk had finished talking to Mary Kathryn, the sun was down and twilight was upon the falls. As if they knew when Mary Kathryn was ready, Greywolf and Taequo appeared out of the canebrake. While Mary Kathryn prepared the tobacco for the opening of the lodge, the four of us washed in the river. Only Taequo dressed after we came out. Mary Kathryn had the tobacco ready to open the sweat lodge.

Part Fifty-two

Michael

Red Hawk just nodded to Mary Kathryn and she returned his nod and began walking around the fire pit, clockwise, sprinkling the tobacco she had prepared. Completing the circle, she left a trail of tobacco particles as she walked to the sweat lodge entrance, bent, and went inside. I knew she would walk around the stone pit inside, continuing to sprinkle tobacco particles as she circled it clockwise. When she came out of the lodge, she nodded to Red Hawk and walked away from the falls. The sweat lodge was now open and ready.

Red Hawk filled the peace pipe and offered it to the four directions without lighting it. When he had completed the offering of the pipe, he opened the flap of the sweat lodge and held it open for me and Greywolf to enter. Inside, Greywolf sat across the fire pit from the opening, which was to the east. Red Hawk and I sat opposite each other, he to the south, I to the north. As he seated himself, Red Hawk placed the peace pipe on a stand by his side.

As soon as we were seated, Taequo closed the flap and we were plunged into complete darkness. I knew this was a time of meditation and contemplation as well as a time to grow accustomed to the confinement of the sweat lodge and its darkness. It was also a time when those who felt too uncomfortable could leave, in fact, it is never a disgrace to quietly leave the sweat lodge if it becomes too uncomfortable for any reason. As we entered, I had seen a large pail of water, a dipper, a short stout stick, an eagle's bone whistle and a small hand drum by Red Hawk's place. These, Red Hawk had explained earlier, would be used in the sweat lodge ceremony.

After several minutes in the darkness, Red Hawk called for the stones to be brought in. Taequo raised the flap and entered with a glowing red-hot stone on a pitchfork. As Taequo held the stone before him, and since it was the first, Red Hawk tapped it with the stick and greeted it in Lakota, "Hau kola" (Hello, friend). The stone was then placed in the stone pit to be joined by others in whose name it had been greeted. Taequo then brought in three more stones and placed them in the pit. The flap was closed. The stones glowed red in the darkness and as I looked at them there seemed to be shapes, figures and images dancing, moving over their surface. As I stared at the stones, Red Hawk started speaking in a soft voice, "This is the first endurance, the endurance of the west, the black direction. It is in the west that the spirits live. In this endurance, we recognize the reality of the spirit world and pray to the Great Spirit, Wakan Tanka, for a spirit guide." Having said this, Red Hawk poured the first dipper of water on the hot stones and steam shot upward, visible in the glow from the stones. Three more dippers of water followed the first and the lodge was filling with steam and getting quite warm. As we sat silent, Red Hawk blew the eagle's bone whistle for a short time and then beat the drum slowly.

When he stopped, the inside of the sweat lodge was quiet. The water poured on the stones had all become steam. We sat in silence, then Red Hawk

started chanting a prayer, in English, and, as he had instructed me, ended each section with, "Hetch etu" (It is so). After the prayers, in which the Great Spirit guides, Father Sky, Mother Earth, Buffalo Calf Maiden and our relatives who were now spirits, were asked to help us, we introduced ourselves to them, "Oh spirits that come among us within this womb of our Mother, I am Michael, and I am pleased to be here tonight. Hetch etu."

As I finished my introduction, something flashed across my face. I couldn't see it clearly, but it was some kind of large golden bird, and I knew there was no bird in the lodge. Besides, the bird that flashed across my face was far larger than the lodge. I reflected on the event for several minutes, then just let the silence, darkness and sweat lodge become my world. I don't know how long it was, I lost count of time, before Red Hawk tapped on the lodge flap, and Taequo raised it and welcome cool air rushed in.

While Red Hawk held the flap open with his stick, Taequo brought in two more glowing red stones and the second endurance, the endurance of the north, began. The second endurance revolved around courage and cleanliness, moral and spiritual cleanliness. Red Hawk appealed to the power of the north for endurance, strength, deanliness and honesty. He then started pouring dippers of water over the glowing stones until the lodge was filled with steam. "Endurance, cleanliness, strength, purity will keep our lives straight," Red Hawk said quietly, then sounded the whistle and the drum.

After we had sat in silence for a time, I stared at the dancing images moving across the stones, Red Hawk gave Greywolf and me a sprig of sage each. We repeated after him, "Oh, powers of the universe, I take this herb to become strong and healthy to endure". I chewed on the sage and remembered Greywolf had called it the healing and fortifying herb which can help overcome the bad things of the world.

As I chewed the sage and thought about enduring, the lodge was very hot and I was sweating profusely, a huge black shape appeared before my face. It seemed to be a great black bird, and I had a sense of evil, of hurt, of bad spirits. Suddenly I felt it bury its talons in my chest and it was all I could do not to scream out. I was saying over and over to myself, "I will endure. I will endure." The pain in my chest was nearly unbearable. I felt myself growing faint when, suddenly, the golden bird from the first endurance appeared and attacked the black shape. As suddenly as it had buried its talons in my chest, the black shape pulled them out and disappeared before the attack of the golden bird, which also disappeared. I was weak, but I had endured. Red Hawk was blowing the eagle's bone whistle as, in the glow of the stones, I saw him handing me another sprig of sage. As I chewed it, he poured another dipper of water on the stones and used the large bird's wing he had used when he was with Matt and Luke, and which he had carried in his right hand as he entered the lodge, to fan the steam over my body.

Gradually, the world, the steam, the heat, the silence, became ordinary and Red Hawk tapped the flap and Taequo brought in four more glowing stones

and refilled the pail with water. The flap was closed and we sat in silence as I, again, watched the dancing images on the surface of the stones. One, which seemed to be a golden eagle, appeared to move from the surface of the stones and rise to stand before my face, its wings spread, protecting me... from what?

The third endurance was the endurance of the east, the endurance which recognizes and seeks knowledge. It also marked the beginning of prayer for, and by, individuals. Red Hawk poured dipper after dipper of water on the stones. The lodge had seemed filled with steam before, but nothing to compare with its present state. The heat, of course, increased as well. Red Hawk sounded the eagle's bone whistle for a long time and then began to sound the drum slowly. When he stopped, he told us we were to pray for what we wanted out of life, for loved ones and for all else we wished. "End your prayers with 'Hetch etu' so your brother will know when to begin his," he concluded. Seated to Red Hawk's left, Greywolf began. He prayed that he might become a better husband, father, teacher and friend. He prayed for the Fellowship, naming each one, and for the Family in this time of pain and hurt. Then he prayed for me, that I might become the Great Spirit man I was intended to be. Finally he prayed for Matt and Luke, concluding with, "Hetch etu," and fell silent.

My chest was stinging and burning, hurting, as I tried to collect my thoughts. The heat was so intense I was sweating profusely and I could have sworn the sweat was stinging and burning wounds on my chest, but it must have been my imagination. I was so absorbed in my pain that I didn't realize I had started praying aloud. Consciously, I prayed that I might be a true friend to the Fellowship, that I would be a warrior for justice, that I would be a good leader for Independence and faithful and loving to Mary Kathryn. I prayed for the Fellowship and that we would all become the fullest possible human beings we could be. Then, and only then, I started praying for Matt and Luke, that they might be healed, that their love for each other would grow stronger. Then I prayed that they would forgive each other and themselves. I was exhausted as I uttered "Hetch etu" and realized, as I said the words, tears were streaming down my face because I was suddenly aware that I could feel, actually feel, their pain. I don't mean I could feel it symbolically or empathetically, but actually. I could feel it, period.

As their pain invaded my being, the black shape, I could see now it was a huge black bird, once again buried its talons in my chest. Matt's and Luke's pain began to fade as my own took over my world. The talons buried themselves deeper and deeper. "No! No! I will not desert Matt and Luke," I shouted as I tried to beat off the black bird. I was determined not to waver, but the pain kept trying to drive out my feeling Matt's and Luke's pain. In spite of all that was going on, I realized in the back of my mind, Greywolf was blowing the eagle's bone whistle and Red Hawk was sounding the drum, although both seemed to be far, far away. Just when I thought I could endure no more, the great golden bird appeared and, when it did, the black bird tore his talons from my chest and disappeared. So did the golden bird. Suddenly I was back in the sweat lodge. "Strange," I thought, "since I have been nowhere else." I was near fainting when

Red Hawk called out and Taequo raised the flap and handed Red Hawk a bucket of fresh water. He took the dipper and poured a dipperful of water over his head and passed the dipper to Greywolf who did the same. Greywolf handed me a dipper of water and, as I poured it over my head, he said, "Your lifeblood of water, your sweat, is mixing with Mother Earth and your lifeblood is mixing with her life-giving spirit". The sweat part I could understand, but the other didn't make sense or maybe I was just too far out of it to understand.

Taequo brought in yet four more glowing stones and Red Hawk called for the flap to be closed. This began the fourth endurance, the endurance of the south, the endurance for healing. Red Hawk did not blow the whistle or sound the drum this time. Instead, he began a slow chant. As he chanted, he poured four dippers of water over the stones and the lodge was again filled with steam. The heat and steam were more intense than ever as we sat in silence. After a long, long period of silence, Red Hawk prayed, "Oh, Great Spirit, we pray for ourselves in order that we might be healed. Oh, we pray for our brothers, especially Matthew and Luke, that they might be healed. Hetch etu."

When he finished praying, Red Hawk started chanting again. In the heat and steam of the lodge, I saw a great gray wolf moving as a shadow in the lodge. It was accompanied by a shadowy red hawk. As I contemplated their being there, a great golden eagle came from the glowing stones and spread its wings before my face. As I tried hard to focus on each in turn, they faded from sight. As they did, I realized the steam had subsided as well, indicating that the last endurance had been going on longer than I thought.

Red Hawk took a splinter of wood and touched one of the stones, which was now glowing dully, and used the resulting fire to light the peace pipe. He took a draw on the pipe, slowly exhaled and passed the pipe to Greywolf, who did the same and passed the pipe to me. Since I didn't smoke, I was surprised that I didn't choke when I inhaled the smoke and then exhaled, but I didn't. I returned the pipe to Red Hawk who replaced it on its stand. Then, without speaking, Red Hawk and Greywolf joined hands and each took one of mine and Red Hawk offered a short prayer concluding with, "God watches over us. Wherever we are, the Great Spirit is. Hetch etu." He then called for Taequo to open the flap and when it was opened, I lead us out, walking clockwise, and we dived into the falls' basin.

When we had swum for a while, we got out and sat on blankets Taequo had spread around the fire pit. After the stones were removed, he had added fresh wood and the pit was now a nice campfire, illuminating the area around it. The three men were looking at me intently and, finally, Red Hawk said, "Michael, what happened in the sweat lodge?" The three never took their eyes from me as I sat, trying to think of what to say.

I'm sure it was only a matter of minutes before I spoke, but it seemed like hours as I tried to collect myself. While I was doing that, I drew my hand across my chest, which was stinging, and when I looked at it, there was blood on it. I looked at my chest and saw wounds there, but I couldn't really see them because

they were just above my nipples and I couldn't bend my neck enough to see them clearly. I looked at my bloody hand and started telling the three what I thought had happened in the sweat lodge. "But then it was like a dream, maybe a vision, unreal. Well, not unreal, but different." All the time I was talking, the three were nodding.

When I finished telling all I could, Red Hawk said, "It is as I thought. Michael, you have much more power than I realized. That and the fact that you and Matt and Luke are linked make all three of you very powerful, but also weak in that if the link is broken, all of you lose power. In the sweat lodge, you did battle with the bad spirit who is trying to break the link and who, at this time, holds power over Luke and Matt. Your spirit protector, the golden eagle, came to you as you did battle. My Son, that seldom happens except on a vision quest, but you received your vision without going on a quest. I suspect you did because you were focused on your brothers and not yourself. Your protector is a powerful one, Golden Eagle, and that is your new name." Then Red Hawk reached into his bag and took out a small mirror and held it before me so I could see my chest. The wounds were closed now, not healed but closed, but I could tell that something had pierced my chest and torn itself free.

The family was having dinner at the Greywolfs at 10:00 and, since it was 9:30, we all started walking to their place. "Will Matt and Luke be at dinner?" I asked.

"Oh yes, they will be there, but don't expect them to speak to each other. Red Hawk has told them they are not to speak, well, they can speak so long as they do not speak using words," Taequo answered.

"Why? Don't they need to talk things out?"

"Right now they might hurt each other with words or might hide their feelings. Either would be harmful to them, to you and to the whole world. But they will communicate, not in words which can lie or hide things easily, but with their bodies and spirits which cannot," Red Hawk said.

Matt

I had been out of it, really, since I had walked into Luke's house and been told he was missing. I took my escape from reality to new heights, sleeping all the time except to get up, go to the bathroom, drink water like I hadn't had any in days, and go back to bed. Most of the time I was in blessed oblivion and when I wasn't I was weeping because I had driven Luke to do something foolish, but I didn't know what. Foolish? Now I know it was, but I seemed to have no control over my thoughts and certainly not over my emotions. I didn't know how long I had been, for all practical purposes, unconscious but suddenly I recognized the smell of sweet grass and cedar. It brought back memories of the garden blessings and I could almost remember something else. It was just out of my consciousness. I felt peaceful, almost, then I felt a strong wind in my face, three times, and woke up. Well, I wasn't sure I was awake because I saw an ancient Indian standing over me. He held a bowl in one hand and told me to drink it. I felt

like Alice in Wonderland, but drank anyway. When I finished drinking the whole bowl of liquid, he ordered me to take a cold shower and dress.

When I was dressed, we went downstairs, I saw Michael was with him, and he told me I was not to see Luke and when I did see him, not to speak until he said it was ok. Kinda strange, but I never questioned anything he said.

When he and Michael left, Mom asked what I wanted to eat and I realized I was starved. "Anything and everything," I replied. When I finished eating, I asked Mom about Luke. "Is he safe? What's going on? I have been completely out of it."

Mom seemed hesitant. So I said, "Look, Mom, I know I have been an emotional wreck. All I know is that Luke is missing. I've got to know about him and I've got to know what I have done and what I must do. Luke is the most important person in the whole world to me. I need to know."

"Matt, what you say makes sense, but it's not easy to talk about. We have all been beside ourselves, completely helpless over the whole thing, but I guess you're right. You have to know." She then told me everything.

Well, it didn't make me feel very good. Luke, for the second time, had attempted to take his life because of me, of course, rationally, I knew that it had been his decision but I felt that I was, nonetheless, responsible. I was surprised that when she finished, I wasn't in tears again. Instead I just felt relieved that Luke was alive, and knew that I had to do everything in my power to restore our relationship and, so long as he was alive, that was a possibility. "Mom, I'm going for a drive. I need to do some thinking. But, before I go, could you make me a couple or three sandwiches in case I get hungry?"

Mom smiled and said, "Matt, you have eaten enough for two people, but I guess you have some catching up to do". She made three sandwiches, placed them with a cold soda in a bag and handed it to me. "Be careful, Matt," she said, kissed me on the cheek, and I left.

I wasn't sure where I was headed, but I wanted to be alone to think. I knew the falls were off limits then recalled Millie's accident and decided to drive to the river where she had skipped stones. I parked the Jeep and walked to the river bank, sat down and thought about what had happened between Luke and myself. For the first time it became clear to me that the past was the past and how utterly impossible it was to change it. Sure, I had been damn foolish, and, truth be known, a coward, by e-mailing Luke. I should have had sense enough to realize that telling him what happened would have waited until I could have at least talked to him on the phone and, in fact, would have waited until he returned. What was my big rush? Was I trying to prove how strong I was in having resisted Lucas? Maybe. Had I wanted to tell Luke so he would know he could trust me? Maybe. Try as I would, I could never come up with a good reason for having e-mailed him. And what difference would a reason make? I had done it and the results were terrible. But if I spent all my energy in trying to justify or explain why

I did what I did, nothing would change and there would be no energy to repair the damage. The past was past.

Then I remembered the old Indian, Red Hawk, Mom had told me, and wondered how he fit in the picture. I guessed I'd find out sooner or later. I did, finally, remember he was the medicine man who had helped Dad. No wonder he looked ancient, he was. But I realized that I was trying to puzzle out the future and that was almost as worthless as worrying about the past. I needed to focus on the present. Sometimes I really am my father's son, and I had one of those Greywolf moments. I started making a mental list of what I really knew. I knew I loved Luke Yonghon Tongmu Larsen with my total being. That I knew. I knew that, because of some serious blunders on both our parts, there was a break in our relationship. I now knew, from Mom, that I had almost lost him to suicide a second time.

As I thought about those things, I realized something I had sensed, almost, at times about Luke, but had never given serious thought. Luke, old cool Luke, was not the cool character he seemed to be. He was, in fact, far more emotional than I. "No, that's not quite right," I thought. "I am emotional and it shows. It is obvious. What you see is the way it is. Luke's emotions are deep, hidden. They are like a swift current running under smooth water. My emotions are like white water rapids." Having reached that conclusion, I said, "Matthew Sarang Hanun Pomul Greywolf, you are going to have to learn to pay attention to Luke in a whole new way. You are going to have to learn how to read beneath the smooth water surface to discover the rapid current underneath."

I guess all that thinking exhausted me, but I felt better as I just kinda turned off my rational thinking machine and put my brain in neutral and just enjoyed, actually enjoyed, the peace of the river as I sat, skipping stones on its smooth surface and munching on the sandwiches Mom had made for me.

It was twilight before I realized how late it was. I drove back to the house where Jens, David and the moms were preparing dinner. I grabbed an apple from the kitchen table as I asked if I could help. "I think we have it under control," Margaret said. "You seem to have made a remarkable recovery, Matt."

"I've started," I replied. "Guess it's that Indian medicine."

"Indian medicine for an Indian. Makes sense," she laughed.

I went to my room, lay down on the bed and ate my apple. I couldn't remember apples tasting so good. Sometime later, Mom came upstairs and said, "Matt, I think you need to know what's going on. I told you what had happened to Luke up to a point, but not all of it." My heart sank.

Earlier Mom had just said a man had found Luke on a bridge ready to jump and had brought him to Greywolf and left it there. She now told me the rest of the story, including Luke's condition and why Red Hawk had showed up. "How did he know to come? Did Dad call him?" I asked.

"I guess in one way, he did. Red Hawk just said his protector spirit, a gray wolf, told him to come. The man who rescued Luke showed up today as well.

They should be completing the sweat lodge about now. We're having dinner at 10:00. And, Matt, Luke will be here but you are not to speak to him, directly or indirectly, Red Hawk said, and Red Hawk seems to have things well in hand so I suggest you do as he says.

Mom had been gone only a few minutes when I heard new voices downstairs. I recognized Red Hawk's and Michael's and another strange voice as they went to the guest room. Red Hawk walked into my room only minutes later and said, "Matt, your brother was honored in a very powerful way today and needs a shirt, a very loose one if you have one. White, I think, would be best." As I handed Red Hawk a shirt, he said, "Go on down. We're having dinner in a few minutes and I bet you are hungry." I hadn't realized just how hungry I was until he mentioned it.

Luke

After my talk with Taequo, Al and Chris, and, by damn, it was a prayer meeting in that it addressed real issues in a meaningful way, I thought I had it all pretty much together. My nightmares made it clear it wasn't all together and, as soon as I was in the car with Greywolf, I knew it was far from all right. When I got home, I just lost it completely and, for all practical purposes, lost consciousness. When I began to return to the land of the living, the nightmares started and Margaret sedated me. That's all I really knew for I don't know how long.

Some time after, long after, I suspect, I got home, I thought I had really gone 'round the bend into cuckoo cloudland because I smelled the same thing Greywolf used when he blessed the garden, and then felt a strong wind hit me in the face three times. As if to confirm my departure from the real world, I opened my eyes to see an Indian, older than dirt, standing in front of me. He lifted my head and put a bowl of steaming liquid to my lips and ordered me to drink. I had no choice in the matter and, when I finished, had no choice but to take a cold shower and get dressed. When I was dressed, he and Michael went downstairs with me where the old Indian, he was real all right, very real, told Mom to feed me. After drinking a huge bowl of whatever the Indian had given me, I didn't see how I could be hungry but I was, and ate like a horse.

Michael and the old Indian, Michael introduced him as Red Hawk, left and I sat in the kitchen, eating and saying nothing until I looked up and saw the pain in Mom's face. "Mom, I'm sorry. I am so sorry I have caused you and Dad and everyone so much hurt, pain and anxiety. I really am. I promise I will never, ever, do the stupid suicide thing again, but when I saw how I had messed up a perfectly wonderful life and when I realized that I had worked hard to hurt Matt, and I did, I couldn't see how he would ever speak to me again and, Mom, I love Matt so much. I mean life without Matt is not living."

"Luke, I think you are mistaken. I don't mean about how barren your life would be without Matt but, even without Matt, as hard as it is for you to see, life would be worth living. But where I think you are really mistaken is about Matt. I think he loves you every bit as much as you love him, and feels about life without

you the way you feel about life without him. Don't let stubborn pride and self-hate destroy life for either of you."

"Mom, you don't understand. You don't know what I did." I then told Mom the whole story, holding back nothing except the graphic details. When I finished, I realized I was still dry-eyed, which surprised me no end. I wasn't crying on the outside, but inside I felt so much pain I couldn't see why I didn't just die.

"Luke, even without the story, I knew you had created a real mess for yourself and all of us. But, and that's a big but, Luke, you're still alive and still have a life to live. The going's gonna be tough, now and at times in the future, that's just the way life is, but there is only one question you need to answer right now, 'Is Matt worth the struggle? Is he worth fighting for?' I don't need to know your answer, but you do."

We sat silent for a while and then I said, "Mom, I need to do some really clear thinking. I'm going to the falls for a while."

"Sorry, Luke, but that's out of the question. Red Hawk is having a sweat lodge there tonight and is preparing for it."

"What's that all about?" Mom then told me all she knew about it and finished by saying, "Luke, I don't understand it all, but it has something to do with you and Matt. Can you find someplace else?"

"Sure, don't worry."

"Easier said than done, I'm afraid, but be back by 9:30. We're having dinner at the Greywolfs'."

"Matt will be there?"

"Of course."

"Then I can't go, Mom. Maybe sometime I can face Matt, but not yet."

"Don't think you have a choice. Red Hawk has ordered it and I don't think you have the option of not going. I've been instructed to tell you to be there, but you are not to speak to Matt. Red Hawk assured me you were free to go anywhere you pleased, but those were his instructions about dinner. Just be back here by 9:30."

"Ok, I guess I can handle it, especially if I have no choice and after Red Hawk ordering me around this afternoon, I think you're right. I guess I don't have a wide range of choices. I'll see you about 9:30."

I got in the truck and started driving aimlessly, and suddenly knew where I needed to be. I drove into town to St. Mary's, went inside and just sat. I guess I was thinking, but I wasn't consciously doing anything but sitting and feeling more at peace than I had for a week. I sat in the silent, empty church until the sexton came to close it for the night. It was only 6:00 and I didn't want to go home yet so I started driving again. As I passed the hospitality house, I saw my sculpture and knew exactly where I needed to be. I headed straight for Uncle Michael's and Mr. Stephenson's place.

When I rang the bell, Mr. Stephenson came to the door. "Luke, what a surprise. Come in." When we got inside, he said, "Michael's at an exhibition in Denver and is not due back until tonight. I'm leaving to pick him up about 9:30. Want to go along?"

"I can't."

"What's up? I just got back this afternoon from being artist-in-residence at a camp in New England. I thought you were to be in Sarasota another week. What are you doing here?"

"It's a long story, Mr. Stephenson..."

"Luke, that reminds me of something I intended to say some time ago. I am now a part of the family and you are no longer a high school student, so why don't we drop the Mr. Stephenson bit? I'm John."

"John... that sounds strange," I said, and managed a weak smile. "John, it's a long, sad story I'm afraid and, if you've got something cold to drink, I'd like to talk about it. Down by the river, maybe?"

"Sure. No sodas, but name your juice."

"Any is fine."

John disappeared into the kitchen and came back with a pitcher of cranberry juice and two glasses of ice. I took the glasses and we walked to the gazebo by the river. We sat in silence until I sighed and started telling my story the second time today. I had held nothing back from Mom except the graphic details, but the version I told John held nothing back, graphic details included.

When I finished, John put his arm around me and hugged me to himself. "Luke, I am sorry, so very, very sorry, but I must tell you, I was afraid of what might happen this summer. I know you feel otherwise, but what happened is not nearly as bad as I feared. I feared worse. You are young, you are handsome, you are trusting and, to be honest, you are innocent. The horrible thing about those characteristics you have is that they are so desirable in a young man. You are also gay and have lived a sheltered life, I know you have witnessed, and been part of, things which have hurt you and others deeply, but you have lived a sheltered life. You have lived all your life in a small town surrounded by people who have loved and cared for you. How could you know that the McBrides of this world come in many shapes and kinds? Michael and I have often discussed ways in which you and Matt might be prepared for what we dreaded, but knew would happen sooner or later. We finally gave up, knowing we could not prepare you for the unknown."

"I am especially sorry that a teacher betrayed your trust. Teachers have a special place in the lives of their students, if they are good teachers. Students trust teachers for the most part. To have that trust betrayed hurts deeply. I am even more distressed that the teacher is gay. Gay teachers live life on the edge. There are always those who see all gays as predators and, believing such, see any such episode with a gay teacher as proof that their sons should never have a

gay man as a teacher. The fact that most student-teacher sexual adventures are between heterosexual males and girls doesn't change that. But, Luke, it's over. Now you must be done with it. It is a major event in your growing up, to be sure, painful, but no real damage done."

"Yes, that's over and done with and, in my heart of hearts, I know that what I did with Rich was partly because I was pretty drunk, and I know that is no excuse, but that's not my concern, my real concern. I told you I tried to drown myself because I had been unfaithful to Matt. This afternoon I sat for hours in St. Mary's and I thought I wasn't thinking, but I must have been. Listening to you talk I realized, as I think I almost realized earlier, that it wasn't my betrayal of Matt that drove me to the bridge railing. It was that I did all I did that night to hurt Matt, to intentionally hurt him. I wanted revenge and then found out that I had nothing to revenge. My real betrayal was betraying Matt's trust and love for me and for wanting revenge. It was not in allowing Rich to take my dick into his mouth. For that I could forgive myself. But for wanting revenge, for wanting to hurt Matt intentionally, I cannot forgive myself and certainly cannot ask Matt to forgive me and, if I did, I don't think he could."

"Luke, there has never been any question in my mind that your and Matt's love for each other goes far beyond what most people your age are capable of. The love you two have for each other is remarkable. Trust, if not yourself or Matt, then your love for him and his for you. Trust that. Listen to that. Luke, trust your love and Matt's love."

We sat silent for a long time. What John had said made sense. I knew it did, but I still found it hard to even think about forgiving myself. Then, I suspect, we both knew that we had talked enough about my problem. John asked, "Luke, tell me about your work this summer".

I started telling John about what I had done, the two close friends I had made and how I had enjoyed it, then the reason I left came rushing back to me. It was only then I realized the sun had set. I looked at my watch and discovered it was 9:00. "I've got to go. We're having dinner at the Greywolfs'. Matt will be there and I don't know how I can face him, but it seems I have no choice."

"Trust your love, Luke," John said as he hugged me. "You have a wonderful life ahead of you with a wonderful partner. Don't let this episode spoil it. Trust your love."

Michael

When we got to the Greywolfs', Greywolf sent Red Hawk, Taequo and me upstairs to get dressed. Mom had brought me a pair of neatly creased jeans, I never wore creased jeans!, and a shirt. When we got to the guest room and started dressing, I saw that Red Hawk and Taequo also had sharply creased jeans. Both had ribbon shirts, Red Hawk's was black with ribbons the colors of the rainbow. When I looked at it, I started to ask a question but, before I could, Red Hawk laughed and said, "No, I'm not gay. I told you I liked women too much

to be a monk and too much to be gay. Our people, the Lakota, are called the rainbow people."

Taequo wore a black shirt with the red ribbons of a warrior. I started to pull on the knit shirt Mom had brought, when Taequo said, "Think you'll want a loose shirt, not that knit one".

When he said that, I remembered my chest and smiled, "Think you're right. I'll get one from Matt."

"No, I'll do that," Red Hawk said. He came back with a white regular shirt, which fortunately, was very loose.

When we were dressed, we went downstairs. The family was in the dining room, standing behind their chairs. Mary Kathryn was standing behind one of four chairs at one end of the table. Greywolf had gone to the opposite end of the table and stood behind a chair, beside Yong Jin. Red Hawk motioned for me to sit to Mary Kathryn's right and Taequo to her left. He took the chair to my right. Luke was to the side of the table to Taequo's left and Matt at the opposite side, to Red Hawk's right. Gabrielle and Jens were to sit beside Luke, and Margaret and David beside Matt. When we were all in place, Greywolf said, "My house is deeply honored by the presence of a great warrior and respected elder, Red Hawk. It is also honored by the presence of another great warrior, Taequo. We, the entire family, are honored by your presence. All we have is yours."

Red Hawk spoke slowly, softly, "Today, as any day, was a good day for dying, but the bravery of one among us made it a greater day for living. Let us thank the Great Spirit for the day and for the bravery of Michael Golden Eagle." Everyone was silent and then Red Hawk said, "Hetch etu. I know we are ready to eat. It has been a long day but, before we eat, we need to honor a warrior among us. Golden Eagle, remove your shirt."

I didn't know what was going on, but I did as I was told. When Mom and Mary Kathryn saw my chest, they both gasped. Maybe Gabrielle and Yong Jin did too, I couldn't tell. While I stood bare chested, Red Hawk said, "Michael Golden Eagle, tell your family what happened in the sweat lodge today". I repeated what I had told the three Indians earlier.

"What do you know of the sun dance?" Taequo asked as he looked around the table, then looked at Mary Kathryn as if expecting her to answer.

"Only what Greywolf has told all of us. I mean, I saw 'A Man Called Horse' and Greywolf explained that maybe part of that was correct, but not for the Lakota. The sun dance is an offering a warrior makes to Buffalo Calf Maiden. Women go through pain and shed blood in childbirth and warriors do the sun dance because they do not. Warriors who wish are pierced in the chest and dance tied to the sun dance tree, then dance until the piercings tear loose. One who has been pierced is honored for his bravery and endurance. That's about all I know," Mary Kathryn said.

"I had never known anyone to be pierced who did not sun dance," Red Hawk said. "But I know one now. In the sweat lodge, don't ask me how, I can't

explain mysteries, just appreciate them, Michael was pierced as a sign of his endurance and bravery on behalf of Matt and Luke. He also was defended by his guardian spirit, which came to him as if he were on a vision quest, a great golden eagle. Greywolf and I saw it. He now has a new name to add to the one he has honored in the past. He is Golden Eagle."

As Red Hawk spoke, Taequo opened a package he had gotten from somewhere. "Michael Golden Eagle, Red Hawk's gray wolf plays tricks on the old Indian, but my coyote spirit is much worse. I wasn't sure I'd need it when he told me to bring you a ribbon shirt, but he wasn't tricking me this time. I would be honored if you would accept this as a token of your new name, Warrior." He handed me a black ribbon shirt with ribbons all shades of a rich golden yellow. It was beautiful. I proudly pulled it over my head and then thanked Taequo and Red Hawk for what they had done for me.

"Well, enough of this high pressure stuff. Let's eat," Red Hawk said. And we did.

There was a lot of talk and questions during the meal and it was very strange not to hear Luke and Matt's voices. Of course they were free to talk, just not to each other, but they were too busy trying to look at the other, without the other knowing it, to talk. Their body language, the glances they gave each other when their eyes happened to meet, their every movement spoke of their pain, their feeling the other's pain, and of their love. There was no doubt about that. In a strange way I knew Red Hawk had been right. By forbidding their talking, they had been forced to use communication that was difficult to fake and that allowed no shortcuts. He was some wise Indian.

When the meal was ending, Red Hawk said, "Ok, about tomorrow. We will rise in time to greet the sun, all are welcome to join Taequo, Greywolf, Golden Eagle, Mary Kathryn, Matt, Luke and myself. Afterward we all, you too Taequo, won't hurt you, go to Mass. I ask all of you to focus on the times that forgiveness and absolution are central, not confession. Think we have done that already, maybe too much. Confession is good for the soul to a point, then it becomes soul destroying, spirit killing. After church, we all eat. Then Taequo, Greywolf and I teach Golden Eagle the sweat lodge ceremony. Mary Kathryn, you will join us."

"Luke and Matt..." both looked up at Red Hawk, "you are to spend the afternoon together. It would be good for you to find a spot at the falls because that is sacred ground. For at least an hour, you are not to speak to each other in words. After that you may speak, but only on the condition that you speak one at a time. Each will have a time to say whatever he wants to say before the other speaks. The old Indian smiled and said, "I know that you two have in the past sat, knees touching and holding hands. That would be good when you start speaking. But nothing more, absolutely nothing more. There is a very bad and very powerful spirit about who lost a battle today, but has not given up the war. And while I am sure you two think this is about you and your relationship, it is not. Well, it is of course, but much more is involved. Your relationship is just a way the bad spirit has been able to do its dirty work. Much more than you two is

involved here. You will eat after church, then fast until the sweat lodge Monday is over. Michael Golden Eagle, when has your spirit called for the sweat lodge?"

I certainly didn't expect to be asked that question. I had assumed it would be at twilight as had ours had been, I think Red Hawk had even said that earlier, so I surprised myself when I answered without hesitation, "Two hours before sunrise".

"That is a good time, then it will truly be a new day," Taequo said. "We will start the fire tomorrow night."

Red Hawk nodded and said, "I fear this will be a major endurance and fight with the bad spirit. Golden Eagle will do the ceremony so Taequo and I will be free to join in the battle if we are needed. Greywolf will be fire keeper and, David, your son will be honored if you would be the door keeper for his first time as medicine man for a sweat." Dad beamed and nodded. "Jens, Gabrielle, you may join if you like, but I must warn you, it could be pretty frightening. You would, I think, do better in the way you know. St. Mary's will be open; go there and pray. You know that way and mine would just seem strange. You need to focus your spirit, not wonder about ceremonies. Yong Jin and Margaret cannot, Yong Jin is on her moon and others disagree, but I fear a sweat as hot as this one might endanger you or your child, Margaret. I guess that means you two will be responsible for breakfast, a big one, as this old Indian expects to be very hungry about an hour or two after sunrise."

"We have seen the power of the bad spirit to destroy, both in the everyday world of Matt and Luke and in the sweat lodge. Matt, Luke, do not give it another chance by dropping your guard. Michael, Mary Kathryn, you know what you must do and not do. Now this old Indian is going to sleep." Before anyone could say anything, Red Hawk had gotten up, walked to the living room, curled up on the floor and was sound asleep.

Everyone started clearing the table, when Taequo leaned over and said to me, "Michael Golden Eagle, you have earned a few minutes with your wild woman. I'll do your part and the porch light will, I promise, stay off. Just keep it relatively pure," he laughed.

Mary Kathryn and I walked to the front porch and when I took her into my arms it felt so natural, so wonderful, so, well, it was different. Never before had it really felt like she was made just for my arms, if you know what I mean. I kissed her ever so gently and, when we broke the kiss, she said, "Michael Golden Eagle, a beautiful name for a beautiful human being. I am so proud of you and I love you so much."

I didn't say anything, just kissed her again, this time not so gently and with passion, just as Jens, Luke and Gabrielle walked out of the house. "Warrior, I'm taking your soul mate home. Tomorrow's sunrise will be early," Jens laughed.

"I'm a warrior," I laughed, "I will walk her home safely."

"Half an hour max," Jens said, "Goodnight."

I took Mary Kathryn in my arms again and gave her another kiss, which became passionate big time. She broke it and said, "Purity, warrior, purity. And if you keep that up, there are going to be stains proving you crossed the line." Wild woman was calling a halt again! "Michael, you are special and I don't mean just because you are mine, and you had damn well better be, but in some way I don't understand, but know, from the bottom of my heart, you are special. And you know something? I think we are a terrific team in this medicine man and priest whatever thing." I was thunderstruck!

Margaret

After dinner, I sat and talked to Taequo about what had happened to the boys, all three. The mother in me overcame the doctor easily and I asked him first about what had happened to Michael. After dinner I had examined his wounds and found them closed and clean. He would have scars, of course. "His chest is beginning to look like a battle field," I said to Taequo and he laughed and said it was.

"The attack which almost killed him was, in a real sense, a battle. There is a lot in this world I don't understand. Red Hawk is a wise old medicine man, I'm pretty good at times and things happen, but even he can't explain what is going on here. What we do know is that the three boys are connected in a way, which makes them very powerful. Their task on this earth is to fight for justice, truth and beauty, in three very different ways, but together in a very complete way. No-good spirits Red Hawk called them." Taequo laughed, "You should hear what he calls them when he is not among polite company. Maybe Lakota doesn't have swear words, but Red Hawk does very well, thank you. No-good spirits see great enemies in the three, but if they can destroy the link among the three, their power will be less than useless. Sounds like mumbo jumbo, but that's the best I can do. Strange, though, neither Red Hawk nor I were prepared for Michael's power. He was selected and given power by Matt without, I suspect, even Matt's realizing it. I'm not Lakota and the sun dance is not part of my heritage, but I know the place it holds among the Lakota and when Red Hawk saw Michael receive his spirit guide without a quest, he was thunderstruck. But when he saw the piercing, I though he was going to fall down and worship Michael. It's hard to describe to someone who doesn't know the culture and religion, and even more so to someone who deals in facts and charts," Taequo laughed.

"Look, I witnessed Michael's healing and I don't even try to understand it but I know it happened. He is a strange one, my son, but he is also so damn normal."

"It's a strange world when normal people are strange," Taequo said.

"Ok, that's still a mystery, but what about the other two. What happened to them? I was ready to put them in the hospital and force feed them, and here they are, as well as can be expected of two people who are busy being disgusted with themselves."

"To tell you the truth, I know nothing about Indian medicine beyond calling on it when I get sick. I do know that the chanting and incense has a definite soothing effect, and the liquid Red Hawk brewed up had herbs to bring calmness and, with a clear or clearer head, herbs to make you hungry, and also what Red Hawk calls a Lakota energy bar. It was made up by Lakota women to give to hunters and warriors who were going to be away for days without opportunity to prepare food. A healthy man can live on it for weeks and never stop. Usually it's a solid, but Red Hawk had it boiled into his other concoction." Taequo laughed, "And Red Hawk used the Lakota force feeding technique. You hold a bowl of hot liquid to someone's lips and say drink. If the only other option is to have boiling Indian medicine poured over your special private parts, believe me, you drink! Right now they are in good shape. Yong Jin and Gabrielle were given teas for the boys before they left. The two will sleep well and naturally tonight. I think we all will."

I thanked Taequo and called David and Michael and we went home. When we got home, I hugged Michael to me and said, "Son, I am honored more than I can ever tell you because you are my son".

Michael looked at me and said, "I am equally honored, Mom". My heart was full and running over.

Yong Jin

Greywolf called me as the predawn light filled the sky. He was already up and dressed, in his Lakota clothes. I dressed quickly while he went up for Matt. When the two came down, I was surprised at how well Matt looked. "Good morning, Mom," he said and kissed me on the cheek. The three of us walked, hand in hand, to the falls. As we left the house, I could see the Andrews and Larsens leaving their places, headed for the falls.

When we reached the falls, Red Hawk and Taequo were atop Lookout Rock, their figures silhouetted against the eastern sky. The two were waving burning braids of sweet grass as first one, then the other, chanted. When we reached the rock, Greywolf joined in the chants of Red Hawk and it was clear those of Taequo were in a very different language. As the sun broke loose from the horizon, the three men, and soon all of us, stood, our arms upraised, to greet the new day. It was, for me, a day filled with new hope for those I loved, not just the boys, all three, but the whole family.

Part Fifty-three

Matt

I was very anxious about the family dinner with Luke present. I didn't know what to expect and would never have suspected what actually happened. First there was Michael's chest when he was told to remove his shirt. Just above each nipple there was a wound that, while closed, was obviously recent. Dad had told me about the sun dance and I could see that the wounds on Michael's chest could have been from being pierced at a sun dance, but I was amazed when Red Hawk and Taequo told us what had happened. The statement that more than the relationship was involved in what was going on, I would follow those instructions.

After dinner, people just sorta sat around talking. I looked at Luke and saw he was looking at me. I smiled and, as I did, he pushed Red Hawk's instructions a bit when he mouthed, but did not speak, the words, "I love you". My heart skipped a beat and I smiled big time and mouthed back, "I love you too". Luke then got up and walked out the door after telling his mom and dad he was walking home. When he left, Taequo excused himself and said he was going to sleep at the falls. Mom gave him a sleeping bag and he was leaving when Red Hawk stirred, raised up and said, "I'm going with you". When Mom offered him a sleeping bag, he told her he didn't need it and followed Taequo out of the door.

Michael and Mary Kathryn left as soon as dinner was over and I went upstairs to my room.

I had been upstairs for a while when both Mom and Dad came up. That was unusual, but very welcome. Dad sat on the bed with me and Mom sat on my desk chair. They were barely seated when I asked, "Dad, can you tell me what is going on?"

"Matt, I am a scientist and I find it difficult to accept what can't be demonstrated in the lab. Nevertheless, I am also Lakota and know that much of what I have seen and experienced cannot be demonstrated or explained in scientific terms. It is mysterious and will remain so. Does that mean one world is real and another unreal? I think not. I think it is all one world, there is just much of it we have forgotten about or pretend isn't there. There are places, which, for whatever reason, are sacred, where there seems to be some kind of power node. The falls is one of them. I have known that from the first time I saw them. The rest of the family did too, it's just that our language and sense of the power is different. They have always seen the falls as a place of healing and restoration which is just another way to say they are a sacred place."

"There are also people who seem to have special power. Maybe everyone has the potential and some develop it and others do not. I don't know. I do know that in my Lakota heritage there have always been medicine men, powerful men, who seem to live with one foot in the ordinary world and the other foot in a mysterious world that most of us cannot see and do not understand. Red Hawk and Taequo are both such, men with the power to struggle with the bad things in

that mysterious world and who are agents of the good things in this world. Obviously, Michael is also. It is very strange to me that Michael, who actually knows very little of the Lakota tradition and culture, has been chosen to be a medicine man. Red Hawk thinks both he and Luke received power from you. Red Hawk says your Korean heritage is responsible. He tells me that the blending of two shamanistic forces is almost beyond his comprehension."

"Add to that mix, and if your mind can begin to grasp it, the fact that the power of the three of you is in some way linked. Together in harmony you are unbelievably powerful but, without the link, your power becomes weak and capable of great harm, you might even say evil. That's why this weekend is important. Sure, we all love you and Luke and the break in your relationship is painful to all of us, but that break involves more than a lovers' quarrel. There is more, much more involved."

Before I drifted off to sleep, I thought, "All I really wanted was a simple life for me and Luke. Just a simple life of loving Luke and being loved by him."

Somewhere in the back of my mind a small voice said, "Tough tittie!".

Luke

After my talk with John, I felt much better but I was still in no shape to face Matt and I knew it, but I guess in-shape or not, I was about to do so. When we arrived at the Greywolfs', Matt was nowhere to be seen but came down shortly. When he did, we avoided looking at each other, although I wanted to look at him. I wanted to see my Dark Angel and tell him how sorry I was, and what I had really done, and beg his forgiveness, but it was forbidden.

Dinner started with a very dramatic twist when Red Hawk had Michael reveal his piercing. I knew a little bit of what this was about, but not a great deal. I did realize, again, Michael had suffered in an effort to save me, from what I wasn't sure. While I didn't know what was really going on, I was in awe at all Red Hawk and Taequo said, and at the presentation of the shirt. I knew something very important and special was happening.

Shortly after we started eating, I was looking at Matt when he looked up. As our eyes met, we both gave the other a weak smile and quickly glanced away. Later when our eyes met, we both looked long and deep into the windows of the soul of the one we loved. As I looked into his eyes, there was no doubt that Matt loved me and I knew he also saw my love for him in my eyes. Now we just had to get the past behind us.

As soon as possible after dinner, I left and walked home alone. The moon was just waning from the full and the night was very bright. As I walked, I tried to think of the importance of what I had seen and heard, but my heart and mind were filled with Matt. My Sarang Hanun Pomul had looked at me with pure love in his eyes, nothing but love. In the night I felt Matt's love surrounding me, protecting me, and I was closer to being happy than I had been since I read only part of that damned letter. In fact, I was happy. Oh, there were still nagging doubts and I knew that Matt and I had to really repair our relationship, but it was

going to happen. I laughed when I remembered the conditions under which Red Hawk said we were to spend Sunday afternoon. We had been separated for five weeks and had to make up after a serious misunderstanding and betrayal of our promise, but I knew that wise old Indian was aware we'd by-pass everything and go gangbusters for sex. After all, he had been eighteen once, "but it was just after dirt was invented," I laughed to myself. But he knew, he knew. So he gave very strict ground rules.

When I got home, I undressed and slipped into bed and fell asleep without drugs, and slept without nightmares.

Sunday morning Mom woke me before dawn and she, Dad, Mary Kathryn and I walked to the falls. All of the Family arrived about the same time and joined Red Hawk and Taequo atop Lookout Rock. Soon Greywolf, Taequo and Red Hawk were chanting in languages I didn't know but, somehow or other, understood. I mean I didn't understand the words, but the spirit was very clear, they were greeting the new day. As the sun appeared, all of us stood with our arms upraised as each greeted the new day in his own way. From the core of my being, I knew it was a new day in more ways than one. When we finished, Red Hawk turned to me and Matt, we were standing side by side, and said, "You two seem to be doing very well. You are on the road to healing. After church, you will spend time together. As I told you last night, speaking without words then you may speak to each other, but only on the condition that one speaks and the other listens. You know the boundaries. I will speak with you at sundown. Meet me here."

When he finished, the three families went home to prepare for church.

When I walked into St. Mary's, I was surprised to see Michael, Taequo and Red Hawk dressed in their ribbon shirts. Needless to say, I wasn't the only one surprised. The three created quite a stir. It was strange, as well, to see Matt sitting with his Mom and Dad and not at the organ. When Millie started the prelude, I could understand why Matt was so good. Millie hadn't lost her touch at all.

I don't know what Fr. Tom knew about what was going on but, whether he knew everything or nothing, he couldn't have done better. The Gospel appointed for the day was "Love your neighbor as yourself" and the story of the Good Samaritan. Both parts really hit home because the first part, neighbor love, took a different tack from what I expected, because Fr. Tom talked about the necessity of loving yourself. I had always been told that was wrong and conceited, but it made sense. I know, because I was still not loving myself and it sure was playing hell with loving Matt and everyone else. Then he talked about doing for those you might not really like and just doing for others in general. I guess I suddenly saw whatever it was Matt, Michael and I were involved in meant that we were, somehow or other, to care for others.

As we were leaving church, I told Matt I would come by about 1:00 and we would spend the afternoon together as Red Hawk had said. He smiled and said,

"I can remember when you didn't have to be told to spend time with me!" and laughed.

Since there had been a family dinner the night before and there would be a family breakfast Monday, there was no usual Sunday dinner. I was kinda relieved. When we got home, we had dinner and actually talked about the sermon, something we seldom did. I was very interested in Mary Kathryn's comments. She didn't have to say that she had a change of heart about being a priest's wife. She just talked about how much being a part of the ceremony Saturday had meant to her and how she felt that she and Michael were a team. "I'm not sure the name of the team or the game we're in, but it's important and I find it exciting. And when I am involved, I forget about Mary Kathryn. No, I feel very much Mary Kathryn and not the selfish little snit I am too often." Amazing.

Matt

Sometime in the night, I woke up and saw the bright moonlight pouring through my window. I started just to stay in bed, I was wide awake, but then decided to get up. I pulled on shorts and a shirt and climbed down the trellis. I wasn't sure where I was headed, but the moonlight was too good to waste. I didn't want to go to the falls where Red Hawk and Taequo were sleeping and I didn't think it wise to go to Luke's. Finally, I walked down the road toward Michael's. When I reached his place, I walked to the side of the house below his room and tossed small stones at his window until he finally heard me. He stuck his head out of his window, waved, and soon came down.

"I don't know why I am here," I said, "but I didn't want to waste the moonlight. Care to go for a walk?" Michael nodded and we started walking down the road, away from the families' homes. "Michael, can you tell me what is going on?"

"Matt, I'm not sure. All I really know is that strange things happened in the sweat lodge and, somehow or other, I am to help you and Luke heal your relationship. Red Hawk says you and Luke saved my life, now I am to save yours. I didn't think he meant it literally but, after I thought about Luke's second suicide attempt, I'm not sure. It's all very weird, but I have a very strange feeling that we are part of something that is important. Mary Kathryn feels the same way. What a change in a woman! I loved her to death before, but I am really in love with the new Mary Kathryn. She is so grown-up and powerful. Matt, I feel that you, Luke and I are linked in some way and that Mary Kathryn and I are a team. I mean, we are really together and I love it. I feel like a part of me that was missing is in place. Do you know what I mean?"

"I think so. It's how I felt when Luke and I had sex the first time. I felt we made each other whole."

"I guess I got cheated on that score," Michael laughed. "But the time will come!"

We walked in the moonlight for another half hour or so, just generally talking about our Larsens and then what next year would be like when the four of

us would be separated. We had turned around and, when we reached his house, Michael said, "Matt, I have great hopes for the sweat Monday morning, but I am also frightened about what might happen. It's some experience." We said goodnight and went our separate ways. When I was in bed again, I wondered just what might happen in the lodge.

Sunday morning, the ceremony greeting the new day was very moving. I felt with all my heart I was truly greeting a new day with new hopes. I came away from St. Mary's with much the same feeling. For the first time in ages I not only listened to the sermon, but felt that Fr. Tom had directed it all to me. I was still thinking about it at 1:00 when Luke walked in.

It was all I could do not to grab him and smother him with kisses. He was so beautiful, so handsome, so Luke, and I knew I loved him more every day I lived. He just smiled and said, "Sarang Hanun Pomul, we have a date".

We walked, hand in hand, to the falls. Red Hawk and Taequo were there gathering wood for the fire which would be started tonight in order that the stones for the sweat would be ready. When we walked up, Taequo said, "Seems you two are getting along pretty well. Michael will be here shortly so we can teach him the ceremony. Red Hawk and I walked down the river and found a spot where the willows hang over the river on one side and make a very private place on the bank. It's a beautiful spot, all covered with moss. Red Hawk says it is also a power place. Maybe you two would like to go there."

Luke had a wicked grin on his face when he said, "We know it well. It's a great place for making love."

"Well, remember what you are to do and what you are not to do and eating and love making are at the head of the 'don't do' list," Red Hawk laughed. "At least until after the sweat."

Luke and I left Red Hawk and Taequo and walked to the spot where we had made such beautiful love. As we walked through the willow branches to the special place, Luke became very quiet and still. Finally he said, "It seems so long ago and far away, Matt". I knew what he meant.

We sat down on the mossy bank "Indian" style, our knees touching and holding hands, just looking into each other's eyes for the longest time. Then I said, "Luke, I'd like to speak first, if that's ok". Luke nodded. "Before I get into anything else, I want to tell you what I think I discovered yesterday." I told Luke about going to the river and what I thought I had discovered about him. "That explains a great deal of what happened when you read part of my e-mail. I guess I thought you'd just be cool Luke and let it go, not realizing that you wouldn't read it all. But, even at that, I should have known better. I should have known that you feel things much deeper than I thought. I haven't been paying attention to you and your emotions the way I should and for that I am sorry." I talked at length about what I felt I had learned at Sewanee, I mean about relationships and the proper place of sex in our lives. "Luke, I never want us to reach the point where what we are about is sex. Don't get me wrong, Babe, sex is a part of it or will be

when we get things squared away." I talked a while longer, but I suspect said very little. I concluded by saying, "Luke, I feel responsible for what happened to you. I never should have taken the impersonal e-mail route to tell you things which are important. Forgive me for that, please." I then fell silent.

"Matt, you have done nothing to forgive, but if you in any way feel responsible for my being a fool then, please, accept my forgiveness." Luke was silent and then gave a great sigh and started talking. He told me, in great detail, all that had happened. "Matt, I did two things for which I am so ashamed. First, I didn't trust you. I know that if there cannot be trust between us, we may as well break up now. But that's not what made me do what I did. I intentionally set out to hurt you, to hurt you as deeply as I could. I was seeking revenge for what I thought you had done. I set out to do what we pledged we would never do, intentionally hurt the other. Then when I realized you had done nothing and I had wanted to hurt you, all I saw was a life without you and, while I promise I will never attempt to take my life again, life, my life, would not be worth living without you. I thought I had lost you forever because of what I had done and that was more than I could bear."

After Luke had finished, we talked, and I mean really talked, about our love and our lives, each listening intently while the other spoke, then speaking while the other listened. Finally, because we both knew where it would end unless we were careful, we stretched out on the moss, holding hands and looking into each other's eyes, saying nothing. Then it was time to go and I said, "Yonghon Tongmu, I think our relationship is healed and we are in better shape than we were before all this mess happened".

"I think maybe you are right. I am sure our relationship is deeper, our love is deeper," Luke said, "but I have an uneasy feeling. It's as if the whole pile of shit is covered up but still there maybe. I don't feel that we're finished. I guess I feel there should be some way we could really know we have put the past behind us. If we had not been told otherwise, I think I would make mad passionate love to you and would know it's done and over with. I don't know."

"I guess, if I really looked, I'd see the same thing," I said, "but maybe that's what the sweat's about. God, Luke, I want to kiss you so bad I could die."

"So do I," Luke said, "but..."

"Yes, but..." As I spoke, I heard Red Hawk call from the falls. Luke and I got up and walked back up the river where we sat and listened as Red Hawk talked about the sweat. I had heard most of it from Dad several times, but this was different. This was not just telling us about the Lakota practice, but telling us about ourselves.

While Red Hawk talked to us, Taequo had started the fire and kept adding fuel to it. By the time Red Hawk had finished, there was a bed of red coals ready for the stones which Luke and I helped place in the fire pit. It was only then that I saw Michael and Mary Kathryn sitting atop Lookout Rock, watching the sunset. "Red Hawk, would it be ok for Luke and me to join Michael and Mary Kathryn?"

"Sure. Would be good. Would also be good if you slept here tonight, apart. Michael, Mary Kathryn, Taequo and I will sleep here. Maybe Greywolf as well. There are blankets here already."

Luke and I joined the two on Lookout Rock and sat, holding hands, as the sunset grew more and more beautiful. When it was finally dark, the four of us walked down the path to the bottom of the falls where we all rolled ourselves in blankets and the falls' lullaby soon sang us to sleep.

Luke

I thought I was dreaming when I saw a dark shadow bending over me in the faint light from the fire pit. I thought I saw a blond Indian. It had to be a dream. Then I realized it was Michael. It was dark except for the glow from the fire pit and it took my eyes a long time to adjust so I could see anything beyond Michael leaning over me. When I sat up, he said, "Luke, Matt,", I looked over and saw Matt was also sitting up, but not fully awake, "it's time to wash in the river before we start the sweat". I realized that the reason I thought he was a blond Indian was because he was dressed as a Lakota warrior. I crawled out of the blanket and stood, naked in the darkness. Matt did the same. We followed Michael to the falls' basin where Michael undressed. Taequo, Red Hawk and Greywolf had been joined by David and Mary Kathryn at the water's edge. All, I could see, even in the darkness, were naked.

Red Hawk led the way as he dived into the water. The river by this time was warm on a sunny day, but the water was pretty chilly on an early summer's morning. We swam for a short time and Mary Kathryn got out of the water, dried herself and got dressed, as did David and Greywolf. Michael was drying himself when he said, "No need to get dressed. For that matter, there's no real reason to dry yourselves, but I'm chilly. Your choice." Both Matt and I took a towel from Greywolf and rubbed ourselves vigorously, as much to get warm as to get dry.

As we dried ourselves, Matt and I watched as Mary Kathryn did the opening ceremony for the sweat lodge. As soon as it was finished, she nodded to Michael and left. Michael took the peace pipe from its stand, made the offering of the pipe and then, as David held the flap open, led us into the lodge.

As soon as we were inside, David closed the flap and while I thought it had been dark outside, I don't think I had ever known darkness like that inside the lodge, except when I was in the hospital, in a coma. I felt the lodge growing smaller and darker and thought about leaving. Red Hawk said some people couldn't tolerate the darkness and confinement of the sweat lodge and if it was too much, we should just leave. But I was determined not to fail this time, even though I felt like running.

After we had sat for what seemed like hours, Michael struck the lodge flap with a short stick. David opened it and Michael said, "Bring in the stones". Greywolf came to the opening with a huge stone, red hot. It lit up the inside of the lodge. Michael greeted the stone as "Friend" and Greywolf placed it in the pit. He then brought three more large glowing stones. As they lay in the pit, I could see

all sorts of images dancing on their surface. All were men, or women, wearing animal masks. Each seemed to have some connection to me, but I was not sure what. As I puzzled over that, Michael reminded us of the purpose of the first endurance, the endurance of the west, calling for spirit guides. As he finished, he poured four dippers of water on the glowing stones and the lodge was soon filled with steam and becoming very warm.

Michael started chanting prayers to the Great Spirit and all the spirit guides, including our relatives who were now spirits. When he finished, he asked that we introduce ourselves and express our appreciation for being present. As all the others, I introduced myself, "Oh spirits that come among us within this womb of our Mother, I am Luke and I am pleased to be here. Hetch etu." When I had finished, I sensed a presence in the lodge with me, I mean a new presence, but I couldn't identify it, try as hard as I could. The heat and the darkness of the lodge were all the world I knew and time seemed to stand still. At some point, someone was blowing a whistle. I don't know how long we had sat in silence before Michael tapped the flap and David opened it. The cool morning air rushed in, sweet and very welcome.

While David held the flap open, Greywolf brought in two larger stones which were bright red they were so hot. As soon as they were in place, the flap was closed and the endurance of the north, the endurance for endurance, strength, courage, moral cleanliness and honesty, began. Michael appealed to the spirit and power of the north to give these things to us as he started pouring water over the glowing stones. The lodge filled with steam and the heat increased as Michael said, "Our lives will be made straight and kept straight by endurance, strength, courage and purity, moral cleanliness and purity". Red Hawk beat the drum slowly as Taequo blew the eagle bone whistle. How I longed for the qualities of which Michael had spoken! I wanted the courage to face life, the strength to go through life without the weakness I had shown when I attempted to take my life. I longed to be pure and to know I was pure and honest! I stared at the glowing images dancing on the surface of the stones and they seemed to be telling the story of my weakness and my betrayal of Matt and my failure to trust him. As the story danced across the face of the stones, the drum and whistle continued and my sense of being unclean and unworthy seemed to be burning away.

Michael had poured dipper after dipper of water on the stones and yet they seemed as red and hot as before. The lodge was becoming completely filled with steam. I could hardly breathe because of it and the heat. I was sweating profusely and that, too, seemed to be purifying me. I was becoming light-headed when Michael passed around sprigs of sage and said, "Chew on this, the herb of healing and fortifying which can help overcome the bad things of the world". As we chewed on the sprigs of sage, Michael prayed, "Oh powers of the universe, we take this herb to become strong and healthy to endure".

>From Michael's account of his experience, I thought I knew what to expect, but what happened was very different. Suddenly I had an overwhelming sense of evil, of hurt, of pain, of bad spirits. The hurt and pain were not mine, but

the hurt and pain I had caused. The bad spirits, I sensed, were those that my actions had given strength and had loosened on the world. I felt tears running down my face. I found myself filled with self-pity and, at the same time, self-loathing. Then I remembered what Michael had said of his experience. I had been focusing on myself, but this endurance was for purity and courage, courage to face what I had been and courage to put it behind me and focus on others. I was struggling with my soul when Michael handed me and Matt another sprig of sage. He then poured more water on the stones and used a large bird's wing to fan the steam around the lodge.

I don't know how long it was, time again stood still, before the steam, heat, silence and darkness of the lodge seemed ordinary. When it did, Michael tapped the flap and David opened it, and once again the cool air rushed in just as Greywolf brought in another stone and then another and another and another. He handed Michael a new pail filled with water. The flap was closed and the endurance seeking knowledge began. The new stones were so hot, I could make out those in the lodge with me. Matt's eyes met mine and I seemed to sense his spirit join mine. We were united in spirit. "This endurance marks the beginning of prayer for individuals," Michael said as he started pouring water over the stones. I stared at them as the water hit their surfaces and immediately burst into steam. The lodge became even more steam-filled and hotter than it had been. Taequo started blowing the whistle and then Red Hawk started beating the drum. The steam grew thicker until I could hardly see the glowing stones before me. The drum and whistle seemed to become a part of me, inside my very being, as Michael said, "Pray for what you want out of life, pray for the ones you love, pray for anything you wish". He had instructed us to end our prayers in the same way as we had ended our introductions.

I was first and I began by praying that I would be the person I knew I could be, that I would be a true soulmate to Matt and that my love would grow stronger every moment I lived. I then prayed for Matt and all the Fellowship, for the Family and my family, for Douglas and Janet, for Millie and Chelsea and Gladys and John and Uncle Michael. I even prayed for Rich, that he would be healed and forgiven. I prayed especially for Michael and Mary Kathryn and their life together and then, again, I prayed for Matt and myself and our journey together. When I finished, I'm afraid I was very absorbed in thinking about that great cloud of people who surrounded me with their love and didn't hear what others prayed. I did, however, hear Matt's final prayer, "I pray that Luke Hans Larsen will always be my Yonghon Tongmu and I his until we are parted by death and then in the spirit world". I wept.

When Michael had finished his prayers, we sat in silence again for a long time. The heat and steam were almost unbearable when Michael called out and David raised the flap and Greywolf handed Michael a new pail of water. Michael took a dipper of water and poured it over his head and then handed each of us a dipper and we did the same. While the flap was still open, Greywolf brought in four stones, the largest yet, and placed them in the pit. "This is the last endurance," Michael said, "the endurance of the south, the endurance of healing.

As the warm winds of the south bring new life to the earth, so may this endurance bring new life to each of us." When he finished, he started pouring water over the stones and, as he did, Red Hawk and Taequo began chanting softly. Over their chanting, Michael cried out in a loud voice, "Oh Great Spirit, we pray that we might be healed, especially Matthew Sarang Hanun Pomul Greywolf and Luke Hans Yonghon Tongmu Larsen, that we might be healed. Hetch etu!"

The heat and steam were more intense than they had been, yet Michael poured more water on the stones. I felt myself growing faint and suddenly I was no longer in the lodge. I didn't recognize the place, but it was a grassy meadow, filled with blooming flowers. There was a gentle, warm south wind blowing and Matt and I were walking across the meadow, hand in hand, laughing, his hair flowing in the breeze. We wore nothing except loin cloths and I had a sense of never having been so alive. I looked at Matt and knew he felt the same. His eyes were laughing and his spirit, as mine, soared. Walking with us was a coyote and flying over our heads were a great golden eagle and a red hawk, all as full of life as we were.

I don't know how long the vision lasted, and it was a vision, not some empty daydream, but when I returned to the lodge, Michael was lighting the peace pipe. When it was lit, he took a draw on it, exhaled and passed it to Matt. When the pipe had been passed around, Michael replaced it on the stand and we all joined hands. As we sat with joined hands, Michael said, "God watches over us wherever we are; the Great Spirit is with us. Hetch etu!" He then tapped the flap of the lodge and David opened it and we followed Michael out. When we were outside, we all immediately dived into the falls' basin. The cool water never felt so good!

We swam for a few minutes, then got out. As we did, Michael pointed to the sky where the first fingers of the dawn had appeared. Silently, all seven of us walked to Lookout Rock and stood watching, still silent, as the east brightened. As the sky grew bright, Matt reached out and took my hand just as the sun first appeared above the horizon. I turned and looked into his eyes and knew that this was, indeed, a new dawn for us. When I looked up, I saw Red Hawk smiling at us and he nodded. I didn't need any mystic powers to know what that nod meant. I took Matt in my arms for the first time in weeks and held him close as he wrapped his arms around me. We stood, looking into each other's eyes as our lips drew closer and then touched in a soft, gentle, loving kiss. I had my Matt back and I was whole, complete. Life was wonderful. As we broke our kiss, I saw in Matt's eyes confirmation of my feeling that life was wonderful.

"Well, I guess we can say we had a good sweat, Michael," Red Hawk said. "I think you are something special. I don't know another sixteen-year-old who has held a sweat."

"I sure don't know one who had someone of Red Hawk's standing in a sweat he was conducting, that's for sure," Taequo added.

"Well, we can talk about it over breakfast. This old Indian is starved," Red Hawk said. "David, it's ok for you to hug your son and let him know you are about

to bust a gut with pride. I'm about in the same situation except he's not mine! Well, not all mine."

David didn't need a second invitation as he grabbed Michael in a great bear hug. "I am proud of you son. Always have been, but never more than right now. I only wish Elizabeth could have lived to see you."

"She sees," Michael said, as matter-of-factly as he would have said, "Looks like a nice day".

Breakfast was, again, a whole-family affair and everyone was interested in what had happened during the sweat. "Don't think it was as dramatic as Michael's," Matt said. "But things happened, things got changed. Don't ask me how, but they did. I have never felt so alive and I know my and Luke's relationship is better than ever. And while I didn't meet my guardian spirit, I certainly had a vision. I mean a real vision, not a dream or daydream or imaging, but a vision." Matt then told how he became very faint and, just when he thought he was passing out, he found himself in another world, at least another place, and described my vision perfectly.

When he finished, Taequo laughed, "Luke, close your mouth or you'll catch flies. Why would you not expect you and Matt to have the same vision? You did, didn't you?" I just nodded, but did manage to close my mouth.

"Luke, Matt, you're right, your guardian spirits didn't show up. I didn't expect them to. That's not the way it usually happens. In fact, in all my years, Michael is the only one I have known for whom it happened. You'll have to do a vision quest. Besides, you two had created such a great pile of shi... crap, getting rid of it was a pretty big job for a sweat. But it happened. Right?"

"Right," Matt and I answered together.

"Well, some of us have to work for a living when we're not rescuing lovers. Chris and Al split up and did my runs for me and I am to meet them this morning. I don't suppose I could prevail upon Michael and Mary Kathryn to run me to Lexington to meet up with them could I?"

Michael got a huge grin on his face and then looked at Margaret and David, both of whom were smiling big time as they nodded. He and Mary Kathryn jumped up, ready to go, and Taequo stood, making his goodbyes, when Red Hawk said, "Taequo, you'll be needed in North Dakota in two or three weeks, I suspect. I think I have an eagle feather I have been saving to be added to yours." Taequo hugged the ancient Indian and said, "Just give me the word," as he left.

Matt

After breakfast, David and Margaret left to get ready to go to work, as did Jens and Gabrielle. Before they left, Jens and Gabrielle hugged me, then Luke. As Jens held his son, his eyes filled with tears and he hugged him tightly, and each time he started to let him go, hugged him again. Finally he said, "Luke, I love you, son. I am so happy you are with us," as he turned to leave.

While Luke and I cleared the table, Mom poured three cups of coffee and she and Dad sat with Red Hawk at the kitchen table, talking. They seemed to have forgotten Luke and I were still around, and we weren't for long.

Luke and I went back to the spot below the falls and sat and talked, just talked, for a couple hours. We talked about what had happened in the sweat lodge, neither of us was sure what, but we were sure that the past was the past and we were more in love and closer than we had ever been. Luke talked about his second suicide attempt saying that, while he had never thought he would consider another attempt after he first, he had just been overwhelmed. For the first time he told me that he had had thoughts about it since the first attempt. "I can't explain it, Matt. I know I had, have, every reason in the world to be happy beyond belief, but there are times when something kinda triggers thoughts inside and my world becomes bleak and dark. I don't expect you to understand, I don't, but I know that it may happen again and, please, keep an eye out for times when I just don't seem me and let me know it. Love me and if necessary, do something, even if I say I don't want you to."

I promised Luke I would, and reminded him that I thought I had a deeper understanding of him than I did before. "I know there are depths in you that I have to be very sensitive to if I am to understand you, and I want to more than anything. Maybe not now, since we have only a month left before we leave but, when we are settled, maybe we both need to look into counseling if you are willing."

"I think it would be a good idea even if I am not willing." Luke smiled a real Luke smile and, for the first time in weeks, my world became bright because Luke was very much in it.

We talked about the weeks ahead. He told me his mom had suggested he invite Douglas and Janet to come to Ohio before school started and I told him Woody was coming and probably would show up on a regular basis. "He says he thinks it would be like visiting grandchildren. Luke, our world is expanding. New friends are becoming a part of our life and it's great." Luke agreed.

"Our world. Matt, you can't know how much those words mean to me. Our world." We had been sitting as we had the day before, "Indian" style, and Luke bent forward on his knees, took my head in his hands and pulled me to him. Our lips met and his tongue brought the taste of my Luke into my mouth, my being. I guess you would have thought that after being separated for so long and going through what we had gone through, we would have been consumed by lust and started having sex like the world was coming to an end any minute, but that didn't happen.

Instead, after our kiss, we lay side-by-side, our arms around each other exchanging kisses, soft, gentle, loving kisses. Of course, the kisses grew more and more passionate and less and less gentle as our hands explored our hard bodies. Finally, I slipped Luke's shirt over his head and he mine. As our kissing became more passionate, our bare chests were pressed close together until I pulled back and started kissing his chest and licking his nipples. I found the snap

on his shorts and unsnapped them, opened his zipper down and slid the shorts off his beautiful legs.

My hands were touching Luke the way I had dreamed of when we were separated. Again, we were exchanging passionate kisses as I reached down and took Little Luke into my hand. When I did, Luke groaned and sucked my tongue deep into his mouth but, as much as that thrilled me, it was not what I wanted. I broke our kiss and moved downward, kissing and licking my love's hard, beautiful body. I was being filled with the taste of Luke, the most wonderful taste in the world. Reaching Little Luke, I took his head into my mouth and tasted the pure taste of Luke in the precum covering him. Luke groaned, "Matt, your mouth is so hot and so loving!" His fingers were in my hair as I took more and more of Little Luke into my waiting mouth. As I started moving up and down, sucking at the same time, Luke kept calling my name. Even in the heat of our passion, he was calling me Sarang Hanun Pomul. My tongue was playing with Little Luke's head as I continued to move up and down, sucking, giving Luke all the pleasure I had been saving for my beloved Yonghon Tongmu. Foreplay is delightful and I highly recommend it, the more the better, but prolonged foreplay makes the play short. I suddenly felt Luke's body stiffen as he arched his back, pushing Little Luke deep into my mouth. "Matt, I love you sooooo!" he shouted, as pulse after pulse convulsed his body and Little Luke filled my mouth with the salty sweetness of my Luke, the salty sweetness I had missed so much and loved so much.

With the last pulse, Luke relaxed completely as his fingers played in my hair. Then, grasping my hair, he pulled my mouth to his. His tongue went wild as he thrust it deep in my mouth, his kiss passionate. When we broke our kiss, I lay atop Luke's body and we continued our kisses. Finally, I lifted my head and looked deep into his eyes and saw love, Luke's love for me. I couldn't help but say, "Luke, we almost threw this away".

Luke's eyes became sad for a moment, then brightened as he said, "But, thanks to so many and so much, we didn't." With those words, he started kissing my chest and nipping my nipples. I was so hot and hard I didn't think I could last much longer when he moved down my body and took Chili Pepper into his hot, hot mouth. Luke's mouth had, before, given me pleasure I couldn't have imagined, but this was beyond that, far beyond it. I knew I was whimpering as his mouth and tongue sent wave after wave of pleasure surging through my whole being. I didn't last as long as Luke and, before I wanted it to end, felt a bolt of electricity shoot through my body as Chili Pepper erupted into Luke's mouth. I thought it would go on forever as shot after shot after shot of man's seed filled Luke's mouth. As I groaned, I stopped breathing and when the last of my seed entered Luke's mouth, I gasped for breath. Luke lay atop me and pressed his lips to mine in a hard kiss.

Relaxing in the afterglow of our love-making, we lay side by side, silent, listening to the river which seemed to be laughing in its happiness for us. I don't know how long we just lay in each other's arms, looking into each other's eyes, but I'm sure it was much longer than it seemed. Then Luke started kissing my

eyes, running his fingers through my loose hair and whispering, "Matt, I love you so very much. I have no life without you. Babe, you are my very world."

I rubbed my cheek against his and said, "And you, Luke, are my world, my reason for living and with you in my arms, I am alive. Every cell in my body is alive." Luke continued kissing my body and I was fully aroused again and said, "Luke, I want to feel you inside me. I want us to be united completely." As I spoke, I reached for my shorts and took a tube from a pocket. When I did, Luke's eyes lit up and smiled into mine, as a huge, special Luke grin spread across his face.

There is no need to go into details about what followed except to say slow and easy was the name of the game as Luke's fingers worked their magic, entering me slowly, gently. His eyes never left mine as he prepared me for what I wanted, Luke inside me. Finally I could stand it no longer and grabbed Luke's cheeks, pulling his body to mine. I cried, "Luke, Now! I want you now!" My wonderful, beautiful Luke slowly entered me. As he did, I crushed my lips against his, sucking his tongue deep into my mouth as he began, slowly, to move in and out of me, letting me know we were, again, united. Soon, too soon, I felt Luke's manhood pulse inside me, his man's seed filling me, making me whole. Finally, exhausted, he collapsed on me and we lay very still, our hearts beating as one. When I looked up, I saw tears in Luke's eyes and I was frightened. As great tears streamed down his cheeks, I asked, "Luke, Babe, what's wrong?"

"Dark Angel, I didn't think I would ever again make love to you and we are together, our bodies have been united and I feel such happiness that the tears just started. Nothing is wrong, hell no! Nothing is wrong. Everything is right. Everything is perfect because I am united with my Sarang Hanun Pomul and we are making love!"

After a long time, Luke looked into my eyes, kissed me and said, "Matt, I want you in me, please".

I laughed, "Babe, since when do you have to say please for me to do what I want to do, am aching to do?"

"Just do your wonders with those fingers of yours," he laughed back. I did as my love asked and, before long, he cried, "Now, Matt, now. I want you, all of you now, I am ready!" I was also ready. Chili Pepper entered Luke in one smooth, slow motion as I leaned forward and kissed the chest of my Bright Angel. Sure, it felt great! It was sheer heaven, but that was just part of what my uniting with Luke was. It was for me, and I was sure for Luke, the final sealing of our being together, again, completely.

Having entered Luke fully, we lay still, united, our eyes locked, our hearts beating together. Then slowly, very slowly, I began moving in and out of my love. Soon Luke was urging me on, his hips rising to meet the thrust of Chili Pepper. Our having made passionate love earlier meant we could make love longer but, even at that, the time came when I could hold out no longer. I pushed deep into Luke as his hands pulled my hips to his. When my orgasm started, I was gasping

for breath, barely conscious, barely able to endure the pleasure consuming me. After I had exhausted my supply of man's seed, I collapsed on Luke and his arms held me close, tightly, as his mouth found mine and his tongue invaded it, bringing more pleasure to me. We lay in that embrace until Chili Pepper slipped from Luke.

"Luke, we may never have the variety Lucas has, but I wouldn't change all the sex Lucas has had, and will have, for one time loving you. It's the difference between getting my rocks off and worshipping the man I love with my body. There is nothing they have in common, I don't care what anyone says otherwise."

Luke looked at me, nodded, smiled and said, "Matt, when I was at the gay club with Rich, I went to take a piss. Rich warned me that men came to the club to get laid, but I wasn't prepared for guys fucking each other, leaning against sinks and walls. I was almost sick. I think that I actually wondered if our love-making was anything like their having sex and immediately knew it wasn't. Don't get me wrong, I need sex. I like sex. I want sex, I love sex, but not that. I want to be loved and sex is one of the ways you love me and I love you, but it's only part of loving and never, I hope, just having sex for sex's sake." We were silent for a while, I guess each thinking about what we had seen in the world of gay men this summer and what we had learned from it. Painful, much of it very painful, but it was now a part of who we were as lovers.

Luke

Matt started trying to run his fingers through my now-long hair and we both laughed. I could easily run my fingers through Matt's long silky hair, but there was no way his fingers were able to move the same way through my tight curls. Suddenly, half in frustration and half in fun, he grabbed two hands full of hair and pulled my lips to his and started kissing me as if we hadn't been together in weeks. After we had laid in each other's arms, still and silent, for a while, Matt said, "Luke, I'm sure we're a mess. I think a swim is called for." We picked up our shorts and shirts and walked up the river to the falls and dived in. After swimming for a while, we dressed and, arm in arm, walked across the meadow to Matt's.

When we reached the house, Yong Jin, Greywolf and Red Hawk were in the garden. Matt and I joined them and we worked until time for lunch. Matt and I had picked a huge basket of strawberries and Yong Jin had gathered peas and salad greens. We went inside and she said, "I'll prepare lunch while you four talk. I think it's time." I wondered what she meant.

Greywolf poured four glasses of lemonade, tart, just the way I liked it and we went to the den. When we were seated, he said, "Luke, Matt, the sweat was the beginning of something, not the end. Red Hawk and I have talked at length about what happened during the two sweats. From the looks on your faces, I think one thing was accomplished. It's clear to me that whatever difficulty you two had in your relationship has been overcome." Matt and I looked at each other and grinned.

"From the looks on their faces, I'd say they both found sex satisfying," Red Hawk laughed. Matt and I both blushed big time. "I see I'm not wrong. I may be an ancient Indian, but I have memories. The gray wolf told me your love making was wonderful. Love making is always wonderful even at its worse, but I suspect you found yours this morning the best you have ever known. Good. But I don't want to dwell on that. Makes an old Indian wish he were young again and that's not good 'cause he's not and not going to be."

"I certainly don't think I have to tell you that you two and Michael have a great gift. It's one you will wish you didn't have sometimes because gifts always carry responsibilities. You are not your own. Michael will become a priest. I think deep inside he knows that, but it's a long time in the future if you're sixteen. Nonetheless, he will be and he will be a great one. Not the best liked or appreciated, but great. Your gifts will also be great and maybe not appreciated all the time, but how they will be used is unclear to me. Maybe in the future I'll know, but I do know they are there. You have started one journey in the sweat, a journey Michael has completed. His guardian spirit revealed itself to him. Yours have not."

"Now you know this old Indian will not fly, well, maybe in a vision or as a spirit, but not on one of those planes. Matt, your dad tells me your Fellowship will be together in a few weeks and you are all going to Ohio. Before that happens, I would like to have the three of you come to the Black Hills with me. You two need to make a vision quest. The gray wolf tells me this is a good time. Luke, you'll have to check with your parents, Matt, yours have approved already. Michael will also need to talk with his folks. I want to instruct Michael in the ways of a medicine man while you two do your quest. There'll be time for any instruction you need later. Think about it."

As Red Hawk finished, the front door opened and Michael and Mary Kathryn came in as Yong Jin called us to lunch.

Part Fifty-four

Matt

By the time Michael and Mary Kathryn reached the kitchen, Mom had added two places at the table. She and Dad had prepared a huge salad from the fresh vegetables from the garden and that, along with several cheeses and crackers, was lunch. As we ate, Michael and Mary Kathryn told us how much they had enjoyed the drive with Taequo and meeting Al and Chris. "Taequo said he would probably see us in a week or so. Anyone know what that's about?" Michael asked.

The question was first met by silence as Dad and Red Hawk glanced at each other. Luke and I knew what was coming, but kept quiet. Finally Red Hawk spoke, "Yong Jin, I think we need some dessert." Mom smiled and prepared bowls of ice cream covered with fresh strawberries. As we started eating, Red Hawk said, "Michael, your brothers have, I think, overcome the bad spirit which would have destroyed their relationship and almost cost Luke's life. Of course, you can't blame it all on a bad spirit since they brought some of it on themselves by their distrust of each other. I think at least that has been handled and will not be a real problem in the future. At least, in that regard, the future is up to them. But they, as you, are destined to be medicine men, healers of spirits, and that is not finished. As a matter of fact you are way ahead of them. You know your guardian spirit. They have yet to meet theirs. For you it happened in the sweat. That's an unusual occurrence. In fact, I never knew it to happen that way before. For most, and for your brothers, it will happen, if it happens, on a vision quest."

"While your brothers are making their quest, I will instruct you in some of the ways of a medicine man. Actually, I will continue your instruction since it started when you learned the sweat lodge ceremony. Then, when the quest is over, Taequo will join us for the celebration."

"What about Mary Kathryn?" Michael asked. "We've already been separated for most of the summer and another couple weeks doesn't seem like a great deal of fun."

"Mary Kathryn, how do you feel about that?" Mom asked.

"Well, obviously, I don't like the idea at all! Seems everyone gets time with Michael except me."

"Guess you need to learn that's the way it's going to be," Red Hawk said. "Sorry, Mary Kathryn, but your man doesn't belong just to you, but to the whole world. And the world will place demands on him neither of you will welcome. But I don't have to tell you that yours is a special man who, by the way, is in love with a very special woman. In fact, I was toying with the idea of asking Jens and Gabrielle if you could come along and spend time with Singing Sparrow, a very powerful medicine woman. While the men are engaged in their work, she could conduct an Ishnata Awicalowan ceremony, a preparing for womanhood

ceremony, for you. It's all about preparing a girl to be a woman. I think it's time, especially in the light of who you have chosen to be your soulmate."

Dad and Red Hawk told us what they had been thinking in terms of the next couple of weeks. "We'll take four or five days to drive to the Black Hills, Indian style, no interstate highways, no motels," Red Hawk said. "When we reach them, Matt and Luke will do their vision quest while Michael and Mary Kathryn undergo instruction."

"Since there will be five of you, you'll need to take our four-wheel-drive," Dad added. "The Jeep would be too small and David's van wouldn't handle some of the places Red Hawk will be dragging you, I suspect."

When the two Indians had finished, Michael asked, somewhat pitifully, "Do we have any choice?"

Red Hawk answered quietly, "I don't know. Do you?"

The Gang of Four started looking at our plates, heads down, saying nothing, avoiding looking at each other. Finally, Mary Kathryn said, "The answer is yes and no. Yes, we could choose not to go and no, we will not make that our choice." She had said all that was to be said on the subject.

The table cleared, we discussed the trip. "Today's Monday," Red Hawk said. "We need be in no rush. We'll leave Wednesday morning, early." We then talked about what we needed to take. "You'll need to take a lot less than you think," Red Hawk said, "if you're like most white folks. Most think you have to take everything including the kitchen sink!" We soon learned what he meant when we got the tent from the garage. "That's too big," he said. "We'll get a couple of tarps in case it rains. They are small compared to that tent." He finally gave us a shopping list of things to get and Michael, Luke and I headed for town to pick them up.

While we were gone, Mary Kathryn called her mom and told her the latest news. Gabrielle said she would talk to Jens, but for Mary Kathryn to go ahead and get ready. Mary Kathryn also told Gabrielle the family was gathering for supper Tuesday night before we left. Michael called Margaret and talked with her. He had planned to talk with his dad, but David was out on a run. I thought it was great that Michael felt as though Margaret was, indeed, his parent, and could make a decision for the family as well as David could.

When we got back with everything Red Hawk had put on the list, he said, "The rest of today and tomorrow is yours. You might want to see your friends tomorrow and let them know what's happening." Michael told me and Luke that he had kept Bill posted on what had been going on, and that they had decided to let those who were not here know very little, for fear they would worry and ruin their summer. Bill, of course, had told Linda everything since she was also in town. I guess they would be the only two we'd see before we left.

Luke had suggested we sleep at his place that night. I told him that, while I was more comfortable at his place than I had been, I still wasn't as comfortable

with him there as I was at my place. "I guess it's not just Jens, but Mary Kathryn is just down the hall and we don't have to be as quiet at my place as at yours."

"True," Luke said, "but since Red Hawk came, we have seen little of Mom and Dad. I'm afraid they feel left out." Luke was right of course.

"Well, why don't we make it extra special," I suggested. "Let's prepare dinner for them."

"Great idea," Luke smiled. "Really a great idea." Before we left for his place, we went to the garden and gathered fresh vegetables and a basket of strawberries. "Shortcake, please?" he said, as we finished picking the berries.

"Whatever you want, Lover," I said and kissed him.

"Well, how about shortcake first, THEN what I want?"

"Agreed."

When we got to Luke's it was already 4:30. Jens and Gabrielle usually got home about 6:00, so we planned an early dinner. As we were getting the food prepared for cooking, Michael and Mary Kathryn burst through the front door, stopped just inside the hall where we could see them, and Michael grabbed her and pulled her to himself, starting a tongue duel. His hands slipped under her shirt and cupped her breasts as she grabbed his cheeks and pulled his hips to hers. Luke "accidentally" dropped a pan and the two sprang apart as Michael said, "Holy shit! What are you two doing here?"

"If you weren't so busy with my baby sister," Luke said, "you'd see we're cooking. I can't imagine what you two would have done had we not been here."

"I can imagine it and I was," Michael said. "Now you've messed it all up."

"Good thing, from what I saw," I commented.

"Actually, we came in so I could change. Michael and I are going to his place for dinner."

"Then we need only prepare for four," Luke said. "And does that mean Matt and I have the upstairs to ourselves tonight?"

"What do you think?" Mary Kathryn answered. "I have until midnight before I have to be back, but I'll be back then so you two better get all the loud groaning and heavy breathing done by then. Back in a minute, Golden Eagle," she said, dashing upstairs.

Michael laughed and chased her up the stairs saying, "I'm not letting you out of my sight".

They came down a few minutes later. Mary Kathryn had changed into a smart sundress and I realized she was one beautiful woman. "And Michael is no ugly boy himself," I thought. The two ran out of the house, Michael chasing Mary Kathryn again. Through the open front door, I saw him catch her and again plant a passionate kiss on his lady love.

Their playful spirit was catching, and Luke and I were having a grand time cooking and playing. I had put the shortcake in the oven and set the timer, then turned and started preparing whipped cream for it. Luke grabbed me about the waist from behind and nipped my ear. When I turned, I smeared his face with whipped cream. Not to be outdone, he grabbed a handful and covered my face with it, saying, "This is a game two can play". I smeared his face with more, then he leaned over and started licking the whipped cream from my face. "Turn about is fair play," I said as I licked his face. The game became lick a little and kiss a lot. I doubt that dinner would have been ready had the oven timer not gone off. I took the shortcake from the oven, covered it with fresh berries and put it in the fridge. When I looked, Luke still had whipped cream on his face and, as I started to lick it off, Gabrielle arrived. As she walked into the kitchen she said, "Looks like something pretty kinky is going on here," and laughed.

Luke placed a glob of whipped cream on his mom's face and then licked it off as he said, "Now that's real kinky!" Gabrielle laughed and asked, "Is there any left for dinner?" I looked, and realized I'd have to whip more. But it had been fun!

Jens arrived a few minutes later and said, "Something sure smells good," as he walked into the kitchen. Gabrielle still had whipped cream on her face and Jens grabbed her and licked it off. Luke and I started laughing and Jens turned red.

"Now who's being kinky?" Luke asked.

"Just cleaning up your mother," Jens said. "You guys doing dinner?" Jens asked as he walked over and hugged Luke, then me. I still found it strange that Jens was as open with his affection as he was, after being the stoic one so long.

"Sure are. It'll be ready by the time you two freshen up, so don't start anything!"

I got the food ready for the table while Luke got it set. We had set a beautiful table, fit for a mom and dad. Jens and Gabrielle were back soon and we had dinner. During dinner, Jens asked about what had been going on and the trip we were taking. Luke said, "Dad, I can't explain it all. I don't understand it all. I mean, it's a mystery, a lot of it is. And I don't mean a mystery like you'll find out in the end. I mean a mystery, well, like the Blessed Sacrament." I looked at Jens quickly to see his reaction, expecting it not to be a good one.

"I think I understand, Son," he said, "but let's have coffee and talk some more."

Luke and I served coffee and the shortcake in the den, and we talked about all that had happened and how much of it was just, well, mysterious. "I certainly can't explain how Michael ended up with his chest pierced," Luke said, "but he did, and it's there for all to see."

"I can understand how Red Hawk might have herbs and things which got Luke and me back on our feet, I mean doctors might have done the same thing," I said. "What I can't explain is what happened to me, us, in the sweat. Now we're

told that Michael, Luke and I are, somehow or other, linked, and Luke and I need to do a vision quest."

"I have heard Greywolf's story of his quest," Gabrielle said. "It's not something I understand, but I know Greywolf and when he said something happened to him, something happened. I guess we'll just have to learn to live with mystery."

"Don't know that we have a choice," I said. "To tell the truth, I suspect everyone lives with mystery. Most just deny it or don't see it."

"No doubt you're right," Jens said. "Anyway, Red Hawk got you two back in the land of the living and that's enough for me. You're leaving Wednesday?"

"Yea. I thought we'd go tomorrow since we have very little else to do before we leave, but Red Hawk said we needed to see our friends before we leave. Of course, only Bill and Linda are around, but I guess we'll spend time with them tomorrow, then be off early Wednesday after having dinner at our place tomorrow night."

"Thanks for dinner and the conversation, Sons," Jens said. "I've had a rough day and am going to bed early." I saw him wink at Gabrielle and the two got up and left the room. Luke and I made short work of cleaning up and, as I was putting away the dishes, he dashed upstairs. A few minutes later he came back with a bottle of oil, popped it in the microwave and winked at me. "Slow and easy tonight, Dark Angel, but we don't have to stop at the end of the menu!"

When we got upstairs, I saw Luke had covered his bed with a couple of large beach towels. How long had it been since we had given each other a massage with warm oil? I couldn't say exactly, but it had been too long, much too long.

Luke

I had told Matt it would be slow and easy tonight, but with no stopping until we were ready. I had been thinking all day that Matt and I had forgotten just how great our loving had been before we had the limits removed. Sure, there was always foreplay but, before, all we had was foreplay and it was long and great. While he finished putting the dishes away, I dashed upstairs, grabbed beach towels for the bed and got the bottle of massage oil that had been neglected too long, and took it downstairs and nuked it. When the microwave timer rang, I grabbed the oil and then swept Matt into my arms and carried him upstairs. As I climbed the stairs, Matt had his arms wrapped around my neck and kept kissing me. I loved it!

When we reached my room, I kicked the door closed and walked to the bed and lay Matt down on it. He lay there, his hands behind his head, smiling at me. I reached down and took the bands from his hair, lifted him and removed his shirt, then his pants, socks and shoes. I started to massage his foot when he raised up, grabbed me around the neck and pulled me onto the bed, where he immediately started undressing me. As soon as my shirt was off, his mouth

covered a nipple as he loosed my shorts and started sliding them down my legs. Since I still had on my shoes, he had to stop, take them off, and then complete the task of undressing me. We wrapped ourselves in each other's arms, our tongues dueling, our bodies pressed together. Matt rolled on top of me, his hair cascading over the two of us. How great it felt! How wonderful to enter that private world we enjoyed so much, the world filled with the fragrance of my Sarang Hanun Pomul!

Finally, I managed to crawl from under him and said, "On your stomach, Lover Boy!" When he did as I asked, I grabbed the warm oil and poured a stream down his back and legs, rubbed it over his body until he was covered, and then started massaging his shoulders. How I loved the feel of his beautiful dark skin under my hands! I moved down his back, finally reaching his round cheeks which I massaged, occasionally slipping my fingers into his crack and touching his magic place. Matt was making purring noises like a contented cat as I continued down his body and legs. I took each foot into my hands and gave it special treatment. Before I finished, I started tickling the bottom of his foot and kissing it. Matt was giggling and groaning at the same time.

"Ok, Matthew Sarang Hanun Pomul Greywolf, on your back."

"You just want to see what you've really done to me," he said in what he intended to be a pouty voice, but it came out with a giggle.

I laughed, "Unless things have really changed, I KNOW what I have done to you, and I have just started". I poured a stream of the still-warm oil on his chest and stomach, and covered Chili Pepper with plenty before covering the front of his legs. As I massaged his chest, I had to stop from time to time to kiss, nip and suck a nipple. When I reached Chili Pepper, it was obvious that my massage had Matt super-hot, as he was literally streaming precum. For fear I'd spoil what I planned for later, I avoided Chili Pepper but did massage his thighs, and frequently reached up to rub the oil around his man's tool and his balls, again reaching far enough to touch his rosebud. When I reached his feet, I again massaged each one, kissing and fondling each in turn.

"Enough, Luke!" Matt said. "I'm ready for some action!"

"Hey, what happened to slow and easy?" I asked, but knew that there were no "No Touching" rules and I knew my Matt! He reached down and took Little Luke in his hands and coated him well with warm oil. He handed the bottle to me and raised his legs toward his head. I knew exactly what he had in mind, so I poured another stream of oil into his crack as he spread his cheeks, then I started working my fingers into his magic place until I had three fingers inside my Dark Angel.

Matt was groaning and twitching, pushing his hips upward, encouraging my fingers to enter him deeper. Finally he said, "God, Luke, I'm ready. I'm more than ready. I want you and I want you now!" I entered my Sarang Hanun Pomul slowly, gently and, as I did, he pushed his hips up against Little Luke until I was buried inside him. As always, once inside I was still, but Matt was having none of

that as he started moving his hips up and down as well as from side to side. Realizing that he was, indeed, ready, I started moving in and out of him and, with each thrust, Matt's hips rose to meet mine. I was in absolute heaven! When I knew that I was on the brink, I stopped and lay atop Matt, kissing his beautiful lips. He was an absolute savage with his kisses! Matt had always been hot when we were making love, but this time he was simply wild. Finally, I once again thrust deep into my love and he grabbed my cheeks, pulling me as deep as possible inside himself. He raised his legs further, giving me even more access to his magic hole and, as I thrust in, he grabbed my hair and pulled my mouth to his, his tongue doing wonders inside my mouth. This time there was no holding back! Matt took his hands from my hair, grabbed my cheeks and pulled me deep inside, his hips rising to meet mine as I saw flashing lights and a thunderbolt shot through my body. I thought I would never stop cumming inside my Dark Angel. Pleasure swept over me in wave after wave and I continued to pump man's seed into him. Finally, I collapsed on his body and he held me close, kissing my face, my hair, my eyes, as he said over and over again, "Yonghon Tongmu, I love you. I have always loved you and I always will love you." I was close to exhausted, after all this was the fifth time we had made love, complete with sex, today, but I could feel Chili Pepper hard against me.

Matt reached for the bottle of oil and, when he got it, he frowned. "It's too cold," he said. I wondered what he would do, but he grabbed a robe from my closet and dashed downstairs. He hadn't bothered to tie the sash, so the robe was open and his Chili Pepper, MY Chili Pepper, stood proudly before him. I laughed, and hoped Mom and Dad were engaged in their own love-making when he got downstairs. He was back in a flash and disagreed when I told him he had given me more pleasure than I could have possibly have given him, and tried to prove it as he made use of warm oil, and Chili Pepper!

We were, of course, covered with oil and, after recovering from some of the hottest love-making we had ever had, started sliding over each other, laughing our heads off! There was a lot of kissing, grabbing and hugging going on when, suddenly, Mat slid over my body and fell to the floor. That, of course, started another round of giggles. I reached down to pull him back on the bed and he pulled me to the floor instead. Realizing we were an oily mess, I stood and tried to pick Matt up, but he kept slipping from my grasp. He finally stood on his own, grabbed my hand and we raced across the hall to the shower.

As we played in the shower, Matt said, "Luke, I have missed showering with you. It seems ages since I did!" I kissed him and then started soaping his hard, beautiful, dark body, paying careful attention to Chili Pepper. I took the shampoo, which now always had the fragrance of Matt, which I loved so well, and started washing his long, black hair. When I had finished, it was his turn to soap me and wash my hair. It was taking a while for us to finish, as there was much stopping for play! When we were clean, we kept playing, just kids' playing, in the shower until, suddenly, the water started turning cold.

After we had dried each other, Matt picked me up and carried me across the hall. When he reached the bed, he held me in one arm while he stripped the

towels from the bed and laid me down. We wrapped ourselves in each other's arms, lying facing each other and drinking in the beauty of our lover's eyes. We were just enjoying each other without words, and the stillness between us, when I realized we had not closed my door as Mary Kathryn came down the hall, stuck her head in my door and said, "Ok, quiet time now you two!" and laughed. I was ready to jump out of bed and close the door, when she pulled it to and said, "Goodnight, Brothers".

Our love-making had left both of us warm, drowsy, contented and, before we knew it, we were asleep, and slept until Dad called up the stairs announcing breakfast was waiting.

After breakfast, we all went to Michael's to decide how we would spend the day. He had already called Bill and we decided we'd all meet at Uncle Michael's. Michael had called him to ask permission and he was delighted to have us come over since we hadn't seen him since we got back. "Bill asked if Buddy and Danny could join us and I told him to ask them," Michael said.

"Where's Jake," I asked.

"I think that's why Bill wanted Danny and Buddy to be included," Michael said. "He was pretty mysterious about it."

When we arrived, Uncle Michael and John had prepared lemonade, which sure was welcome as it was turning out to be a very hot July day. We went to the gazebo, where we told everyone what had happened and what we would be doing the next two weeks. Needless to say, there were a lot of questions!

No-one asked about Jake until we had finished our own stories and then Matt asked, "Where's Jake?" Danny and Buddy looked at each other, and Danny finally nodded and Buddy said, "We're not sure. All three of us were released from the half-way house and found a small apartment we could afford. Everything seemed to be going ok, except Jake became more and more strange. Finally both Danny and I noticed a sports car we thought we recognized, parked across the street from the apartment one evening when we came from the hospice. Jake had night duty and left after we had eaten. Sometime later, Chelsea called and asked if something was wrong because Jake hadn't shown up. I guess both Danny and I suspected what had happened, but didn't want to believe it. Danny took Jake's shift and, when he came home in the morning, Jake was on the living room couch. He was out of it big time. We finally got him into bed and, when he came around, we asked him what was up. He told us it was none of our damn business and he was sick of dealing with dying people, having no money and no fun. After that, he was generally gone when we got home from school and, if he was there the next morning, he was usually stoned on something."

"Buddy and I really knew what was going on, but we didn't want to admit it. Finally, he missed an appointment with his probation officer and when the officer called the apartment, Jake wasn't there. He hasn't been back since. The car, we are both sure, belongs to a john who has given Jake money, clothes, expensive gifts, and a lot of alcohol and drugs. We both suspect, know, he's run away with

the guy. We aren't sure what we should do. His probation officer keeps calling and we just keep telling him we haven't seen Jake, which is true. Yesterday, the officer came over and put the screws to us and we told him what we thought. He's stumped because we don't know the john's name, Jake just referred to him as my sugar daddy, or anything else. All we know is the kind of car he drives. I'm afraid for Jake. I know the guy is into some pretty kinky stuff, but what can we do?"

The answer, of course, was nothing. "Jake has made his choice," Danny said, "and I'm afraid he'll have to live with it."

"Or die from it," Buddy added. It was sad, but what could we do except agree. Mary Kathryn changed the subject and asked the two how they were doing. Both actually found working in the hospice not enjoyable, but fulfilling. "I can handle it most of the time," Danny said, "but we had two kids, I mean really young kids, die, and that hurts. Both, however, have given me a real appreciation of life and that has meant the world to me." Buddy agreed.

Uncle Michael and John served lunch, and we just kinda lazed around and talked about first one thing and then another. Both the guys were enjoying college. "I never thought I'd like school, but I am. I'm taking general courses now, but am thinking about starting a nursing program this fall," Buddy said.

Danny wasn't sure what he wanted to do, but was enjoying the classes he had, especially a literature one. "And I'm taking an art class, Mr. Stephenson, and I really love it. Don't think I'm very good, but I enjoy it for myself."

Mid-afternoon, the two had to leave. Buddy had an early evening class he needed to study for, and Danny was on night duty at the hospice. After they left, we talked about the change in them and then about Jake. "I think Jake will end up a statistic," Michael said, and we all agreed.

Matt

It was time for us to start packing for the trip, and Bill and Linda decided to come with us. When we had everything together and started packing the four-wheeler, Red Hawk said we might need the sleeping bags tonight, so we left them out. When we finished, Bill and Linda hugged us goodbye and said they would see us in a couple weeks.

After they left, Red Hawk asked me and Luke to go for a walk. We walked along the river below the falls and, when we reached Luke's and my special place under the willows, he said, "This, too, is a sacred spot". We both nodded and the old Indian smiled. He talked about the vision quest, something we both had known about since we were kids because we both had heard the story of Dad's quest. Red Hawk talked in very vague terms about what he saw in our future, but said nothing specific. I soon got the feeling he was beating about the bush and said so.

Red Hawk grinned like a little boy caught snitching cookies and said, "Well, there is something you need to know and I suspect you haven't been told.

You know that during the quest you will fast." We both nodded. We had talked about how Dad had managed to go without food and water for a week, since we first learned about it. "There's another fast. A fast from sex."

"That should be no problem since we will be separated," Logical Luke responded.

Well, actually..." Red Hawk was, it seems, reluctant to finish what he started. "We will leave tomorrow on a journey leading to your quest which, I am sure, will end with a vision and a feast celebrating it. During that time, I mean as soon as we begin the journey tomorrow, no sex."

"Wait just a minute," Luke practically exploded. "After being separated for four weeks and living through a week of sheer hell, we have made love, I mean REALLY made love, you know, and now you want us to give it up for another week or two? You've got to be kidding!"

"Think you two are men enough to do that?" Red Hawk asked.

Luke and I were both silent for a long time. Finally, I leaned over and kissed Luke and answered, "I guess if we have to, we can. Right, Babe?" I looked at Luke and saw him nod, but he was definitely not pleased at the prospect. Neither was I!

Luke suddenly got that look in his eye, gave me his special wicked grin and said, "Dark Angel, Red Hawk didn't say no love-making, just no sex". He turned to Red Hawk, grinned and asked, "Right? Does that mean anything we did before we were eighteen is ok?"

"Don't know what you did before you were eighteen, well, actually I do. Greywolf told me about your promise and that you kept it. So, yes. 'Course, it's going to be hard to draw the line now that you have stepped over it, but you're men. You know what you need to do. But no-one said anything about the time between now and when we leave," Red Hawk laughed his deep belly laugh. "And I think this old Indian better get the hell out of here."

Red Hawk was barely out of sight before Luke was all over me. "Not wasting any time, are you, Yonghon Tongmu?"

"Hell no!" Luke said, stopping his undressing of me just long enough to look into my eyes as he answered. Luke was practically ripping my clothes from me, his hands running over my now-bare body, sending goose bumps over me. Luke was so busy I found it hard to get his shirt and shorts off. His eyes sparkled, sending me into sheer ecstasy.

Our love-making grew more and more intense, our tongues doing battle, our hands rubbing each other's hard body. Our love-making started hot and furious and only increased in intensity. We had never tried giving and receiving pleasure with our mouths at the same time because we had wanted to focus on our lover, but today was different. This time, before Luke could take Chili Pepper into his mouth, I turned around and placed my mouth on Little Luke and then his hot, hot mouth covered Chili Pepper. Luke was sucking and licking Chili Pepper,

sending waves of pleasure through my body. I did the same as my hand moved up and down his hard, beautiful manhood. From time to time, we held the other's manhood in our mouth, but stopped to gaze into our lover's eyes. Maybe Lucas had been right after all. Maybe you can give and receive pleasure at the same time. Perhaps he meant that maybe you can receive two kinds of pleasure at the same time, for surely having Luke in my mouth was pleasure, different, but just as intense, as was having his mouth pleasuring Chili Pepper.

I knew Luke and I were both giving as well as receiving, focusing on the other as much as on ourselves when he slowed down as my breathing started to become ragged. I knew I was about to go over the edge when he slowed down and I increased my suction and moved my hand up and down Little Luke faster. Suddenly I felt a blast of Luke sweetness in my mouth as I was hit by a surge of pleasure. Stars shot before my eyes and shiver after shiver shook my body. Finally, out of pleasure beyond my imagining, I gasped and lost consciousness. When I came to, Luke had turned around and I was looking into the blue, blue depths of the most magnificent eyes in the whole world. A special Luke smile covered the face of my Yonghon Tongmu, bringing one to my face. "God, Yonghon Tongmu, how could we ever have thought that our love wasn't perfect," I asked. "How could we ever have doubted that what we have is special beyond belief?"

"Guess being madly in love doesn't mean you can't be an idiot from time to time," he answered.

We lay side by side, drinking in the face of our beloved. I reached out and started stroking Luke's wonderful hair. I knew that long hair wasn't the fashion any more, but it didn't matter. I loved the golden halo of tight curls covering the head of my Bright Angel. As I stroked Luke's hair, he pulled mine over our bodies. Moving over him, my hair covered us and, once again, created that very private world in which only the two of us existed, for the second time in much too long. After we had exchanged numerous kisses, I rested my head on Luke's chest and we both fell asleep.

I was awakened by a tender kiss. As I opened my eyes, I saw my Bright Angel before me, his golden hair glowing in the sunlight which filtered through the willows. We lay, our naked bodies in the dappled sunlight, and talked, again, about what we had gone through and what we faced. Luke was resting on an elbow, his face above mine, when he said, "Sarang Hanun Pomul, Red Hawk has said we can make love as we did before we turned eighteen. Do you think we can do that? Do you think we can make love and not cross the line?"

"I don't know. Do you think we can? I mean make love and stop before sex?"

"Dark Angel, I can if that is all I can do. But, I mean, it's about loving and being loved. And if we have to have a 'beyond this there be dragons' point, then so be it. Right?"

I could only nod. We talked a while longer and then I said, "But, Yonghon Tongmu, we haven't started our journey yet!" Thank God for the endurance of eighteen-year-olds because we proved, once again, that there could be wonderful sex after long foreplay!

Exhausted by our afternoon of love-making, we lay together a while longer then, without speaking a word, picked up our shirts and shorts and walked to the falls.

Before we reached them, we heard voices, Michael's and Mary Kathryn's. When we walked out of the willows, our sister and brother were playing in the basin. They had not seen us and, just as we approached, Michael grabbed Mary Kathryn and planted a passionate kiss on her mouth, his hands cupping her butt, pulling her hips to his.

"Unhand my baby sister, you cad!" Luke shouted. Michael didn't break his stride as he lifted one hand and shot Luke a bird. Luke and I joined the two lovers frolicking in the water.

After we had swum for a while, the four of us lay, naked, on the beach, talking about the latest turn of events. Suddenly Mary Kathryn rose up on an elbow and asked a question I had wondered about: "Do you think that after I'm prepared for womanhood it means... I mean... you know...."

Michael laughed and then turned red. "Well, if you're a woman, I guess it means you're a woman. I mean that you do woman things." He blushed again. "But what I want to know is, do medicine men have sex with such a woman?"

Mary Kathryn gave him a real slug on the arm and said, "I don't know about that, but if you, medicine man, have sex with any other woman than this one, you'll be a very dead medicine man!"

"Well, I think a medicine man can have sex with a woman but you, medicine man, better not have sex with my baby sister!"

Michael hit Luke on the shoulder and soon the two of them were wrestling on the beach. I never expected to see the day when our younger brother could take either of us on, but that day had come. Michael grabbed Luke, hoisted him into the air and raced to the basin and tossed him in. Luke could hang on to Michael just long enough to pull him into the basin as well.

When the two rejoined Mary Kathryn and me, we became very serious when she said, "You know, times like these for us are very near their end. I welcome the future, but I am sorry to see the present go." After a long silence, we started talking about things we remembered from our growing-up years. Mary Kathryn finally said, "We have to be four of the luckiest kids in the whole world". We all agreed.

Margaret

Mary Kathryn had called earlier to tell me that we were having supper at the Greywolfs', and Greywolf had called later to tell me what was going on. "I

tried to get David, but he is out on a call," he had said. After I had talked with him, and gotten some clarity on what the Gang of Four would be doing, I began to wonder just what preparation for womanhood involved for the Lakota. As I did, I realized that there was another preparation that needed to be taken care of and made a decision, but I needed to talk with David before I took any action. I left word in the ER for him to see me as soon as he came in.

David came to my office shortly after I had left word. I was with a patient when he came and, as soon as I was finished, I found I had a few minutes before my next appointment. David and I sat in my office and I was ready to get right down to business, but David had other ideas. Finally, after several passionate kisses, I said, "David, you know how I hate quickies and that's where you're headed".

He laughed and sat down as he said, "That's a down payment on a longie! But what's up?"

"David, this is one of those times when I find Dr. Bailey and Michael's mom in conflict." I told him about Mary Kathryn's going to the Black Hills and undergoing the ceremony called Preparing for Womanhood. "I'm not sure where the preparation ends and the being begins, but I think Michael and Mary Kathryn may see it as permission to have sex. Don't get me wrong. I'm not sure I approve. After all, they are only sixteen, but I'm also not sure I disapprove. What I am sure about is that we will not make that decision for them."

"Just what are you getting at, Margaret?" David looked puzzled.

"What I am getting at is that I'm not ready to be a grandmother or you a grandfather. I think someone needs to talk to Mary Kathryn about birth control and you need to talk to Michael."

"I have, many times, but I will again if you like."

"Well, you know better than I whether you need to or not, but what about Mary Kathryn?"

"I see your point. Don't you think Gabrielle has talked with her?"

"I'm sure she has, but how much...?"

"Well, if I were you... if I were you, I'd chicken out and say nothing, at least as far as Jens is concerned. Mary Kathryn is still his baby girl. Talk to Gabrielle and take your cue from her." As David finished, his pager went off and he was out the door. I wondered if that was planned!

I asked the nurse to send in the next patient and have the receptionist call Gabrielle and ask her to come over.

After two more patients, the receptionist called me to say Gabrielle was waiting. When she came in she said immediately, "I hope nothing is wrong, Margaret. I'm not ready for another crisis!"

"Neither am I!" I joined in her laughter. "I'm hoping to avoid another." I then told her what I had been thinking and what David and I had discussed. "I don't

want to overstep my bounds," I said, "but I also want to be as helpful as possible."

"I have had a good mother-and-daughter talk with Mary Kathryn several times. I was prepared to blame Michael if... well, you know... but she set me straight on that," Gabrielle laughed. "Takes after her mother, I guess! It is obvious to me that Michael and Mary Kathryn are both pretty mature for their age. Both are so much in love it's frightening at times, and both are generally very responsible, but hormones are hormones! Well, I say they are both mature for their age, but I'm not sure that was true before the summer. Mary Kathryn has really changed and matured this summer. She is now definitely a woman and no longer a silly girl, well, most of the time. On the one hand I hate to see her leave childhood behind and take on a woman's responsibility and, on the other, I love the young woman she has become. I know that sooner or later she and Michael will become sexually active, that sounds so clinical. Sooner or later they will express their love through sex, and I know that is what it will be, along with the lust, expressing their love. I wish it would be later but, again, she is her mother's daughter, if you know what I mean." Gabrielle blushed. "Unlike Jens, I suspect, I know they will make the decision, not us. But I'm doing all the talking and you asked me over."

"Well, you've answered part of my question. What I wanted, after I was sure you knew Michael and Mary Kathryn would sooner or later, and, I agree, it will be sooner, begin to make love without restrictions... what I wanted to ask was your and Jens' permission to prescribe birth control for her."

"Margaret, to be honest, I think this better be women's talk. Don't get me wrong, Jens loves Michael, I think as much as Luke. I'm sure in his daydreams he already sees Michael as the father of his grandchildren, but in the far, far distant future. Right now, if you approached the question of birth control for Mary Kathryn, I'm sure he'd just pitch a Jens fit. I'll speak to Mary Kathryn and tell her I wish they would wait, even until they were married, but in my heart I know they won't. I wouldn't, would you?"

"Do I need to answer that?" I said and rubbed my large midsection. Gabrielle laughed.

"If you'll take care of the doctor details I would appreciate it. Seems at this point Michael and Mary Kathryn are our only hope for grandchildren, and I feel equally as strongly as Jens about Michael being the father of my grandchildren. And thanks, Margaret, for your concern for my daughter as well as your son. I'll call Mary Kathryn and ask her to come by."

"Would you ask her to drag Michael along?"

"Sure."

"You know, Margaret, sometimes I wish Luke wasn't gay. It's not because there is anything wrong, or right, about the fact that he's gay, or because he won't be giving us grandchildren. It's just that he would be spared a lot of

suffering but, since he is gay, I couldn't ask for a better soulmate for him than Matt and, thankfully, Jens feels the same way."

"I understand how you feel."

Mary Kathryn called just before I saw my last patient, and said she and Michael were on their way.

They arrived just as I was showing my last patient out. I had debated about seeing Mary Kathryn alone and then the two of them, but decided that wasn't a good idea. When they came in, both gave me a big hug. I was still surprised at how easily Michael showed affection and was more than delighted that he did. "Come into the office," I said. "I want to talk with both of you before you go on your trek."

When we were in the office, I said, "The forthcoming Preparing for Womanhood ceremony made me, I suspect, suddenly realize you were adults and... I'll get to the point. To be honest, I wish the two of you would wait on sex until college at least, and I don't want anything I say to suggest otherwise. Having said that, I am realistic enough to know that will probably not be the way it is. Given the reality of your situation, I ask two things of you, Michael, as my son, and of you, Mary Kathryn as, yes, a daughter. First, and this is very important, I ask that you make your first time, and for that matter every time, special. Never let sex become a thing in itself. I know from bitter experience where that leads. Michael, be gentle, be caring, be easy." I then told Michael about what Mary Kathryn's being a virgin meant for the first time. "But a woman always appreciates her man being slow and easy, loving and caring, and respects that in a man more than you realize."

"The second thing I ask of you is that you don't allow your love-making to create a problem for you and the whole family. Someday I hope the two of you will have bundles of children. You are the hope of the family in that regard. It will be years before the children I am bearing will give us grandchildren." I then told them about my talk with Gabrielle and wrote a prescription for birth control for Mary Kathryn.

As I handed Mary Kathryn the prescription, she blushed and said, "Margaret, the whole town will know!" She was right of course. Concord is a typical small town in that regard.

"I'll take care of that for you," I said and then went to get what she needed from my sample drawer. "I suggest you start now," I said. "It will do no harm and you'll be protected. Michael, David will have another talk with you. Don't know what he may say, but no method is foolproof and if you want extra protection you can use a condom, as much as some hate them. If you do want extra protection, or think you might, your Dad can explain all about them to you."

One of those endearing, dimpled-cheek, wicked smiles spread across Michael's face and he said, "I'm not too sure about that!" as he reached over and patted my big tummy. I blushed and all three of us laughed.

We all stood and, as we did, Michael said, "Mom, I'm not sure when our first time will be. We both know where, at least we think we do, but, rest assured, I will do you proud in the way I treat my wild woman."

"Linda told me above all else to make our first time special and to do nothing which would make it otherwise," Mary Kathryn said. "She said she and Bill both now know the difference between their first time and their first time together. 'The first time for both of us was just fucking,' she said, 'and our first time together was making love, real love. It was not just sex, but sex expressing our deep love for each other.' I take her words very seriously."

"Peers can do more than parents in some things," I thought.

Jens

I didn't know what to expect when I went to supper at the Greywolfs'. Mary Kathryn had called and said we were having supper there to discuss some plans for the Gang of Four. I certainly hoped there was not another crisis brewing.

I had to work a bit late getting some reports done and when I arrived, everyone was present, including Red Hawk. I had a hard time figuring out what had gone on over the weekend. I think I would have dismissed it all as hocus pocus except for two things. First, I would have had a hard time explaining the wounds on Michael's chest unless what Greywolf, Taequo and Red Hawk had said were true, and even then it was hard to believe. It was still a mystery to me. But there were the wounds on Michael's chest and I knew none of those involved would have hurt Michael. Then there were Matt and Luke.

I had been sure Luke was beyond my help and expected him to need to spend a long time in a hospital, and had even thought he might end up in a mental hospital. I mean he was in really bad shape. I know one thing, the weekend had made me realize just how much my son and his happiness meant to me. Now, as I looked across the table at him, he was radiantly happy and the looks he gave Matt told me why. I still couldn't understand how a man, and especially my own flesh and blood, could love another man, but there was absolutely no question in my mind that he did. I understood love and knew it when I saw it, and I saw it between these two sons of the family.

Before we sat down at the table, we had had a glass of wine, that is, everyone except Margaret and Red Hawk. Margaret had not touched a drop of alcohol from the moment she suspected she was pregnant. As she poured herself a glass of juice, Red Hawk had asked for one as well. "This old Indian has been sober for over thirty years after being drunk for almost as long, and I know I'd fall off the wagon easily." He also said, "Luke, I think your family has been very reasonable about teaching you how to drink. You forgot that in that gay club. You forget it again and I will kick your ass until you are sober, then kick it some more." Luke smiled a somewhat guilty smile.

As we ate, we talked about what we all had been doing at work, the fact that Douglas and Janet would be joining us for a visit, before going on to Ohio,

the usual family chat kind of things. Then Yong Jin and Greywolf served coffee and a great strawberry shortcake, and suggested we go to the library.

As soon as we were settled, Red Hawk and Greywolf talked in some detail about the seven ceremonies of the Lakota. I found it fascinating. Then they focused on the vision quest in particular. "Matt and Luke need to do a vision quest. They are ready to drive Red Hawk to the Black Hills and to do their quest there," Greywolf said. He then told the family Michael would be getting instructions as a medicine man while his brothers were on their quest, then he fell silent.

Finally Red Hawk spoke, "Jens, if you and Gabrielle will permit, Mary Kathryn will spend the time with a medicine woman and undergo the Preparation for Womanhood ceremony." There was no question in my mind about Luke going. Whatever it was he was into had made him alive again and I wasn't going to raise any objections. Mary Kathryn's going, especially to prepare for womanhood, was something else altogether!

"Luke is eighteen and can do pretty much as he wants. I don't think I have much say in that anymore," I answered.

"He may be eighteen and think he can do what he wants," Red Hawk responded, "but he can't. He's still your son."

"Well, I have no objection, in fact, I'm all for it after I have seen what happened this weekend, which I still don't understand, but Mary Kathryn preparing for womanhood... my baby girl..."

"For heaven's sake, Jens," Gabrielle said, "your baby girl has been, technically at least, a woman for four years. Truth be known, you could have been a grandfather to a three-year-old child by now! She's grown!"

I was stunned. I mean, I knew all that, but still it was hard to see Mary Kathryn as a grown woman. I looked across the room at where she sat between Michael's legs, his arms around her, and I think, for the first time, realized that she really was a woman, and a very beautiful one at that! I also thought about how she had changed over the summer. She had grown up while I wasn't looking. "You're right, and of course she can go," I was finally able to say.

"There will be a feast after the quest," Red Hawk said. "I hope all the Family will be there. The Greywolfs, Gabrielle and I said, "Of course we will."

"You can still fly, can't you?" David asked, looking at Margaret. She nodded and David said, "Count us in too."

"I guess everyone thinks us old Indians just listen to spirits and drums, but this one likes a lot of other music," Red Hawk said, looking at Matt. For the first time in ages, Matt sat down and started playing. He told us he had done an organ arrangement of "Yonghon Tongmu", and played it for us. Finally, he played, you know what, "More", and the family had a great time singing. When he finished, Red Hawk said, "Time these old bones rested. Sacred ground tonight,"

and, with those words, he grabbed his pack and started to leave but not before Michael asked if he could join him.

Before he could answer, Mary Kathryn asked, "Mom, Dad, can I join them?" Both Gabrielle and I nodded, and she grabbed Michael's hand and they headed for the door as Yong Jin called after them, telling them their sleeping bags were on the porch.

Luke

Matt and I said goodnight to our parents and as I hugged Dad tightly I said, "Dad, thanks. Thanks for being my dad."

Dad hugged me very close and said, "Thanks for being my son and loving me". He then hugged Matt and said, "Matt, thanks for loving my son and for making him happy".

Matt boked Dad in the eye and said, "My pleasure, Jens, and thanks for giving me the love of my life". He then turned to me and said, "To the river, but not the falls," and the look in his eye told me where.

We hugged Yong Jin and Greywolf and, as we turned to leave, Yong Jin called after us, "May your dreams be of each other!" Gee, this family can get real mushy these days, and I love it!

Matt and I snagged our sleeping bags from the porch and walked, hand in hand, stopping for some great kissing, to the place under the willows. When we reached the willows, we zipped our sleeping bags together and lay on top of them. The summer's night was balmy and we had no need of them as cover. As soon as we lay down, we both started undressing each other. Sometimes I think we should all go nude. It would save a lot of time! Once naked, we started loving each other, first slowly and then more passionately. Just like anything else, making love improves with practice and we were discovering new ways of giving pleasure to each other. I could drive Matt wild by moving my teeth carefully and gently over the head of Chili Pepper. Likewise, he could send me into orbit with his fingers. We certainly took our time, and made love as long as we could before finally exhausting ourselves. Curled in each other's arms, we drifted off to sleep.

I was awakened by the morning birds, before daybreak, to see my beautiful Dark Angel sleeping peacefully beside me. As I looked at him, I thought, "This is how I want to wake up every day of my life," then remembered that, as soon as we got to the Black Hills, we would be separated for our quests but not for long. I smiled at the thought of having my Sarang Hanun Pomul by my side for as long as I lived and that, I hoped, would be a long, long time. And I was sure of one thing, I'd never again try to shorten that time. As I watched, Matt stirred, his eyes opened and his smile melted my heart. "Good morning, Light of my life," I smiled. In response, Matt pulled my mouth to his and buried his tongue in it. This was living!

We had some time before we had to leave for the house and I was sure that Michael, Mary Kathryn and Red Hawk would respect our time together, so

we made love in the dawning light. It was beautiful love, wonderful love, star-spinning love. But good things always end and we got up finally, dressed, picked up the sleeping bags and walked to Matt's place where Yong Jin had breakfast waiting. Life was good, living was good, being in love was good. I was happy.

Part Fifty-five

Michael

The trip to the Black Hills was, to say the very least, interesting. As Red Hawk had said, there were no interstate highways or motels involved. In fact, no two days or nights were the same. Often we'd be traveling along a country road when Red Hawk would point out something that was little more than a dirt trail, and we'd be off on an unmapped road. The only map was the one the old Indian had in his head and it never failed us. The result, of course, was that we saw things and places few others saw.

Our sleeping places were even more varied. The first night we camped beside a spring somewhere in the southern mountains. The next night Red Hawk had Matt, who was driving, turn down a lane toward a pasture. He asked Luke to open a gate, and Matt drove through it and across the pasture to a barn standing on a hilltop. We spent the second night sleeping on new, sweet-smelling hay. But the strangest, I think, was our final night on the road. Mary Kathryn was driving when Red Hawk directed her to a farm house where dinner was waiting for us. As soon as he had introduced us to his great-granddaughter, Spring Fawn, we sat down to a wonderful dinner. When we finished, Red Hawk said, "I'll see you in the morning," grabbed his bag and left.

When he had gone, Matt asked Spring Fawn how she knew we were coming, and she answered, "Cell phone".

"You mean Indian cell phone?" Luke asked.

"Well, Granddad Red Hawk is an Indian and he used his cell phone, so I guess you could call it an Indian cell phone." She laughed uproariously, her great-grandfather's belly laugh, at Luke's suggestion that Red Hawk had powers which allowed him to communicate with her without a phone.

She continued laughing as she said, "That old Indian great-grandfather of mine is a first-class trickster. Only half of what he says is so and the problem is, you don't know which half."

As if on cue, the Gang of Four got stricken looks on our faces. I knew we were all thinking the same thing, we were on a wild goose chase. Seeing our reaction, Spring Fawn quickly added, "Don't get me wrong. Red Hawk is a powerful medicine man, but he has a real sense of humor and loves putting something over someone, especially on know-it-all white men. But, no, he's up to serious business with you four. Real serious business." It was obvious we were all relieved.

"That's good," Matt said, "because if he had taken me from Luke for nothing, I'd be major pissed!"

Mid-afternoon of the fourth day of our journey, Red Hawk pointed out what seemed to be a nearly non-existent trail and we drove deep into the Black Hills, stopping at a two-room cabin just at sundown. The trip had been over pretty

rough terrain and travel was slow, almost at a walking pace at times. When we stopped, a woman who was obviously an Indian of fifty or so, came out of the cabin. She greeted us warmly after Red Hawk introduced her as Singing Sparrow, a powerful medicine woman. "She'll be in charge of Mary Kathryn," he told us.

Inside, Singing Sparrow served us cups of steaming, strong coffee. As we drank, Red Hawk told us we'd do a sweat tomorrow after Matt and Luke had found their questing places. "We'll leave about daybreak and explore until each of you sees your place. You'll know it when you see it," he added. "When you do, give me a sign, but say nothing."

Luke

Singing Sparrow had prepared supper for us and, after we had eaten, we found places for our sleeping bags outside, under the stars. Matt and I had had ours zipped together for the entire trip, but I wasn't sure it was ok now since we were about to begin our quest. When I asked Red Hawk, he laughed and said, "Just behave yourselves," and walked away.

Before we went to bed, Matt and I walked under the stars, holding hands. In the clear, clean air, the stars seemed close enough to touch. They looked as if you could reach up and pluck one from the sky. When we stopped and stood looking at the stars, Matt said, "Luke, we need to remember how great just holding hands, holding each other and kissing is. I guess the joy of having sex can make simpler, no, less lustful, ways of making love seem unimportant. It doesn't, does it?"

I answered by taking my Dark Angel in my arms, holding him close, then kissing his wonderful lips tenderly.

We found a grassy spot and lay on our backs, Matt's head resting on my now-bare chest, my arm encircling his as we gazed at the stars overhead. Reluctantly, we finally got up and walked back toward the cabin. Michael and Mary Kathryn had placed their sleeping bags, zipped together, a short distance from ours and were asleep, entwined in each other's arms. As we walked past, Matt said, "Luke, one day we will have beautiful nieces and nephews". I couldn't have agreed more and uttered a silent prayer that their love would last and grow.

The sun had not risen when Red Hawk shook us awake. When we were up, he handed us steaming cups of coffee and what he called Lakota energy bars. The taste was strange, but it seemed to be all we needed for breakfast. When we had eaten, the six of us climbed a rise and greeted the new day as it dawned. As the sun rose, Michael and Mary Kathryn, Matt and I held each other close, knowing we would soon be separated, again, for days, maybe even a week.

After sunrise, we went down the hill to where the sweat, to purify us for what lay ahead, would be held. Red Hawk had long ago dug the fire and stone pits and erected the framework, but insisted, he told us, on removing the cover after each sweat. "So Father Sky can visit this place," he explained. The covering

was not tarps, but buffalo hides which were hanging on a framework in the fresh air and sun. We didn't have to gather stones only take those in the stone pit out, ready for the fire. Michael, Matt and I did that and went to the small stream nearby for water to be used in the ceremony.

We gathered wood for the fire, which Red Hawk started. He had told us where we would find some fallen logs which we cut into lengths and took to the fire pit. Soon the fire was burning well and the logs were becoming burning embers. Red Hawk inspected it carefully, was satisfied that the fire would do well and said, "Ok, now we look for your questing places. Michael, you need to join us."

As we walked through the wilderness, I spied an overhang forming a kind of grotto, its floor covered with leaves and pine needles. Nearby were ferns. As I looked at it, I thought I heard a voice call, "Here, Luke". When that happened, I looked at Red Hawk and Michael. Both were smiling. I nodded. I had found my place. As I turned to leave, it seemed the ferns called out, "Use us". I knew I would cover the leaves and needles with the fern fronds. How did I know? Don't ask me. I just did.

Matt

When we started the walk to find our questing places, I felt very alone, well, maybe not alone, but in solitude. It's hard to explain, I mean I was with people, yet was alone, but not lonely. We walked along a dry streambed for a while, then up a rather large hill. As we started down the other side of the hill, I saw a stream flowing at the bottom of it and, across the stream, a bluff or cliff. Halfway up the bluff I saw an opening, like the entrance to a cave. As soon as I saw it I knew it was my questing place, then realized there was no way to reach it I could see, either from the bottom or the top of the cliff. I looked at Red Hawk and he nodded. We continued walking for perhaps another mile, then returned to the cabin.

When we reached the cabin, the fire had burned down to a huge bed of hot embers. Luke and I placed the rocks in the fire pit and Michael added a large pile of log sections. Then we three covered the lodge with the buffalo skins. That done, Red Hawk motioned for Luke and they walked a short distance and stopped to talk. Red Hawk kept nodding.

They returned and Red Hawk called me to go with him. When we were out of earshot, he asked, "You found your questing place?"

"Well, I'm not sure. There appeared to be a cave halfway up the bluff, but I saw no way to reach it. Yet that seemed to be the place."

"You'll find a way to reach it," Red Hawk said. "When you do, mark your place with the pouches of tobacco Michael will give you. They are the colors of the four directions."

We walked back to the cabin where we ate a hearty meal, Luke's and my last until the quest was over. Red Hawk had insisted we drink nothing except

water after our morning coffee and, in fact, kept insisting we drink more and more. The last time he had handed us water, Luke had said, "Red Hawk, I have drunk so much water my eyeballs are floating".

"Piss and then drink some more," he said.

A couple hours later, Red Hawk came to where Luke and I were sprawled out in the shade of a cottonwood tree, my head resting on my beloved's bare chest. "Time to get washed up for the sweat," he said, pointing to the small stream flowing in front of the waiting sweat lodge. When we came out of the water, Red Hawk handed the three guys a clout and Singing Sparrow handed Mary Kathryn a thin cotton dress.

Since Mary Kathryn was joining us, Singing Sparrow opened the lodge. I had thought Michael would conduct the sweat or be fire and doorkeeper, but Red Hawk said Michael would also need to have the sweat prior to his training so he would conduct the sweat. "Singing Sparrow will handle the door and stones," he said. Seeing the size of the stones, I thought he was nuts, but that's the way it happened. Never underestimate the strength of an Indian, a woman or especially an Indian woman!

As nearly as any sweat is uneventful, this one was. I guess after the excitement of the last two, I expected some wonders, but the only wonder was the wonder of a sweat. When we came out, we went to the small stream and washed and cooled off. When we came out, Red Hawk gave us fresh breech cloths and said, "Luke, I'll lead you to your questing place. Matt, Michael will assist you." With those words, he started walking away, Luke beside him.

When Michael started out, I was sure he was going in the wrong direction, because we had walked out of the camp together in the morning and now we were going in a different direction from Luke and Red Hawk, but I said nothing.

I was surprised when we walked around the foot of a hill and I saw the bluff a short distance away. When we reached the bottom of it, Michael handed me the four pouches, which I tucked into my clout. As I did, Michael laughed and said, "Didn't think you needed any addition down there!" I just ignored him. Michael hugged me to himself and said, "Have a good quest, Big Brother," and turned to go. As he did, I looked at the bluff again and still saw no way to reach the opening twenty or thirty feet above my head.

I was about to go around and climb to the top of the bluff to see if I could reach it from there, when I saw a handhold just above my face. I reached up for it, grasped it and used my arms to pull myself up. Just when I was sure I couldn't make it, my foot found a small, and I mean small, foothold. Each time I reached up, I seemed to find a handhold and then the handholds became footholds as I climbed. But they were small and a few times I thought for sure I was a goner, but I finally made it to the opening. I guess it was a cave mouth although the hole was hardly large enough to be called a cave. In fact, it was so small, I had to pull myself around until I could enter feet first. Before I pulled myself completely

inside, I marked my questing place with the four pouches, using up and down as two directions.

Inside, there was room enough for me to sit, but not stand, and the cave was just deep enough for me to lie down, no more. When I was finally inside, it was almost sundown. I had not been aware before, but the cave opening faced east. I sat in the mouth of the cave, looking out, as the sunset, which I could not see since it was behind me, created ever-changing patterns on the hillside across the stream, painting the trees and rocks first one color, then another. Since I was only seeing the sunset's reflection on the hillside, I thought of Plato's cave.

As darkness fell, the sounds of the night drifted up to my questing place. I didn't think I, and in ordinary circumstances, had ever realized just how alive the night was. As I listened, the moon came up, painting the landscape in silvery light, illuminating the scene before me. I was entranced, so much so I had no idea how long I sat, watching the changing patterns across the stream and on its waters, my thoughts drifting. I thought about the crisis in my relationship with Luke and its healing, about my future and the route Woody and Stinky had urged me to consider, about the family. With these thoughts came a deep sense of thankfulness and gratitude. I thought about Michael and Mary Kathryn who had grown up while I wasn't looking. Then I thought of Luke again.

Sure the past was past, but I was almost in tears when I recalled how close we came to losing each other, and vowed never to let anything come between us again. The more I thought about it, the more I came to realize the sense of desperation Luke had felt. I mean, would my life be worth living without my Yonghon Tongmu? Not that I would ever think of ending my own life, but how empty it would be! I knew Luke loved me, there had never been any question about that since the day I stormed out of his hospital room only to return to the man I loved. At the same time, I guess I never realized the absolute depth of his love until I sat on the river bank and saw there was a depth in him I had not seen or appreciated. My thoughts continued to wander as sleep came over me. When the call of the morning birds woke me, I couldn't recall having drifted off to sleep.

I sat in the entrance of the cave, watching the sunrise, greeting the new day. Then I became very aware of the fact that I needed to piss and was hungry. The former I took care of by kneeling at the cave entrance and pissing over the edge. The latter would go unanswered for... how long? It had been a week for Dad.

I was surprised when I woke up the second day, at least I think it was the second day, to find I wasn't hungry. My sleeping and waking prevented my having any real sense of what day it was. I only knew whether it was morning or evening by the sun. As a result of sleeping and waking, I saw my surroundings at all times of the day and night but, really, I had no concept of time beyond the time of day, and I did know about what time of night it was from the shifting stars.

One night, as I sat watching the moon rise, it seemed to grow in size until it was all I could see. As I stared at it, it slowly changed from a shining orb into a

great silver wolf. It sat on its haunches, watching me as I stared into its eyes. Suddenly, it seemed to spring from the sky straight toward me. Just as I prepared to dodge its attack, I became the wolf and raced through a very strange forest.

The wind whistled through my fur and ears as I ran faster and faster through the moonlit forest. As I ran, my thoughts became those of the wolf. I was the wolf and felt a sense of strength and power I had never known before. Somehow or other I was strong, not just physically, and I was that, but possessing an inner strength, a deep inner power. Through some sense or instinct, I knew it was not power to be used for me, but for others, the power to protect.

As I raced through the forest, I suddenly came upon a clearing, a glade, shimmering in the moonlight. Standing in the glade was an enormous bird, a thunderbird, its feathers golden in the silvery moonlight. As I approached, its golden feathers shifted pattern, looking more and more like a golden fire. I was surprised when the bird turned and looked at me with piercing blue eyes, eyes I knew but did not know. As I gazed into those eyes I was, at first, frightened, but then saw in their depths nothing but love and I felt, even wolf that I was, a sense of caring beyond anything I had ever felt before. I felt great love toward this figure which I found strange, overpowering. As we continued looking at each other, I felt in the core of my being a promise, a promise I couldn't understand, just accept.

I moved closer and, as I did, the bird became a thunderbird of golden flames then it took flight, a stream of flame climbing into the sky. I was still haunted by those blue, blue eyes as I found myself back in my cave. I knew I needed to climb down, which I did and, when I reached the stream, I fell to my knees and started lapping water like a wolf. It was the best water I had ever tasted! When I had satisfied my thirst, I heard Michael's voice. Still on my knees, I looked up and saw him across the stream. Seeing Michael, I opened my mouth to greet him and, instead, uttered a tremendous wolf's howl. Michael smiled and said, "A powerful vision, Silver Wolf".

Michael lent me support as we walked back to the cabin, but neither of us spoke after my howl and his calling me Silver Wolf. As we approached the cabin, I saw the whole family and could smell the fragrance of food cooking. Coming from the other side of the cabin, I saw Luke approaching with Red Hawk. I forgot all about food as the two of us approached each other slowly.

Luke

When Red Hawk left me at my questing place, I raked the leaves and pine needles into a bed, adding a pile to serve as a pillow. Using my knife, I cut fern fronds, covering the bed with their sweet fragrance. That task completed, I sat down and looked around me. This was a beautiful, peaceful place. As I sat still, a deer passed by, completely ignoring my presence. As the day came to an end, I saw patches of the setting sun through the leaves of the trees in front of my place. Night fell and the night sounds started. Somewhere in the distance a wolf or coyote howled. I didn't know when I had been so at peace. The moon rose in

the back of my grotto, casting strange and wonderful shadows in the forest. Night birds were singing as if they knew I was at peace with myself and the universe.

As I sat listening to the night, my thoughts turned to the past few months, my attempted suicide at the falls, my dreams when I was fighting death, discovering Matt's love for me, everything. It was as if I had a movie running in my head. Finally, I recalled my time with Rich. I guess all the time I had really been blaming him for seducing me, "But it takes two," I thought. What had I been really wanting? Sex? Of course, I had been away from Matt for almost four weeks, but it wasn't really sex. I had wanted to hurt Matt, really hurt Matt and I had known how to do it. Never had I doubted his love for me and to appear to have thrown that love away would have hurt more than anything. I knew that because I put myself in Matt's place and knew that if he took his love from me, I would be hurt to the quick.

I felt an overwhelming sense of thankfulness flow over me as I thought of what Taequo had done. He had given me back a life I was throwing away. Finally, I realized that I had rehearsed the past without blaming myself or anyone. I had forgiven myself, healed by the love of those who cared for me, including Taequo and Red Hawk who had not known me. It was over and I was at peace. The next thing I knew, I was waking up from a deep, healing sleep.

It was still night, or maybe it was the next night, I didn't know. I was very thirsty and hungry. I didn't know whether I could endure the whole quest if the pangs of hunger and thirst continued. As if to answer me, I remembered the sweat lodge and the prayer for endurance. I knew that not only must I endure, but also that I could. Again I fell asleep.

When I awoke, the sun was bright and the forest alive with day creatures. I sat up, looking around me, when a butterfly came and sat on my knee. I knew his life was short compared to mine and that he was, even in that short life, giving the world great beauty even if no human being saw it. I sensed what Red Hawk meant when he spoke of all creation as his brothers and sisters. How fortunate I was to have a longer life to give beauty to the world!

In what I think was mid-afternoon, the buzz of unseen insects made me very sleepy and I lay back on the ferns, enjoying their scent, and fell asleep. I dreamed of Matt who, like the butterfly, gave the world great beauty. As I dreamed, I was also thinking, "The butterfly's life is short, but regardless of how long mine may be, it will be too short for me and my love". Suddenly, I was walking through the forest with Matt. We were holding hands and both of us, I knew, felt as though we were not only at one with each other but also with the whole of creation. We were singing as we walked in the sunlight, Matt's black, black hair shining as it blew in the breeze.

When the dream ended, I wasn't sure where I was at first, you know, that waking up in a strange place and not remembering how you got there? I tried to get myself oriented but, even when I remembered where I was, the scene before me didn't look right. It was dark, black, and strange shapes were moving about. I don't know how I knew, but I knew they were the bad spirits coming for me. Just

before I panicked, I remembered that I was weak when I was thinking about myself and not others. I forced my thoughts to the Fellowship. I wondered what they were doing. I guess I prayed because I thought of each in turn and what they were doing, and of their struggles. Finally, my mind became fixed on Jake, Danny and Buddy. I wanted to give the three of them some of the peace and happiness I had felt earlier and, as I had that thought, I felt it again. I looked up and the forest was shimmering in the bright moonlight as it should have been.

Time passed, I had no concept of days or nights, or of time, beyond what I could tell from the sun and moon. I was no longer hungry or thirsty. About noon of one day, I was sitting, looking out from my place when, out of a perfectly clear sky, a great thunderbolt crashed through the forest, shaking the ground on which I was sitting. A second and a third crashed, then a bolt of lightning struck the ground before me. I was blinded by the flash but, when I could see again, a giant bird was standing before my grotto, staring at me, a thunderbird. As it stood, I got up and walked toward it. As I approached, I felt a tingling all over my body. When I was only a few feet from it, there was a mighty crash of thunder and a lightning bolt struck me. I was knocked down and, as I got up, I saw that I had become a giant thunderbird. I had become the thunderbird, because he was no longer present. I flapped my wings and rose into the air. My feathers became flames and I was a flaming bird screaming through the air. My cries were thunder, and lightning was coming from my wing-tips as I flew.

I was ecstatic at being able to fly and flew higher and higher in the sky. I felt the power in my wings and knew the power of my thunder cry and of the flashes of lightning coming from my wings. As I flew, I looked at the sky and saw that it was clear except where I was flying. I was surrounded by great thunderclouds, rolling and whirling in the sky. I flew and flew and flew, feeling at one with the sky and the earth below. Before I realized it, I had flown into the night. I looked down and, far below, saw a great silver wolf racing through the forest. I flew over him, watching the beauty of his sleek body and its fluid movement. I knew I was, in some way, bound to the wolf, but I was not sure how. Ahead, I spied a clearing in the forest. The wolf was headed for it, still running like the wind. I shot out of the sky and, just before the wolf entered the clearing, landed in its center. When the wolf came into the clearing, he stopped and I turned and looked at him, looking directly into his eyes as he looked into mine. I looked into beautiful, black almond eyes. They were very strange eyes for a wolf, but in them I saw and felt an overwhelming love and an unbreakable bond. Without being aware of what was happening, my feathers became flame and I shot into the sky then, without warning, I was no longer a bird. I was back in my questing place, squatting as if I were a bird, when I saw Red Hawk and heard his voice. I called out to him but, instead of calling his name, the call was a great thunder clap.

I stood up and started walking toward Red Hawk, but soon realized I was very weak and stopped. Red Hawk came, put my arm around his shoulders and gave me a flask of water which I drank eagerly. We then walked back toward the cabin. As we rounded the cabin, I saw Matt, being supported by Michael. Both

Red Hawk and Michael took our arms from their shoulders, and Matt and I walked toward each other slowly. When we met, we embraced, looking into each other's eyes, and I recognized those black almond eyes, I didn't know how I could have forgotten, the eyes I had seen in my vision were Matt's, as, slowly, our lips met. As the kiss, tender, loving, soft, gentle, went on, I swore I would never, ever forget how special a kiss from my Matt was! As we broke our kiss, I looked into those black almond eyes and said, "I love you. I love you Silver Wolf!"

Matt smiled, his black eyes sparkling, and said, "And I love you Fire Thunderbird!" and our lips met again.

Later both of us wondered how we knew the other's new Lakota name.

Matt

When Luke and I broke our kiss, I saw our parents and Taequo had arrived. There were hugs all around and, as I hugged Mom, she said, "Matt, you stink!" Luke and I were still dressed in the clouts we had worn for four days during our quest, Red Hawk had told me our quest had lasted four days, and after that long without a bath, no wonder even a mother would think her son a little rank. Luke must have gotten the message as well, because he grabbed my hand and we raced toward the stream, tossing the clouts to the wind as we leaped into the shallow water. Michael and Mary Kathryn joined us, cloutless and dressless, I am sure to Jens displeasure, but he said nothing.

As we frolicked, a bit tamer than usual because Luke and I had, after all, done a four-day fast, Taequo brought us a mixture of some kind to use as soap. It smelled fantastic and made my skin feel tingly and clean, wonderfully clean. When we started out of the water, I saw Dad and Red Hawk had joined Taequo, waiting for us on the bank. As Luke stepped out of the water, Taequo handed him a beautiful pair of leggings, a fresh breech cloth and moccasins. Before he took them, Luke embraced Taequo in a bear hug.

As I came out of the stream, Dad hugged me and said, with tears in his eyes, "Son, I never dared dream my son would make a vision quest. You have honored me deeply." He hugged me again and gave me leggings, a breech cloth and moccasins. David gave Michael his Lakota dress and Gabrielle gave Mary Kathryn a soft, white buckskin fringed dress.

Red Hawk looked at Luke and Michael, smiled and said, "Fire Thunderbird and Golden Eagle, two blond-headed Lakota warriors, more Lakota than many full-bloods".

Luke and I, Michael and Mary Kathryn, walked, arm in arm, to the feast table which had been laid out. As we reached it, Red Hawk, Singing Sparrow and Dad started a Lakota chant to Taequo's drumbeat. When they had finished, Red Hawk handed us steaming bowls of broth. "This will get your stomachs used to food again," he said. "The rest of you, dig in."

The broth tasted very good and soon Red Hawk bid us eat. We ate sparingly at first, still giving our stomachs a chance to adjust to having food inside, but then....

The feasting lasted well into the night. The family had always enjoyed being together and eating together, well, except for the time Jens found out about Luke and me, but I couldn't remember a time when we enjoyed each other's company more, when we were all so happy and showing affection so freely, even Jens. Shortly after midnight, I guess, Red Hawk called us all into a circle. Taequo joined him in the center and Red Hawk made a brief, but moving, speech about the kind of man Taequo was, mentioning he had received eagle feathers for brave and kind deeds in the past. Then he presented him with another "in recognition of what he has done for Fire Thunderbird, the Family and the world, by saving his life". I wept, as did Luke.

Having received the feather, Taequo asked Singing Sparrow to speak of Mary Kathryn's journey. In a few brief words, I liked that about Indian speeches!, she said Mary Kathryn was now fully a woman and ready to take on the privileges and responsibilities of womanhood. "She is a fine spirit woman," she concluded as she placed a feather in Mary Kathryn's hair, the tail feather of a red hawk. As she did, she called her by her new Lakota name, Daughter of the Dawn.

We all hugged Mary Kathryn and then Taequo spoke. "Those who go on a vision quest are careful to whom they reveal their vision. Tonight, I am not sure Silver Wolf and Fire Thunderbird could tell us of theirs if they tried. It is up to Golden Eagle and Red Hawk to tell us of our brothers' journeys." I am sure the two did a better job than Luke and I could have done and, when they finished, they handed us each a medicine bag which we hung around our necks.

It was nearing dawn when people started drifting away. David and Margaret were the first to go; I guess the trip had been tiring for her especially. Yong Jin and Greywolf left just after David and Margaret, then Red Hawk and Singing Sparrow, leaving only Jens and Gabrielle and the Gang of Four. Michael and Mary Kathryn were sitting across the campfire from Luke and me, cuddling and exchanging kisses from time to time, as did Luke and I. Finally, Michael stood, extended his hand to Mary Kathryn and helped her to her feet. "Look at Dad," Luke whispered. Jens was obviously struggling with himself as the two walked toward their sleeping bag, just out of the firelight. Finally, Jens extended his hand to Gabrielle and they went to their sleeping bag, away from Michael's and Mary Kathryn's, mine and Luke's. As they left, Luke whispered, "Silver Wolf, how would you like to make mad passionate love to a fire thunderbird?" I grinned my answer as I grabbed his hand and we raced into the night.

When we reached our sleeping bag, Luke flopped down on it, pulling me on top of himself. I thought I could learn to like leggings and a breech cloth! Little more than a flick of the wrist and only the leggings remain, and they interfere with nothing! Since Luke and I had just come off a four-day fast, our love-making was, of necessity, slow and easy, but that did not make it less than perfect, perfectly

wonderful. Finally, two Lakota warriors, one light, the other dark, lay in the moonlight, bodies entwined. "Goodnight, Silver Wolf," Luke whispered.

"Goodnight, Fire Thunderbird." At peace with ourselves, each other and our world, we slept.

Michael

Mary Kathryn and I had been separated while Matt and Luke were on their quest, she with Singing Sparrow and I with Red Hawk. I was very surprised when, on the fourth day of their quest, I found myself watching Matt's vision. Later, when I told Red Hawk, he asked what I had expected. "You are Matt's protector during his quest as I am Luke's. What did you see?" I told him of Matt's vision and he told me of Luke's.

I was surprised that I had witnessed Matt's vision, but that was not my biggest surprise. When I saw Mary Kathryn as I brought Matt back from his quest, she had changed. I couldn't tell you how she had changed, beyond saying she was a woman, and, as nearly as she would ever belong to any one, she was my woman.

After the feast, we walked to our sleeping bag. When we reached it, I undressed my beautiful, wonderful wild woman, Daughter of the Dawn, and kissed her breasts, her hair, her eyes. As I did, she reached down and removed my breech cloth, allowing my manhood to stand straight and hard before me. As we stood in the moonlight, our lips joined, her hand worked miracles for me as my finger did, I'm sure, for her. When my climax came, it brought me to my knees and Mary Kathryn knelt before me, joining her lips to mine as another orgasm shook her body. My passion spent, we lay in each other's arms, talking in the night. I realized I was aroused again and said to my woman, "Dawn's Child, this is the perfect time and place..." I didn't finish the sentence because she covered my mouth with her hand.

"Michael, this may seem to be the time, but it's not, unless you want to be a father before you are seventeen, and I think we both know it is not really the place. You know that, don't you?" Of course I did. Then, in a joking mood, she said, "Besides, after what happened a few minutes ago, I doubt that you are up to it".

"The hell you say," I replied as I placed her hand on my rock hard manhood. Mary Kathryn actually bent down and kissed its head and said, "Lover, I think this is where we stop for the night". Well, it didn't actually work out that way and the eruption that covered her hand proved she was wrong about what I was able to do.

When we had rested from our love-making, how the hell we stopped when we did, I'll never know, but I could tell you one thing: that stopping at the brink had got to stop! I took Mary Kathryn in my arms and carried her to the stream where we frolicked in the moonlight, enjoying being kids.

Finally, we walked back to our sleeping bag, dried each other and lay in each other's arms as we drifted off to sleep.

Sometime before dawn, I was shaken awake by Red Hawk. He put his finger to his lips, signaling me to be quiet, then motioned for me to come with him. I crawled out of the sleeping bag, got dressed and followed him back to the campfire which had burned very low. Matt and Luke were standing by the fire, dressed as I, as Lakota. "Do you know the Lakota ceremony for making relatives?" Red Hawk asked. All three of us nodded. "Several years ago, eight sun dancers were given HIV when they were pierced with the knife which had pierced an HIV+ dancer. Since that time, the mixing of blood has just about become unknown," he said. "But, if you trust me, I assure you that I'm clean and I know you three are."

"Of course we trust you," Luke said.

Red Hawk took his knife from his belt, held it over the embers of the campfire until it was almost red hot, then waved it in the air to cool it. That done, he pricked his wrist, then asked that I hold out my arm, which he also pricked. As tiny drops of blood appeared on our wrists, he bound the two together and said, "Michael, I am honored to make you my relative, my son". He then repeated his action with Luke and Matt. When he had finished, he said, "You are now my relatives and relatives of all the Lakota. We are honored and I am sure you will honor your relatives. Now get back to sleep. You have a long journey ahead of you."

When daylight came, I awoke and thought that it had been a dream, until I looked at my wrist and saw the mark of our mixed blood. I was very proud to be a relative of Red Hawk.

I kissed Mary Kathryn awake and we walked toward the table where there was hot coffee and, soon, breakfast. As we approached, Matt and Luke looked at me and turned their arms so I could see the marks on their wrists. I nodded and showed them mine.

Part Fifty-six

Matt

After a very early breakfast, the parents left, driving their rented four-wheel-drive back to the airport for the flight home. Taequo was to have gone with them, but Red Hawk asked that he wait a day. The Gang of Four said goodbyes to Red Hawk, Taequo and Singing Sparrow, not without some tears, and started the trip home.

We had decided we would drive straight through, this time using the interstate highways and stopping only for food and gas, and maybe toilets, but bushes would do. We tried to have two sleeping, one driving and one navigating. Just after dark, Michael and Mary Kathryn were asleep, Luke was driving and I was navigating. I placed my hand on Luke's thigh and asked, "Luke, do you remember you once asked me to marry you?"

"How could I ever forget your answer?" he smiled. "I meant it then and, if you like, I'll ask you again. Matt, will you marry me?"

"Luke, lots in our life has changed. In the years to come, there will be other changes, we both know that. But one thing that will never change is my answer. Of course I will marry you."

"Then why the question?"

"Of course I know it can't be official and legal, in the church and all that, but a commitment ceremony would mean the same thing for us, right?"

"Right. Are you thinking what I think you're thinking?"

"That the time has come?"

"Yea."

"Then I'm thinking what you think I'm thinking." Luke took his eyes off the road for a minute as he turned and smiled at me. It was hard, but we did manage to get in a kiss before he had to pay attention to his driving. As we drove into the night, we talked about what we wanted and when. Finally we decided we'd ask the whole gang to postpone going to Ohio until we could be married, as married as we could be. "Luke, since there's nothing legal or official about what we want to do, let's ask Michael to do the ceremony," I said, after we had talked at length.

"Exactly what I was thinking, Sarang Hanun Pomul."

When I took over as driver, Michael was navigator and Luke was to get some sleep. He got in the back seat and said, "Matt, talk to Michael," and the next minute was asleep.

"Michael, Luke and I have been talking and have made a decision. You know we were going to have a commitment ceremony when the time was right, and we've decided the time is now. That means we will have to postpone the trip to Ohio a week, I think, but we both feel we need to have those who have loved

and supported us through this hard time be a part of our really being, well, married, committed, whatever it might be called, and we'd like you to do it."

"I've no objection to postponing the trip. In fact, I think your having your ceremony is an excellent idea. It's a great idea," Michael said, "and I'd love to do it, but I mean..."

"Look, Michael, you can't do a wedding because you're not a priest. But what difference does that make? We can't have a legal wedding or an official commitment ceremony, so why can't you do it? Maybe, I hope and pray, by the time you are a priest, or even before, committed couples can have their union blessed. When that happens, Luke and I will be first in line to have you bless our union. But I am sure it will be no more real to us than a ceremony you do for us now. After all, as even Fr. Tom says, the couple marry each other. The only thing the church does is bless the marriage and the people witness the commitment. Certainly we want all our family and friends to witness our public vows, and I bet Fr. Tom can figure out a way to bless it one way or another."

"Well, you're right about all that," Michael said. "And of course I will, and will be damn honored to do so, but I'll have to have help putting it together."

"I'm pretty sure I learned enough at Sewanee this summer that Luke and I can put a ceremony together, and I'm sure Fr. Tom will help if we need it. Thanks, Li'l Bro."

"Thank you, Big Bro."

I realized I was getting very sleepy and we stopped so Mary Kathryn could replace Michael and he me.

The two asleep, two awake, worked pretty well for twelve hours, but soon all four of us found ourselves getting sleepy as soon as we started driving or navigating. Luke finally said, "Look, we'd like to get home, right? Then we'd better stop before someone has to pull our guts off a telephone pole." We found a place to camp, got out our sleeping bags and slept for eight hours then, refreshed, finished the trip home.

When we got to my place, Dad met us at the door. "I have some sad/happy news," he said. "Shortly after you left, Red Hawk told Taequo his work was done, he was tired, and that it was a good day to die. 'I now have sons to carry on, so I'm finished,' were his last words. Having said that, he just sat down and died. Taequo said it was the way he went to sleep, he announced it and then did it. Taequo and Singing Sparrow wrapped him in a buffalo hide, erected a scaffold and placed his body on it, the Lakota way of caring for their dead. Taequo said he knew he was probably a strange one to do it but, in addition to the Lakota ceremony, he read the service for the dead from Red Hawk's Book of Common Prayer. Sad news because Red Hawk was such a beloved friend, but happy news because he did what few men are able to do: he finished his work."

Dad was right. It was sad/happy news. Sad for us, but happy for a man who had lived a great life and was now among the spirits he knew, and who knew him so well.

Michael

When we got back from the Black Hills we were all exhausted and, as soon as we were home, fell into bed. I finally woke up about eleven and called Bill. He told me the whole Fellowship was back in town. "I didn't expect them until today," I said.

Bill said all had gotten back sometime Friday. "Jacob is with me, and Paula and Larry got back a day early as well."

"How about getting together this afternoon? Maybe even spend the night. I'll get everyone here rounded up and we'll meet about 1:30 or 2:00. Unless I hear otherwise, I'll assume you managed to get the others," I said.

"Great idea! We'll get food for tonight and see about staying all night at the falls. I'll call you back in half an hour."

When I called Mary Kathryn, she said, "Good, I wondered when we could get together to talk about the summer, you know, the old first essay 'What I Did on My Summer Vacation', except what we really did, not some teacher junk. Meet you at the falls in half an hour, Sweetheart."

"Sweetheart? Is that the best you can do for the light of your life, the meaning of your universe, the father of your unborn children?"

"Michael Golden Eagle Andrews, I would think that having Daughter of the Dawn call you sweetheart would be enough to keep you going for days!"

"Yea, but I've got a whole lifetime ahead of me!"

"Well, Golden Eagle, fearless Lakota warrior and medicine man, Daughter of the Dawn will await your coming at the sacred falls, in humility."

"That's more like it," I laughed.

"And if your golden eagle butt is not there in thirty minutes, Daughter of the Dawn will have a handful of golden eagle feathers to give out to the men who come courting her!" Mary Kathryn laughed. Then, on a serious note, she said, "It's hard to believe the summer is almost over, and even harder to believe all that's happened. I'll take care of Luke, you call Matt."

"You mean they're not together?"

"No, they stayed here last night. Don't think they would have known where they were if they slept like I did," she laughed. "They had breakfast with Mom and Dad, then went to Matt's place. They woke me up talking to Mom and Dad, then I heard them leave saying they were going to Matt's. When I got up, Luke was flaked out on his bed, alone, asleep. Not sure what's going on."

As soon as Bill called and said the rest were on their way, I started walking to the falls. I saw Matt outside his house and yelled for him to wait up. He had not unpacked the four-wheel-drive, so we grabbed blankets out of it and put them in the Jeep and drove to the falls. Luke and Mary Kathryn were already

there. I thought Mary Kathryn and I were experts at the kissing business, but Matt and Luke put us to shame as soon as Matt arrived.

"What was going on this morning?" Mary Kathryn asked. "You two kept waking me up with your coming and going."

"We talked to our parents about our ceremony," Matt said.

"Yea, and both sets thought it was a great idea," Luke added.

"So why were you in bed by yourself, Brother of Mine?"

"I needed sleep," Luke laughed.

The four of us got the blankets out of the Jeep, took them to the falls and spread them on the beach. Just as we finished, Larry and Eugene showed up. There were a lot of hugs all around. It was good to see them again. Both looked great!

Bill and Linda, Jacob and Paula came together. When they arrived, the first thing I noticed was that Jacob had a black eye and cut lip. Before anyone else could say anything, Mary Kathryn ran to him and asked, "What happened?"

Jacob's Story

"It's kinda a long story." Everyone sat down and Paula pulled me to herself. I sat leaning against her legs, beautiful legs, and she put her arms around me. I thought I could get through the ordeal of telling my story without crying but, as soon as I looked around and saw the concern on the faces of the people I knew and loved, the tears gushed. Paula hugged me tightly, rocked me in her arms and kissed the top of my head. Gradually I gained control and started the story of my summer.

"Well, it started soon after I got to Lexington. I had always known Dad and Mom, both, were real redneck bigots, but I had thought my aunt was different. She had always seemed like a caring person. Man, was I ever wrong! She started when she learned Eugene was a friend. At first she claimed to have sympathy for him, but soon she started referring to him as 'that fag friend of yours'. Each time she did, I raised an objection until I realized I was wasting my breath. And it was not just gays, you name any group and she had a put-down name for them."

"You all know that I had started seeing the rabbi. I was really enjoying our conversations, especially since it gave me insight into my woman." I turned and looked at my dark beauty and she kissed me ever so gently. "God, I love you, Paula," I whispered, then looked at the Fellowship. There were eight smiling faces looking back. "Anyway, I was careful to hide my trips to the temple because I knew I'd catch hell if my aunt found out. Even at that, the house was so filled with hate, my aunt and her husband even hated each other, at least they were constantly shouting insults at each other, that I looked forward to getting to work. Weekends, I pretended I was going out with the guys so I could go to the temple. Then, to get away from it all, I mostly hid in the mall Saturday and Sunday."

"In addition to wanting to get to work to get away, I was learning to love it. I worked a lot of overtime, which not only added to the paycheck but kept me away from that hate-filled house. The construction boss kinda took me under his wing and had me doing more and more involved jobs. He thought I was a quick learner and I guess I was, because I was doing just about any job he had. Halfway through the summer, I was even pretty good at reading blueprints, often picking up mistakes the workers were making. The boss started asking me to eat lunch with him and, as we ate, posed problems for me to solve. I loved it. One day he said, 'Jacob, you definitely have a knack for this business. Get yourself an education and you definitely have a job with this company if you want it. I was excited. When I told my aunt and uncle, their reaction was not what I expected. My uncle said, 'Yea, fill your head with crap and tell you how good you are so he can get more work for less pay. My drinking buddy Charlie works there and knows all the tricks.' Well, he was wrong and I knew it because, even though I was temporary summer help, the more I took on, the more I earned, I was given two raises, unheard -of for summer help. I definitely decided I was going into some part of the construction business, engineering or maybe just learning the trade and eventually getting a company of my own."

"Anyway, last week was really terrible. Seems a Mexican was made my uncle's boss and, even though he was at least twice as qualified as my uncle, the shit really hit the fan big time. Then, to make matters worse, Charlie, my uncle's drinking buddy, was fired. He was caught stealing from the job. He saw me come out of the temple Friday night and told my uncle I was associating with 'them Christ-killing Jew owners of the construction company'."

"I had gone to the ice cream parlor with a friend I met at the temple and when I got back, both my aunt and her husband lit into me about associating with money-grabbing, Christ-killing Jews. 'Charlie saw you so you can't deny it. He says you're becoming a sneaking, money-mad Jew,' he shouted at me. He and my aunt were both screaming at the top of their lungs. They were shouting at me and, before I realized it, I blew up, my red hair had had it, and told them I was going to the temple because I was in love with a Jewish girl that I hoped would one day be my wife."

"'You're changing into a Jew?' my aunt screamed."

"'Not sure,' I told her the truth, 'but I am going to temple and practicing Judaism, at least to some extent.' Well, when I said that, it was dear that things were about to get violent as my uncle jumped out of his chair and headed toward me and my aunt threw the book she was reading at me, I think it might have been her Bible, how's that for irony? Anyway, I left the room and since I had already packed to leave Saturday morning, this morning, I just got my things and started out the door. My uncle tried to stop me, shouting about my having been sucked in by a 'hot little Jew pussy'. You would have been proud of me. I held my temper long enough to say, 'No, I think I've been sucked in by God,' and left."

"I had no place to go and no way home, but I did have money, the boss had given me a cash bonus when I left work, so I thought I'd just catch a bus, but

learned I'd have to wait several hours for one. I thought about a taxi but, on the off-chance Larry was still around, I called the Greentrees'. Mr. Greentree said that Eugene had come over for dinner and the two had left for Concord about half an hour before. 'Anything I can do?' he asked. I started to say no, but my anger and hurt got the better of me and I started crying like a baby. See what you guys have done to me?" I half laughed, but it was true. I had learned from this bunch that tears are ok. "I told him what had happened and he asked where I was, and was there in fifteen minutes."

"He said, 'Jacob, you can spend the night at our place, or I'll take you home'."

"It's late...' I started, but he stopped me."

"Nonsense!' he said. 'I think probably the only place for you tonight is home.' Little did he know, little did I know."

"On the drive home, I talked about why I had been going to temple and what I had found there, something I had never had before, faith, I guess, spirituality, you guys know what I mean." When I looked up, there were eight people nodding. "I then told him what living in my aunt's house had been like and could see he was getting upset, so I changed the subject and talked about work. I could be enthusiastic about that!"

"When we got to my place, he came inside with me and, as soon as we were inside, I knew something was up. I introduced him and Dad said, 'I guess you're one of those damn Jews who has been screwing with my son's head'."

"I told Dad he had just offered to bring me home. 'That's all.' Then I told Mr. Greentree I thought he better go. He asked if I was sure, and I just nodded."

"Call me if you need me,' he said, hugged me and left."

"He was barely out the door before Dad started. My aunt had called him about my going to the temple. 'And just what's that all about?' he demanded. I told him I was in love with a Jewish woman and had wanted to learn about her religion since it was important to her. 'Is that all? I mean are you just doing this so you can get some pussy, some Jewish pussy?'"

"I was livid! 'Hell no, that's not what I'm about! I love the woman. There has never been any religion in this house unless you count bigotry and prejudice, and I have seen what their religion means to my friends and to the woman I love. I want some of what they have. Since I expect to marry her one day, if she will have me, I may or may not convert to Judaism formally, but I sure as hell intend to attend temple!' I could see Dad was really getting wound up."

"He cussed and swore, screamed and yelled about my letting a little piece of hot Jewish pussy screw up my brains. Finally I had all I could and would take. 'Don't you dare say another word against Paula,' I screamed. 'We have not had sex and she's a hell of a lot more to me than some hot pussy as you put it. Can't you get that through you thick skull? I love the woman and intend to spend every minute I can letting her know it and hoping she loves me!' Dad really got livid

then and he and Mom were both shouting and cursing and I could see this was going nowhere. They were saying all sorts of things about Paula and how she'd used her body to 'fuck my mind' to make a Jew out of me. 'A hot kosher pussy is turning you into a damn money-grabbing, Christ-killing Jew,' Dad shouted. That did it. I kept control enough to say, quietly, 'If you've finished, I'm going to bed,' and turned to walk away."

"Hell no, not here you're not, unless you promise me here and now you'll forget this Jewish pussy that's got control of you! That did it!"

"I'll see you burn in hell first,' I exploded. When I said that, Dad hit me, twice, in the face."

"Get your Jew-pussy-loving ass out of this house and don't expect to darken my door again until you have your head on straight.' He had knocked me to the floor, so I crawled away from him, grabbed my bag and ran."

"See, guys," I managed a weak smile, "being gay is not the only thing that can make your ever-loving parents turn on you. Dad and I have had fights before, but he hasn't hit me since I told him I'd kill him if he ever beat me again, after he beat me with the buckle end of his belt the day after I turned sixteen, but nothing like this. I knew he meant what he said. I think I might have been able to defend myself had he tried to beat me, but what was the point? If I won I was out and if I lost, I was beaten and still out. For the second time in one day, I was on the street with no place to go. I didn't think Paula was home yet, so I called Bill and he came and got me."

"I told him what had happened on the way to his place and, when we got there, he told his parents I would be staying as long as I needed, but didn't say why. I was surprised when both said, 'Sure' without asking why. They said it because they trust and respect Bill, Linda, you got yourself a good man, and because they are caring people. But I didn't want them to wonder why I was on the street, so I told them and we sat and talked well after midnight. When I finished, Bill's dad said, 'Jacob, you are a friend of Bill's, that's all we needed to know. What you need to know is you have a home here as long as you want or need it.' He then hugged me the way I had always wished my dad had, but never did. And that's what happened on my summer vacation."

When I had finished, I felt a huge load fall off of me. Paula held me close and I turned and kissed her. "Jacob's got a home as long as he wants it," Bill said. "I talked to my dad while Mom took care of Jacob's eye and he was horrified that anyone would abandon a son, and I learned he cared a lot more for me than I had ever thought. I was kinda ashamed of not seeing it before, and said that."

Bill added, "He said, 'Bill, I guess I should have told you more often.' I guess I'll have to rethink his being a hypocrite, even if he does see church as a way to getting business. And I welcome having a brother!" Of course, the end of my story was greeted with hugs from the Fellowship and I knew, suddenly, they were all my family, and what a family they were!

Paula's Story

I realized everyone was looking at me after Jacob had finished, so I guess they were waiting for my reaction and/or the story of my summer. "I was really sorry that Jacob didn't call me last night. I wasn't supposed to get home until today, but I came home early. I guess I got home about the same time Jacob was going to Bill's, but I thought he would be in Lexington and went to bed without calling. I came home a day early because I was finished with my work and was fed up with fighting off a guy."

"I loved working with the kids and music therapy. I definitely want to go into that kind of work. All in all, it was a good summer. I wasn't too busy so there was time for swimming, thinking and writing. In fact, there was too much free time because, when I was not busy, all I thought about was the redhead I had fallen in love with and missed like crazy. I called as often as I could and, when I did, we talked for hours it seemed, but it was not like having him near me. You know the lines:

'More than you'll ever know my arms long to hold you so my life will be in your keeping Walking, sleeping, laughing, weeping.'

"Anyway, except for missing Jacob, and all of you, of course, it was a good summer with only one fly in the ointment. A fly named Nathan Shapiro from Brooklyn. Nathan was a counselor and a nice enough fellow, good looking, damn good looking, rich as all get out, what I had always heard people call 'a Jewish mother's dream for a son-in-law'. He was going into pre-med next year at Harvard. I mean, he was the very stereotype of what Jewish mothers are supposed to want for their daughters. To be honest, he was an absolute dream of a guy, except he wasn't Jacob. He came on to me big time the first night at the opening dance. I let him know right away that I was taken, but he just wouldn't stop. In fact, he got worse."

"One night, as I was walking back from a staff meeting with him, he started really getting obnoxious, trying to kiss me. He backed off when I slapped him a good one and asked him what part of no he didn't understand. For the next couple weeks, he was extremely nice and I found I was enjoying being with him. When I told him I enjoyed being friends, he smiled and said, 'If that's all you're offering, I guess I'll have to make do with it'. I told him I thought friendship was a very precious thing and he said he guessed it was if that's all you could get."

"I thought that had settled things, but the night before the closing of camp, there was a variety show. Nathan and I had coached two groups of kids, mine in music, his in gymnastics, who were in it. Before the show he asked, 'A kiss for good luck?' and I had kissed him on the cheek. He laughed and said luck required a real kiss and grabbed me and kissed me hard on the mouth. I guess, since he had been so nice recently, I thought he was just playing. The show went very well and our two groups were especially good. Afterwards, Nathan said he had managed to get the night off and thought we should celebrate. 'How about we go to the lake and watch the moonlight?' I should have known better, but he had done a good job and my kids had done a good job, so I thought, 'Why not?'"

"When we got to the lake, he opened a bottle of wine he had brought and, after we had a glass, he started telling me how much he loved me as he poured himself a second. 'I fell in love with you the minute I saw you,' he said."

"'I'm sorry,' I replied. 'You are a dream guy, good looking and everything any girl might want in a man,' I said, honestly."

"He poured me a second glass and a third or fourth one for himself and said, 'If I'm everything any girl might want in a man, why are you holding me off?'"

"'Because I am not any girl, I'm Paula Wright and I have the love of my life already. You have everything I want in a man except for one very important thing. You're not Jacob.' Suddenly he became very angry and started getting rough with me. He held my arms to the ground, crawled on top of me and started kissing me hard as he said, 'I am going to prove I am more of a man than this Jacob fellow'. I was frightened because he seemed determined to, well, have sex with me. I kned him in the balls and he rolled off me, clutching his crotch. I got up and ran."

"I wasn't sure what I should do. I didn't want anything terrible to happen to him, I mean I had gone to the lake with him and he had given enough indications of what he was after, but I wanted him to know that no meant no. Finally I went to the head counselor and told her what had happened. She said I wasn't the first and that she knew that Nathan's family had enough influence to cover up anything he did, and would. 'I'll report this to the camp director tomorrow, but I don't think anything will be done.'"

"'Well, I don't like the idea of being around, even if he seems to behave himself,' I said."

"The head counselor said, 'I don't blame you. Why don't you leave tomorrow? You've finished your work, so be ready to leave right after breakfast. I'll see the director tonight and get you a plane home as soon as possible tomorrow.' So, all in all, it was an uneventful summer except for Nathan. When I was ready to get on the plane, the director gave me a note of apology from Nathan. Doubt that he learned his lesson, since his parents always bail him out, but maybe he did." Jacob held me close and kissed me gently, and I felt loved and protected, certainly by my red-headed man but also by those surrounding me in this special place.

Larry's Story

Everyone was silent for a while after Paula finished, kinda honoring her and her story, I guess. When I looked up, Gene was smiling at me and I thought, "You're right, time for an upbeat story".

"Well, I got home a day early, not because I had any trouble, actually it was the opposite. Shortly after the McBride mess was over, I urged Eugene to go to band camp to get away, and our therapist thought it was a good idea. Besides, I had a lot of work to do and would see little of Gene. Jonathan, Mr. Greentree,

decided I should learn as much as possible, so he laid out several projects, one being a pictorial on Concord and the surrounding countryside. I spent days videoing all over the town and county. When we got it edited, it was very good, even if I do say so myself...."

"It's damn good," Eugene interjected.

"And you, of course, are entirely objective," Mary Kathryn laughed.

"When it was finished, we selected music for the background since that was to be it, pictures and music. Matt, before it's broadcast, you'll have to approve since all we used were excerpts from 'The Family' and 'Yonghon Tongmu' and, again, I am very pleased with it and so was Jonathan. We finished yesterday afternoon and he said, 'Larry, you have done a magnificent job this summer, with everything, and this is an excellent piece of work. I know you are missing Eugene like crazy. Why don't you call him and tell him you're ready to go home? Have him come over and we'll have dinner, a kind of celebration of this work and the summer, and then you two go home.' Needless to say, I didn't have to be told twice and Eugene must have broken every speed limit to get over so quickly. We had a wonderful dinner with the Greentrees and left about eleven last night."

"I learned two important things this summer. The first is that I am headed in the right direction. I even loved the scut work involved in getting productions together. The second is that I love kids. Every minute I spent with Jon, the Greentrees' son, was a perfect delight. I mentioned that to Laura, Mrs. Greentree, early on, and she said that there were lots of ways I could be involved with kids, and then floored me. She said, 'And if you and Eugene get settled in good jobs and a stable home, there's no reason you can't have kids. Lots of gay couples adopt. It's not easy, but it can be done.' Gene and I have done a lot of talking about that... a lot."

Eugene's Story

"You better believe Lar and I have talked a lot about having kids. I mean, when you start thinking about that, you kinda go beyond teenage romance and that sort of thing, not that we haven't gone beyond it in other ways, but the idea of having a family... Well, he really flipped me out when he first mentioned it. I know it seems a long time in the future, but it's not really."

"Anyway, after the trial I kept seeing the therapist with Lar and, when Lar suggested I get away and go to band camp, she thought it was a good idea. I wasn't sure. I was still pretty much an emotional wreck, at least on the inside, after the trial and, as if you didn't know, I didn't want to leave Lar. Of course, he pointed out he would be busy and I needed to be busy too. I'm glad he insisted I go. The camp was great! I learned so much. Of course, the fact that there were tapes shown of the concert, that were used as an example of how things should be, didn't boost my ego, NOT! That's about it, except to say that when Lar called and said he was ready to come home, I was more than ready to get him. I don't

know about the rest of you, but absence does make the heart grow fonder, but I think there are better ways!"

As I finished, Lar pulled me back against himself and kissed me big time, and I returned his kiss and whispered, "Lar, I love you more than you'll ever know".

"About as much as I love you, I guess," he whispered in response, and gave me another kiss.

"Oh, and I can honestly say that I am convinced my place is as a high school band director, maybe with a group on the side. I really did love working with high school students who were serious about music."

Michael

Everyone was waiting for someone to speak, when Bill said, "I guess most of you know what happened with me and Linda this summer. We went to camp where we had an absolute ball. I thoroughly enjoyed working with the third and fourth graders especially. All of you seem to have found your niche in life and I think I have as well. I want to be a teacher in grade school, maybe a physical education teacher, but I think I'd like to just be a teacher. Beyond that, all I can say is that Linda and I really found out the difference between fucking and making love. I mean really. Our first time together was at camp and we vowed there that our next time would be here. Thanks to Matt and Luke, that got postponed, but they finally went off searching for a vision and we had the falls to ourselves, and I brought my vision with me." He then kissed Linda and she responded.

Linda said, "Look, we're all friends and know just about all there is to know about each other. I know 'kiss and tell' is really not something one does, but I think I'd like to tell you about the first time Bill and I didn't stop in our love-making." She then told us what had happened at camp, she and Bill blushing but obviously sharing something very personal and precious with people they loved and whom they knew loved them. When they finished, Bill had added a comment now and then, Linda added that she was headed to becoming a middle school teacher.

"Lots of luck!" Eugene said. "They are beyond me."

I guess everyone was being very careful not to ask Matt and Luke too much, and Mary Kathryn and I had said little. When I looked at Matt and Luke, both seemed ready to tell everyone what had happened to the Gang of Four. We told the whole story from beginning to end, Matt talking at length about Sewanee and Luke about Sarasota, as well as the results of their mistrust of each other. Eugene kinda made us all stop and think when he said, "Luke, and you too, Matt, when we get settled, you are going to see a counselor. I know what happened seems like a world crisis that's over but, Luke, I've been there and I think a second attempt at suicide cries out for more than just thinking everything's ok now."

We were all silent, looking at the two, when Luke said, "Matt and I have already decided to do that. Maybe nothing more is needed, but we can't go through that shit again."

Matt

I was glad to hear Luke say we would look into counseling and whatever we needed to do. I felt we were both in excellent shape, but hadn't I thought that before? I guess there is a deeper side to me as well as Luke.

We continued to talk about the summer, having a lot of laughs. I kept an eye on Jacob to see how he was taking things after being thrown out of his house. I think maybe he was relieved because he was certainly having a good time. Of course, he had Paula again and that should be enough to make his heart sing. I knew having Luke back sure made mine sing!

We were finally talked out and Linda shouted, "Skinny dipping time!" I doubt that there are many friends who skinny dipped as often as the Fellowship did. It was so natural and we had done it so often we thought nothing about it. Michael had not taken off his shirt before and, when he did, everyone had to have a look. "Damn, your chest's a mess," Jacob said. "Did it hurt?"

"The knifing or the piercing?" Michael laughed. "The knifing hurt like hell. The piercing wasn't exactly pleasant, but bearable." Everyone was as quiet as if they were in church, as they looked at Michael's chest.

I thought the mood was a little heavy, so I shouted, "Skinny dipping time!" and leaped in the water. We swam and played around for a while, and then the guys started wrestling in the water until Mary Kathryn tossed a ball into the basin and the girls took on the boys in a game of water keep-away. I hate to say it, but they beat us big time. Of course the fact that all of them felt free to grab anything hanging loose was a definite advantage!

Late afternoon, Bill said, "I don't know about the rest of you, but I'm a growing boy and I'm hungry!"

Linda walked in front of him, swinging her well-rounded butt and said, "Well, I'm no growing boy!"

Bill grabbed her, pulling her on top of himself and said, "Damn right you're not. You're a well-built woman," as he kissed her. Soon we had all the food spread out on a blanket and were eating as if it was going out of style. When we had finished, we paired off and found a blanket and, after a little making out I suspect, Luke and I did anyway, all of us fell sound asleep. Food, sleep and sex, aren't they the only three things in a teenage mind? I guess I knew they weren't, but they sure took up a lot of mind space!

One after another, we woke up, and soon all of us were sitting on the beach, when Luke said, "I think Matt and I have an announcement to make." When he did, a huge smile spread across my face. "You all know we can't be legally or officially married, but we are going to have a commitment ceremony. We'd like to have it here next Saturday. That means we may have to put off going

to Ohio and since you are all involved in that, you have to decide what we should do."

As soon as he finished, the whole gang started hugging the two of us and I guess we knew our answer. "I better call Janet and Douglas and let them know the trip's postponed," Luke said.

"Why?" I asked. "They can be here with us all next week so we can get to know them. Besides, I suspect they are already on their way here."

"Guess you're right, Lover," Luke said.

"So, let's get some planning done," Mary Kathryn said.

"Damn, she's a lot like Jens, get it lined up, organized and in the book," I thought. She got a pen and paper and soon the whole crew were involved in planning "the social event of the season," in Paula's words. We made up a guest list, planned the food, made a rote of who we'd need to call about what, like asking Fr. Tom to celebrate a Eucharist, and getting Millie to record music since I wanted more than the keyboard.

When we finished planning, at least we thought we had covered everything, Michael got all excited and said, "Look, we know Fr. Tom can't bless this union, but a medicine man could. I think I could do it, but we left one person off the list, Taequo. Why not have him bless the union?"

"Michael, you're a genius!" Luke said.

"Of course, that's perfect," I added.

We talked longer about our ceremony. I asked Luke if he minded making it traditional, well, I knew that to talk about a gay wedding being traditional was kinda crazy, but he knew what I meant. "Whatever you want, Babe, so long as it says this is forever." I was trying to remember some words of a service I had read at Sewanee, when my cell phone rang. Paula grabbed it and tossed it to me.

When I answered, David said, "Matt, there's been an accident and the young man involved asked about Luke as we were bringing him in to the hospital. Is Luke there?"

"Sure," I answered, and handed the phone to Luke. After listening for a few minutes, Luke asked, "How bad?" looking very serious. "Are you sure? I'll be right there," as he handed me the phone. "Douglas and Janet were coming early, I guess, and had an accident just outside town. David said he didn't think they were seriously hurt, even though the car rolled over three times. They were wearing their seatbelts and are bruised. Douglas was conscious when they brought him in. Janet wasn't." Luke started getting dressed as he talked, and the rest of us did the same.

"Luke, I'll drive. Why don't the rest of you stay here? We'll call as soon as we know something. There's really no place for all of us."

"We'll go to my place. That way we'll be close if there is anything we can do," Eugene said.

I started driving pretty fast when Luke said, "Look, we've had one accident already. Take it easy so there's not another." I did and we arrived at the hospital in a matter of minutes anyway.

Inside, David met us. "They're still in the emergency room," he said. "To be honest, I don't think there's any real damage done beyond bruises from the seatbelts. Both will be plenty sore tomorrow, but I think that's it. Now that you're here, I'll go in and see what I can find out." He was gone for a very short time and when he came back said, "Douglas is in good shape. Just as I expected, he's only bruised. Janet, on the other hand, is just regaining consciousness. Apparently there was something loose in the car and, when it flipped, it struck her on the head. She has a laceration, which has been stitched up, there was a lot of blood, but there always is with a head wound. I still don't think it's bad, but Dr. Walker thinks she might have a concussion so she'll have to stay overnight for observation. I think all's well, considering. Douglas should be released shortly."

Twenty or thirty minutes later, it seemed hours, and both Luke and I were getting kinda nervous because the hospital brought back some pretty bad memories, a nurse helped Douglas as he walked out of the emergency room. When he saw Luke he burst into tears and Luke held him, carefully, as he cried. Finally he said, "God, Luke, I am so glad to see you. They told me Janet would be all right, but when I saw her she was covered with blood."

"David, he is on the EMS team that picked you up and is a member of the Family, said she had a head wound which wasn't too serious, but mighty bloody. He thinks you're both ok. She'll probably have to spend the night here because she took a lick on the head, but you..."

"The doctor told me I could go, but I'm not leaving until I can see Janet and see she's all right. Luke, my friend, it has gotten pretty serious, between Janet and me I mean." He smiled, then groaned, "Man, I feel like I have been hit by an elephant," stroking his chest.

"David calls that the sign of life. It's bruises your seatbelt made. Think what it would have been like if the same force had tossed you about the car."

"Yea."

Luke suddenly remembered that I only knew Douglas through him and that we had never met. "Oh, Douglas, this is..."

"Matt, Luke's Sarang Hanun Pomul if I remember correctly. Matt, it would be pretty hard for you to hide, even in a crowd." Douglas smiled as he shook hands with me.

As we were shaking hands, the emergency room doors opened and a gurney was wheeled out. I had no doubt it was Janet because Douglas was at her side in a flash. "Babe, are you all right?" he asked. "I mean really all right?" He bent to kiss her on the forehead.

"I'm covered with blood, I have the headache from hell, every time I breathe I feel like an elephant sat on me but, yes, I'm all right. I'm especially all right now that I see you are. They want me to stay here tonight for observation, so I guess I will."

"Sure you will," Douglas said.

Dr. Walker walked out of the emergency room just as Douglas spoke, saw me and Luke, smiled, and said, "I thought you two had dropped off the face of the earth. These are friends of yours?"

"They are my friends," Luke said, "We met this summer. They were coming up to go to Ohio with the crew when the accident happened."

"Don't think it would be a good idea to plan on going until next week. No serious damage done, but both will be very sore."

"Well, they didn't know it, but we postponed the trip until next week anyway. Matt and I are having our commitment ceremony next Saturday if we can get it all arranged. We've been living in sin long enough," Luke laughed. "And we expect you and Mrs. Walker to be there. You know if it hadn't been for you and your breaking rules, I probably wouldn't be here now."

"Of course we'll be there. Wouldn't miss it. And you're right. Had Matt not spent those nights here, I don't think you would have made it. And I heard you tried something foolish again."

Luke hung his head and stared at the floor. "Luke, I think there may be a problem here. I talked with Dr. Bail... Margaret and, if you are going to be here next week, I'd like for you to come in Monday for some tests. I'll make an appointment. Matt, I want you to come with him. Douglas, sorry this was your introduction to Concord, but I'm glad there's not too much damage, well to you and Janet anyway. Your car, I'm told, is a hopeless wreck. What happened?"

"Driving all night without sleep the night before," Douglas said, "I just fell asleep and went off the embankment."

"Then you are indeed lucky. And had you not had on your seatbelts, you would have been in another establishment down the street, the funeral home."

He then turned to Janet and said, "Young lady, I want you to behave yourself tonight. If you do and all goes well, as I am sure it will, you'll be out of here tomorrow. By the way, Douglas, be sure to call your parents and Janet's. We didn't try since both of you were over eighteen. Well, goodnight all," he said as he walked toward the exit.

After an orderly took Janet to her room, the nurse on duty told us we could see her for a few minutes then we'd have to go. When Luke and I went in with Douglas, Janet smiled and said, "Matt, I was jealous as hell of you the first week of the summer, but I think if I had seen you first, you would have given Luke a run for the money, not that you would have been interested either. You are one good-looking hunk." Need I say it? I blushed. "You're both damn lucky, almost as

lucky as I am." She smiled at Douglas who leaned over and kissed her very gently.

"I don't think you lucked out as well as I have, Janet, but you've done pretty damn well," Luke said. "Well, we'll say goodnight and give Douglas some privacy. See you in the morning."

Luke leaned over and kissed her and, as he turned to go, she said, "Sarang Hanun Pomul, damn that's a mouthful, don't I get a kiss from a Korean Indian?"

I kissed her and said, "Take care. We have a busy week planned."

Douglas joined us shortly. He was obviously getting very sore and stiff. "We'll take you home and get you as comfortable as possible," Luke said. Actually, we all went to Eugene's where the Fellowship was waiting. After introductions, Millie insisted Douglas spend the night there, in case the hospital needed to call. "I'll ring them and give them this number," she said. "I think you might find Eugene's spa a bit comforting and when you're ready for bed, down to the downstairs guest room. Those two have been separated for a couple weeks and probably would like a little privacy. I sure as hell would!"

"Millie, before you go," I said, "We're having Sunday dinner at the Andrews' tomorrow. Be there for an important announcement."

"That reminds me," Luke said, and called Uncle Michael and John and asked them to join us for Sunday dinner at the Andrews'. "We have an announcement to make," he had said. He also called Chelsea and Gladys. "By the Way, Chelsea, have you heard anything from Jake?" When he hung up the phone, he said, "Seems Jake has definitely disappeared."

"Douglas, don't you need to call your parents? And Janet's?" Luke asked.

"Mine can wait. I'll call Janet's. I'll talk to her dad or mom, the one I can get, if either and, by damn, they can make the effort to call the other. They were both relieved, and didn't hide it, when they learned she was staying in Florida. She was right, neither really wanted her." Douglas made two phone calls and when he was finished, said, "Well, that's true to form, neither was at home. I just left a message that she had an accident and was ok. They can call here if they like, but I won't be surprised not to hear from either."

We all went upstairs to Eugene's place and Douglas got in the Jacuzzi. Paula and Jacob joined him and the rest of us just sat around, the whole crowd in the bathroom! Finally, Luke asked, "Why were you and Janet outside Concord today. We didn't expect you until tomorrow."

"I had a major fight with my parents a couple days ago, the first in ages, since I see them so seldom we didn't even have a chance to fight. I told them Janet was moving in with me. They had no objection at all. 'It will be good for you to experiment,' Dad said, winked and added, 'I know young men need a woman now and then, and it's nice you can have one handy.' Mom was pretending she

didn't hear him and I was getting pissed. He was talking about Janet like she was a common whore!"

"So I broke the news which really flipped them out. When Janet and I finished the summer course, we came to my grandmother's vacation place here in North Carolina. While we were there we did a lot, a whole lot, of talking about what we wanted to do with our lives and, by that time, I was pretty sure of one thing I wanted to do with mine, and that was to spend it with Janet. 'Are you serious?' she had asked when I told her."

"'I'm damn serious. I'm so serious that I'd like to ask you a question,' I said."

"'Shoot,' she said, and I got down on one knee..."

"You didn't," Luke laughed. "spiked hair of all colors and things pierced you wouldn't believe, hey, where's the spiked hair and all those studs and rings?"

"Another story," Douglas grinned.

"Anyway, old Douglas of the spiked hair got down on one knee? I can't believe it."

"I did, swear to God I did, and asked Janet to marry me. 'You got to be kidding!' she had laughed. I was a bit pissed and said, 'I'm sure as hell not kidding! Damn it, Janet, stop the nonsense and get serious! Will you marry me?'"

"'You're sure you're not kidding?' she asked, and again I assured her I was not, not in very nice language, I think."

"'Well, since I haven't had time to think about it, I'll give you an answer tomorrow,' she said. That really got me. 'Janet, are we going to have our first fight over whether or not you are going to give me an answer?'"

We were all laughing our heads off at Douglas who was being very dramatic about the whole thing and, I think, getting pissed all over again. "Finally I said, 'Janet, I want an answer tonight. Right now.' She laughed and said, 'You look so cute when you're mad. I guess I'll just have to keep you mad!' I realized how funny all this was and started laughing with her. When I did she said, 'Douglas, I'd marry you in a minute'."

"'Do you mean that?' I asked, and she nodded and gave me a kiss to die for."

"'When she turned me loose, she said, 'I sure do'."

"Well, to make a long story shorter, we were married last week by a judge in South Carolina."

"You and Janet are married, actually married?" Luke said, looking as if he didn't believe it. In answer Douglas held out his left hand where there was a shiny new band.

"Damn!" Luke said. "Some summer romance!"

"Yea, and we're spending our honeymoon in hospitals and painting a house because of you," Douglas laughed. Then he added on a very serious note, "Thanks, Luke, for that talk we had, which ended making me a very happy man." Luke gave him a very gentle tap on the shoulder, but still he said, "Ouch!".

"Anyway, we didn't see Mom and Dad until the day after we got back. One night I heard them when they came in late, as usual, and we went down and told them we were married. All hell broke loose. She was not 'quality', she had no money, etc. Then Dad made the mistake of saying, 'Douglas, if you need sex, we told you she could move in, but now you have messed up everything by getting married. We'll have it annulled.'"

"Like hell you will!" I shouted at him, and we left them storming at me and went to our room. Janet was upset, but not for long," Douglas smiled.

"The next morning, Dad left a note telling me to call the family lawyer 'about getting this ridiculous marriage of yours annulled'. When I read it I started pitching a major fit and Lupe told me to shut up and calm down. She then asked what I was carrying on about. I told her Janet and I were married and the first thing she said was, 'Then you need to start looking and acting like a responsible married man. Get rid of that spiked hair and most of those rings and studs you have poking in and out of your body!'" Douglas smiled and looked at Luke and said, "And you know what Lupe wants, Lupe gets!" as he rubbed his hands through his short hair.

"She then gave me and Janet a good lecture, starting with, 'You're both artists and know that requires discipline, technique and practice. Well, marriage is an art.' Then she really got moving on our being too young to get married and, well, you know Lupe, Luke."

"Finally she stopped for breath and I said, 'Lupe, as I seem to recall, you and Hector were fifteen when you married'. She started telling me that was different and I stopped her and asked, 'Lupe, how often have you regretted It?'"

"She started dying laughing and said, 'Ok, what'll we do about this? You don't need to call the family lawyer. What you need to do is see Mr. Blalock.' Mr. Blalock was my grandmother's lawyer and her close personal friend. He had long since retired, but managed some trust funds for old clients, including one she had left me. When my grandmother died, he kinda took her place. I called him several times a year and we got together just to talk. He also called me every few weeks just to ask how I was doing. I knew by the time I was fifteen I would probably do best by following any advise he gave, which he only gave when asked. God, this is getting to be a long story."

"We all had naps this afternoon, so go on," Mary Kathryn said, just as Luke helped Douglas out of the Jacuzzi.

"Damn, I'm sore," he said.

"Just wait until tomorrow," Bill smiled.

Douglas settled himself on a sofa and continued his story. "Lupe picked up the phone and, before I knew it, made an appointment for me to get my hair done. 'But what if Janet doesn't want a new look?' I asked."

"'Douglas, if I had been going for looks, you'd still be single,' Janet laughed. 'Now get upstairs and get dressed. You can't go to see Mr. Blalock looking like a member of some street gang.'"

"'I'll call Mr. Blalock,' Lupe said. 'And, Janet, don't let him start anything. We don't have time for messing around today!'"

"Janet blushed," Douglas smiled. "I understand she has caught the MGTD, the Matthew Greywolf Transmitted Disease." Everyone laughed like crazy when I blushed.

"I did as I was told and Janet picked out a good-looking shirt and slacks and we were off. After an hour and a half, I came out from the hair place looking like this and Janet and I went to see Mr. Blalock. He seemed delighted to see me and actually kissed Janet's hand. I mean he is a real old-fashioned gentleman and I really look at him as I would a favorite grandfather. I told him the situation and he asked us a bunch of questions, all about Janet and her family, why we had decided we were meant for each other, and why we thought we should have gotten married. Not easy questions either. When either of us didn't have an immediate answer, he'd say, 'Take your time, we're in no rush'. I hadn't realized how long we had talked until he said, 'Let's go out to the terrace. Lunch is waiting for us there.' Mrs. Blalock joined us, a striking woman still, at least eighty. When we came out, Mr. Blalock kissed her on the cheek and it was obvious this was not for our benefit. He then told her, briefly, of our situation."

"'Granville and I wanted to get married when we were your age,' she said, 'but our parents objected and said we should wait until Granville was settled in a practice, and we did. That was fifty-two years ago and I have only one regret. I regret that we didn't defy our parents and get married six years earlier when we wanted to. We would have had six more years together. So don't let anyone tell you that you can't make a marriage work just because you're young. And don't let any fool tell you it's not work!' she laughed."

"As we ate, Mrs. Blalock wanted to know all about how we met, when we decided to be friends, and she made a point of talking about being friends, not lovers, and when we decided there was another dimension to our relationship. You know, all that. Luke, Janet even told her about hitting on you and your giving her to me, so to speak," Douglas laughed.

"After lunch, we got down to business. Mr. Blalock called the family lawyer and told him he was wasting his time and my family's money filing for an annulment. 'If there's any question, you can tell Douglas' parents to call me, after you remind them of the trust funds' conditions.' He then explained that Mom had a trust fund from grandmother, the source of the family's wealth, I learned for the first time, and that my trust fund's conditions changed when I turned eighteen and when I married. I didn't know that, as Mom had always handled my money."

Seems when I turned eighteen, I could write checks on the fund up to a certain, obscene, amount, and when I married, so long as I stayed married to the same woman, the house was mine and the trust fund limit increased. I did, however, have to provide for my parent's housing. 'Da...darn,' I said when I heard that, 'makes sense why they wouldn't care if I just kept a woman, and raised hell when they found out I was married.'

"Anyway, when I finally caught Mom and Dad at home, they both exploded when I told them Mr. Blalock had blocked any annulment. Since they didn't know I knew the conditions of the trust, they were howling all sorts of reasons why the marriage should be annulled, until I calmly told them I knew why they were concerned. 'You needn't worry. The easiest way for me to provide for you is to keep things as they are so far as the house is concerned, that is, as long as you don't interfere with me and my wife', Mom blanched when I said 'my wife', so all's cool.' That seemed to calm things down until night before last."

When they came in, late as usual, Dad handed me a paper which the family lawyer had drawn up, spelling out an agreement between me and Janet. 'Just in case she's nothing more than a gold digger,' he said. Well, I blew my stack. 'We're leaving in the morning', I had just decided, 'and when we get back, I expect you and Mom to show my wife the respect she deserves and I demand,' and stormed upstairs. I started to tell Janet nothing, but she said, 'Look, if we're going to make this work, we're going to have to be a team. Now what's going on, HUSBAND?' That did it! I ranted and raved for an hour about how my parents had never really cared about me and how, now, they wanted to treat my wife like a common streetwalker and on and on and on. When I finally wound down, Janet and I talked until sunrise, packed and started here. Well, you know the rest."

"Wow," Luke said. "Lupe to the rescue again."

Douglas grinned a wicked grin and said, "Yea, and she's being rewarded. I gave her and Hector a month off and money to travel first class wherever their hearts desire. We'll see how Mom manages without Lupe!"

Douglas needed help getting up and, as Luke and I helped him, he asked, "You two have an announcement you're going to make?"

"Yea, Matt and I have been saying we would have a commitment ceremony, since we can't be legally married, when the time was right. Well, after this summer, the time is right. We both think it is high time we made our commitment, well, kinda, public so to speak. I don't mean coming out, hell, everyone who cares knows that, but our commitment. We plan to have it next Saturday."

"You'll love married life," Douglas smiled.

Luke and I helped him downstairs and into the guest room and, after all the excitement, no-one really wanted to go back to the falls, so we all went home.

That night was Luke's night in my bed and we cuddled together, just talking about the events of the summer, our last summer before we started a whole new life. From time to time we exchanged soft kisses as we talked about

our relationship and, finally, enclosed in each other's arms, drifted into peaceful sleep.

Part Fifty-seven

Luke

Matt and I were up Sunday morning and had breakfast with Mom and Dad. We told them about Douglas and Janet, they had been in bed when we got home the night before. We went to St. Mary's and I was surprised to see Douglas with Eugene and Larry. Douglas was sure sore, but managed to smile when he saw us.

"How's Janet?" I asked.

"She's sore. Eugene and Larry took me by to see her earlier. She's ok. Dr. Walker had left word he'd be back to discharge her about noon. I wanted to stay with her, but she wanted me to come here and say a prayer of thanksgiving. Guess I wanted to do that too. Soon as church is over, we're going back. She should be ready to leave then."

"We'll hold Sunday dinner until you two can get there," Matt said. "That's when Luke and I are making our announcement, kinda Sunday and announcement dinner."

When church was over, Larry, Eugene and Douglas started toward Eugene's car when Millie, she was walking well but had started carrying a silver-headed cane, "just in case", yelled from the parish house steps, "Hold up there". When she reached us, she said, "Look, I know you guys like your sporty cars, but that young woman will need something comfortable. Douglas, you come with me and we will pick her up. The rest of you head to the Greywolfs'."

By the time we had gotten home, dinner preparations were in full swing. Paula and Jacob had already arrived and soon all of the Fellowship was present. Uncle Michael and John came shortly afterward, followed by Gladys and Chelsea. Millie came driving up in her land yacht. Fr. Tom was the last of the invited guests to arrive. As soon as I saw him, I grabbed Matt's hand and we raced to ask about his celebrating the Eucharist the following Saturday. We had intended to do that the day before but, with the news of the accident, forgot about it. He said there would be no problem.

Dinner was finally ready and when everyone had gathered around, Greywolf said grace and when he finished said, "I have been told that Matt and Luke have an announcement to make".

We hadn't decided who would say what, so we stared at each other for a few seconds until Mary Kathryn said, "Well, will you or won't you?".

"We will," we said together and then both got the giggles.

Finally Luke got control enough to speak. "All of you know about me and Matt. You have all been with us through some very hard times in the past few months. Now we hope to have you with us for a very happy time. You know, of course, that Matt and I are very much in love. We have promised each other we will be together until death do us part, and I'm not sure, after the last few weeks,

even that will separate us, but that was the promise we made to each other. If it were possible, we would be legally married or whatever the equivalent would be for two men in love. But that, at least now, cannot be. We do want to make our vows to each other with friends and family as our witnesses, so we want to invite all of you to a commitment ceremony which will be held at the falls next Saturday at..." I looked at Matt, and he at me, and finally stammered, "We haven't set a time!".

"Three o'clock in the afternoon," Mary Kathryn said. "That's the time your planning committee decided."

"At three o'clock in the afternoon," Matt said. "I know better than to cross the women of the Fellowship!"

Jacob, Bill and Michael all shouted, "Wise move!".

I don't know why I was nervous but I had been and, when I finished, I grabbed Matt and kissed him. Everyone applauded.

Well, after dinner, the rest of the day was spent planning and checking this, that and the other. At one point Douglas said, "Think Janet and I had the right idea, just do it".

"Yea, but you two didn't have as many people to celebrate with you as Luke and I have," Matt said.

"How true," Janet said. "Even our parents really didn't give a shit. But this is exciting." She was obviously sore, but was soon in the middle of all the planning going on.

Matt was busy with Millie selecting the music, the mothers were going over the food list that had been made Saturday, and the men were huddled talking about heaven only knows what. Eugene, Larry and I were with Douglas, who had been persuaded to sit down and try to get comfortable. Seems his seatbelt had bruised his ribs good fashion, and Dr. Walker had given him pain pills which he finally agreed to take so he was feeling very mellow. "I still find it hard to think of you and Janet married," I said to him.

I was taken aback when he said, "What's so unusual about that? Aren't you two getting married next weekend?" I guess that was the first time I had really thought of what Matt and I were doing as getting married. I mean, we had talked about it that way but, when Douglas asked the question, it really hit home.

"YES!" I exclaimed. "Hell yes!"

"Before that happens, we've got some other things to take care of," Larry said. "I mean your and Matt's ceremony is important, but the world still spins."

"Which reminds me, Douglas, have you called your parents?" Michael asked.

"To tell the truth, I haven't. I guess I better." I got the phone for him and he called. It was obvious the conversation was not a happy one when he finally said, "Mom, I called to let you know about the accident, that's all, not to discuss my

wife or my marriage," and then slammed down the phone. He said to us, "They're still trying to figure out a way to get my marriage annulled. Great parents I have! Here are two guys getting themselves committed to each other and their parents are happy. I had a perfectly ordinary marriage and Mom and Dad are raising hell. You figure."

"Well, at least you have taken care of the phone call. Now we need to plan how to take care of other business. Tomorrow, Eugene and I will take you to see an insurance adjuster and, if you like, check into a new car, that sort of thing," Larry finally got to say.

"By the way, you and Janet have my suite," Eugene said. "Lar and I will take the guest room."

Douglas started to protest, but both Larry and Eugene would have none of it. "It's the honeymoon suite this week," Eugene said, "although we may borrow the Jacuzzi, if you don't mind."

"Be our guest," Douglas laughed. "I'm sure we will join you."

Margaret came by and said, "I'm giving Janet a pain killer. She's hurting pretty bad from her bruises and you don't look too happy either, Douglas. I think both of you could use some down time."

Douglas didn't protest as Eugene and I helped him to the downstairs guest room. Matt and Larry helped Janet. As we tucked the two into bed, Eugene said, "No hanky panky, now".

Janet laughed and said, "I never thought I'd say it, but this husband of mine better not touch me, unless it's very lightly. I hurt like hell."

About 5:00, the two were sound asleep when Millie said, "I need to get home and start getting music together. Eugene, your keys." Eugene gave her a funny look as he handed his keys to her. "Well, you don't expect the two accident victims to ride back in your bone crusher, do you? Use my car to come home," she said, and handed him her keys.

Eugene, of course, had the top down on his car and Millie crawled in, started the engine, turned the music up loud and roared out of the driveway. "That's my mom," Eugene laughed.

It was 6:30 when Douglas and Janet finally woke up. They had supper with the Family and then Eugene and Larry took them back to Millie's. The rest of the Fellowship had left earlier. The Family all sat around the dining room table, making a checklist of the things that needed to be done. We told the Family we had planned for Michael to handle the ceremony and see if Taequo could come and bless our union. Greywolf found his phone number and I called him. He was delighted that we would ask him and assured me he would be there. "Proper dress?" I asked him and he assured me it would be.

When I hung up the phone, it promptly rang. "Luke here," I answered.

"Luke, it's Danny. Can you, Matt and Michael come to the apartment? We need you."

"Be right there," I replied and hung up the phone. I told Michael and Matt that Danny wanted us, and we left without knowing what was up. When we arrived, Chelsea and Gladys were with the two guys.

As soon as we walked in, it was obvious both had been crying. The three of us grabbed both in a big hug and held them. As we did, Buddy said quietly, "Jake is dead".

"Dead? Jake's dead?" Michael asked.

"The hospital called shortly after we left your place," Chelsea said. "They identified him by his fingerprints. They needed someone to take responsibility for the body and Jake's parents refused to, saying they had disowned him. I told them I'd take care of any charges and came right over to tell Danny and Buddy. It seems that, late last night, someone rang the emergency room bell and when the attendant rushed outside, he found Jake lying on the loading dock, in a coma. He saw a car, all he knew was it was a sports car of some sort, skidding around the corner. He couldn't get a license number and wasn't even sure of the color."

"They rushed Jake inside and did everything they could, but it was too late. He died of a drug overdose. Nellie, the nurse on duty, said his arms were covered with needle tracks. She also said it was obvious he had been into some pretty kinky things, but wouldn't say more beyond the fact that he was dressed, the part of him that was dressed, in leather and chains. The police have no more leads than they had when he disappeared."

We sat and talked with Danny and Buddy for a good two hours. Finally Danny said, "We three were more or less trapped into doing whatever McBride wanted, and Buddy and I have often talked about how we are now free to make choices and how hard that is sometimes, I mean having to make choices when you don't know how things will turn out. Jake made a very wrong choice. We have both talked about it since he disappeared, and are sure he chose the fast life and paid for it with his body. Now he has paid for it with his life. We were never really close. I guess we were bound together by what we had done and had been forced to do, but I can't help crying over Jake's death. He really did have a lot to offer. It's just that... well, I don't know what to say."

We talked a while longer and, finally, Gladys said, "His body will be cremated after an autopsy, Nellie did say everyone was very careful because of how he was dressed, and other things, because no-one would be surprised if he is HIV+."

"Since no-one will take responsibility for his body, and Gladys and I have agreed to pay for his cremation, they will release the ashes to us. We thought maybe you three could hold a memorial service, something simple, when we scatter the ashes. We plan to scatter them in the garden at the hospice."

"Sure, no problem," Michael said. "Just let us know when. Buddy, Danny, I am sorry it ended this way for Jake. Any such death is a great waste, especially when someone is as young as Jake."

"Thanks. And we'll be ok now. It's just that when we were told, you were the only family we had except Gladys and Chelsea," Danny said.

Early Monday morning, Dr. Walker's office called and asked if Matt and I could come in at 10:00. When we got there, Dr. Walker had his nurse draw blood from Luke for tests and then he sat and talked with us. "Luke, Matt, I am concerned, more than I would have been a year or so ago, about what's going on with Luke. After your first suicide attempt, Luke, I did a lot of reading about teen suicide. Much of what I read shocked me, the numbers of teens who attempt, and far too many succeed, to take their life. I have always known that teen years are not easy, I'm not so old I don't remember my own," he smiled. "But there seems to be something else involved, I mean more than just raging hormones and that sort of thing."

"Luke, your attempt really puzzled me because it seemed you had everything going for you. Your love of Matt and fears for his safety didn't seem enough to push you over the edge. But, when things turned out as they did, I relaxed a bit then there was this last attempt. I'll grant that, to you, you made a mistake, but it just didn't make sense. Then I remembered something else. I had just read a medical journal article on teen depression. We've finally realized that depression is most often caused by a chemical imbalance in the brain, and have drugs to treat it. These drugs are, of course, not without side effects but they are saving lives, from suicide and from just existing in a living hell. After your second attempt, I suspected depression might be involved in your case. I'm not going to prescribe for you until I get some test results but, if they turn out as I suspect they will, then we'll try to overcome the imbalance. Matt, in the meantime, and from now on, you need to be sensitive to Luke's emotional state, as I'm sure you will be."

"We've talked about that," Matt said, "and I have already decided that I missed something, and don't intend to do so again."

"Good. And I know that you'll not be depressed Saturday, Luke. It will be a happy day."

Well, when the autopsy report was finally complete it showed Jake had been HIV+. What a waste. The body was released, cremated, and Gladys called and asked if we could do the memorial Wednesday afternoon. We did. Michael was in charge, and did a remarkable and moving job of what had to have been a difficult task.

I noticed that Buddy was with a very attractive young woman who had her arm around him, holding him close throughout the service. When it was completed, he introduced her to us. "Michael, Matt, Luke, this is Gloria James. She is a fellow student and a very special friend." We shook hands with her, and she and Buddy left together after Buddy had thanked us profusely. Danny looked

at them as they left and said, "Buddy has found a real friend in Gloria. She knows all about us and still, I think, is very much in love with him. I am very happy for Buddy. He has made a good choice, well, I guess it's more like he fell into a good thing when he finally got up the nerve to ask Gloria for a date. I know it was hard for him to do, but she has made him very happy. He's a real lovesick puppy these days."

"And you haven't found someone?" I asked.

Danny smiled and said, "I think it's going to be a bit harder for me," and said no more. "Thanks, all of you. This has been very important to me and Buddy. In a very real way, I think Jake's death closed a chapter for us. Not a very nice one and no happy ending, for Jake, but it confirmed our choices. See you three Saturday."

Matt and I had earlier asked him and Buddy to come to our ceremony. "We're going to be very busy but, if you and Buddy need us, call," I said. "And, by the way, if Gloria won't be freaked out, tell Buddy we'd love to have her come."

"I think she can handle that," Danny smiled. "See you then."

While there had been no question about our doing the service for Jake, it was another addition to an already hectic week. Thursday, Margaret said Dr. Walker had been right. I was suffering from a very low-level clinical depression which could be aggravated by stress. Just knowing that made me feel a whole lot better. Margaret gave me the drug he prescribed and said it would be a week or two before I would see any effects of the antidepressant, and even then I probably would not see any marked change, just that the dark thoughts would go away or be much less severe. She was right.

The rest of the week passed in a blur, not only were we all planning for the ceremony, but also getting ready for the trip to Ohio. We gathered up the tools we'd need to make the repairs to the house, and had to decide what personal belongings we were taking and what we would be leaving.

Millie spent a couple days recording the music, using Matt's organ since it was simpler than trying to use the pipe organ at St. Mary's. Douglas made arrangements to get the car he wanted delivered to a dealership in Ohio, and things were actually falling into place. Michael and I were packing my things when Demetri somebody called. After he finished his conversation, Michael told me about going to the Greek restaurant with Fr. Tom. "The owner mentioned his grandson was coming sometime this summer and wanted me to keep an eye on him. Think you can handle this while I run into town, meet him, and maybe show him around a bit?"

"Sure, no problem."

I finished what I was packing and took the truck to Matt's. We were loading things into it when Michael returned. I could tell he was not a happy camper. "What's the problem, Lil Bro?" Matt asked.

Michael exploded. "Christopher, Demetri's grandson, is a first-class asshole. As soon as we were in the Tracker, the first question he asked was where he could score some weed! Learned he was supposed to be here a month ago, but got in trouble again and it took a major effort to get him released to come. He is big-time trouble and I'm supposed to keep an eye on him. I will, all right, but he's not going to like it. He's a big-city, streetwise, wiseass asshole who will probably be in jail before we get back."

"Guess that's your junior year project," Matt said.

"I'd rather try to save a rainforest or something," Michael shot back. Didn't know what all Christopher had said or done, but Michael was boiling. One thing about it: when he's mad, he is a whirlwind. We had the truck packed in half the time I expected.

Since the Ohio house was furnished, we decided we'd take little in that line. If we wanted or needed something different when we got there, we'd buy it or do without, "so long as there's queen- or king-sized beds," Matt had laughed. We only packed in the vehicles what we would need immediately. The rest would be picked up by the movers who were coming for Matt's organ. The fact that we were actually leaving hit home when the movers came very early Friday morning and picked up the Oberlin Five's things and packed Matt's organ. When the truck pulled away, we all breathed a sigh of relief but, I suspect, were also more than a little sad, and frightened.

"Now we only have the ceremony to go," Matt said as the truck pulled out of sight.

Janet and Douglas had improved each day and by Friday were pretty much back to normal. After the movers left, we spent the rest of the day getting the falls ready, improvising an altar, that sort of thing, and getting Matt's place ready for a reception. I had thought that would be at the falls, but Greywolf suggested we'd want to dance and the house was better for that, so the reception would be at Matt's.

Matt and I had talked about what we would wear for the ceremony, but hadn't discussed it with anyone else. We had talked about tux and all that, but then decided we had something better. When we told Michael what we wanted, he got a huge Michael grin on his face and said he'd talk with Matt's mom and dad as well.

The week was so hectic, there wasn't a lot of time to devote to love-making, but Matt and I did manage to find a little time for ourselves and we made the most of it! We had decided, and neither he nor I were really sure why, that we'd spend each Friday night in our own bed.

Friday had been overcast all day and I feared the worst for Saturday. When Taequo arrived late Friday, I guess Matt had been worried too because he asked, "Taequo, is there a no-rain dance?"

Taequo laughed and said, "Do you think Red Hawk would permit rain tomorrow?". He must have been right because when I rose up on an elbow Saturday morning, the sun was streaming in my window.

Matt and I had agreed we'd not see each other until the ceremony, and I had nothing to do so I mostly just paced the floor for a while, flopped down on my bed for a while, and then paced some more. I was getting nervous and didn't know why. "What difference is a ceremony going to make?" I asked myself. I mean Matt and I had been a couple for months, well, if you started counting our having sex for the first time, a little over two months, so what difference would today make? I didn't know why, but I knew it would make a lot of difference.

Finally, it was 1:30 and I started getting ready by taking a long shower. When I finished, I dried my hair, a major undertaking these days, and got dressed. When I was dressed, I looked at myself in the mirror and I was pleased with what I saw. "You are one good-looking hunk!" I said, as I turned in front of the mirror. "There's only one other man in the world who is better looking, and he's mine!"

I decided I was ready just when Dad called upstairs, "Luke, time to go". When I came down, Dad whistled and said, "You are a handsome young man, Luke Hans Yonghon Tongmu Fire Thunderbird Larsen," and hugged me tightly. "Your mom and Mary Kathryn have gone on, so I guess it's just the two of us."

Matt had told me Millie had chosen the music and wouldn't take no for an answer when he told her it seemed like bragging. She had chosen happy excerpts from "The Family" and "Yonghon Tongmu". As we approached the falls, I heard the music and agreed with Millie's stubbornness. Matt and I had discussed how we were going to walk in, and had decided we would walk between our parents. Mary Kathryn, in her buckskin dress, would walk behind Mom and Dad and me. We thought that would show how our families supported us. When I got close enough, the tape started playing Clarke's "Trumpet Voluntary" and Eugene, live, was playing with the recording. It was time for us to start. I could see Michael and Taequo standing side by side, both dressed in full Lakota regalia. As we walked toward them from one side, Matt and his parents came from the other. Greywolf was dressed as the Lakota warrior he was, and Yong Jin had chosen to wear her Korean hanbok, proclaiming to the world that she was the mother of the beautiful Lakota warrior walking next to her. And he was beautiful! I, of course, was also dressed as a Lakota.

*A Making and Celebration of the Covenant of Union
Between Matthew Sarang Hanun Pomul Silver Wolf Greywolf
and Luke Hans Yonghon Tongmu Fire Thunderbird Larsen*

Michael Jacob Golden Eagle Andrews: "Friends and family, we are told that God is love and if this be true then, truly, love is a mystery beyond human understanding. And why should this come as a surprise to us? For who can explain the love of a parent for a child, of brothers and sisters, or of friends. No-

one. Even more mysterious is the special love which draws two people together and which draws them to yearn to join their lives. It is a powerful force, capable of overcoming many obstacles, of being expressed in many ways. We all know Matthew Sarang Hanun Pomul Silver Wolf Greywolf and Luke Hans Yonghon Tongmu Fire Thunderbird Larsen. And, since we know them, we know their love for each other is that kind of love, a love which knows no bounds. Yet many would condemn their love. Even some of us who know them and their love cannot understand it, but we accept it and acknowledge its reality. And we rejoice in it and the happiness it gives to them. Therefore, we have been chosen to witness their profession of that love, one to the other, and the vows they will make to each other. And we are honored."

[Michael nodded and our parents stepped behind us and Matt and I joined hands.]

"Matthew Sarang Hanun Pomul Silver Wolf Greywolf, will you have Luke Hans Yonghon Tongmu Fire Thunderbird Larsen as your partner, companion and soulmate, to live together in the covenant of holy union? Will you love him, comfort him, honor and keep him in sickness and in health and, forsaking all others, be faithful to him until death you do part?"

Matthew: "I will."

Michael: "Luke Hans Yonghon Tongmu Fire Thunderbird Larsen, will you have Matthew Sarang Hanun Pomul Silver Wolf Greywolf as your partner, companion and soulmate, to live together in the covenant of holy union? Will you love him, comfort him, honor and keep him in sickness and in health and, forsaking all others, be faithful to him until death you do part?"

[Suddenly I was choked up and was barely able to answer.]

Luke: "I will."

Michael: "Those of you who are here as witnesses to this union, will you promise to offer your support, friendship and prayers for these two men as they continue on their life's journey? As their extended family, will you share their joys, help them bear their burdens, and do all in your power to uphold them in their covenant?"

Family and Friends: "We will!"

Patanka St. Michael Greywolf, reader: "A reading from the Book of Ecclesiastes: Two are better than one, for their partnership yields this advantage: if one falls, the other can help his companion up again; but woe betide the solitary person who when down has no partner to help him up. And if two lie side by side they keep each other warm; but how can one keep warm by himself? If anyone is alone, an assailant may overpower him, but two can resist; and a cord of [two] strands is not quickly snapped."

Gabrielle Larsen, reader: "Psalm 67 (Read responsively) May God be merciful to us and bless us, * show us the light of his countenance and come to us. Let your ways be known upon earth, * your saving health among all nations.

Let the peoples praise you, O God; * let all the peoples praise you. Let the nations be glad and sing for joy, * for you judge the peoples with equity and guide all the nations upon earth. Let the peoples praise you, O God; * let all the peoples praise you. The earth has brought forth her increase; * may God, our own God, give us his blessing. May God give us his blessing,* and may all the ends of the earth stand in awe of him."

Jens Larsen, reader: "A reading from First Corinthians: [Behold] I ... show you [a] better way. I may speak in tongues of men or of angels, but if I have no love, I am a sounding gong or a clanging cymbal. I may have the gift of prophecy and the knowledge of every hidden truth; I may have faith enough to move mountains; but if I have no love, I am nothing. I may give all I possess to the needy, I may give my body to be burnt, but if I have no love, I gain nothing by it. Love is patient and kind. Love envies no-one, is never boastful, never conceited, never rude; love is never selfish, never quick to take offence. Love keeps no score of wrongs, takes no pleasure in the sins of others, but delights in the truth. There is nothing love cannot face; there is no limit to its faith, its hope, its endurance. Love will never come to an end. Prophecies will cease; tongues of ecstasy will fall silent; knowledge will vanish. For our knowledge and our prophecy alike are partial, and the partial vanishes when wholeness comes. When I was a child I spoke like a child, thought like a child, reasoned like a child; but when I grew up I finished with childish things. At present we see only puzzling reflections in a mirror, but one day we shall see face to face. My knowledge now is partial; then it will be whole, like God's knowledge of me. There are three things that last for ever: faith, hope, and love; and the greatest of the three is love."

Hymn: O God of Love O God of love, to thee we bow, and pray for these before thee now, that closely knit in holy vow, they may in thee be one.

Whatever comes to be their share, of quickening joy or burdening care, in power to do and grace to bear, may they in thee be one.

Eternal love, with them abide, through change and chance be thou their guide, let nothing in this life divide those whom thou makest one.

Yong Jin Greywolf, reader: "A reading from St. John's Gospel: [Jesus said] As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Dwell in my love. If you heed my commands, you will dwell in my love, as I have heeded my Father's commands and dwell in his love. I have spoken thus to you, so that my joy may be in you, and your joy complete. This is my commandment: love one another, as I have loved you."

Michael: "The poet D. H. Lawrence wrote: Those who go searching for love only make manifest their own lovelessness only the loving find love and they never have to seek for it.

"If anyone doubt the truth of the poem, you have only to look at Matthew Sarang Hanun Pomul Silver Wolf Greywolf and Luke Hans Yonghon Tongmu Fire Thunderbird Larsen (who obviously never went searching for names

because they have them!)." [Michael looked at the two of us and gave us that wicked Michael grin.]

"They came into this world to loving families and a loving family, for they were born in the midst of three families who, before they were born, had become one. Yes, the two never had to look for the love of family, it has always surrounded them.

"Nor have they had to look for the love of brothers and sister. They were brothers from the time they came into the world and soon had another brother and a sister who loved them and whom they loved in return.

"Your very presence is witness to their lack of need to search for the love of friends. All of you, again and again, have proven your friendship and love of these two young men. And perhaps, most importantly, they have been best friends since the time, well, since forever.

"Nor did they have to search for the special love between two human beings for it, too, was there. Their struggle was actually to deny it out of fear that if one's love for the other became known, it would destroy their friendship and fracture the love they had from their family. That fear of love almost cost Luke his life. But they didn't have to search for it, for the loving find love.

"Their love is a forbidden love for many. It is a love that is rejected by many. It is a love which has cost them, and will cost them, much pain. But it is a love which will endure because it is from their hearts. It is a love to which they ask that we bear witness and in which they will bind their lives together.

"Luke Hans Yonghon Tongmu Fire Thunderbird Larsen, Matthew Sarang Hanun Pomul Silver Wolf Greywolf, my beloved brothers, remember, "There are three things that last for ever: faith, hope, and love; and the greatest of the three is love."

[Matt and I had taken off our rings and when Michael asked for them, we handed them to him.]

Michael: "Great Spirit, the Father of All, from Mother Earth came silver and, through the skills of one of your children, these rings were made. May they be for Matthew Silver Wolf and Luke Fire Thunderbird, your sons, symbols of their love for and trust in each other."

[He then handed to me the ring I had given Matt, as a pledge of our love, and I placed it on Matt's finger and said:]

"Matthew Sarang Hanun Pomul Silver Wolf, with this ring I pledge to you my life-long devotion; with my body, I you worship and my love I entrust to you. This ring is a symbol of my solemn vow."

[Now it was Matt's time to be choked up as he placed on my finger the ring I had given him and repeated the vow I had just made to him:]

"Luke Hans Yonghon Tongmu Fire Thunderbird, with this ring I pledge to you my life-long devotion; with my body, I you worship and my love I entrust to you. This ring is a symbol of my solemn vow."

[When we had placed the rings on each other's fingers, Michael stepped back and Taequo came forward, bid us join hands and, when we had, he bound them together with a rawhide strip. As he did, a large red-tail hawk swooped down and landed on his shoulder, and stayed there as he said:]

"Fire Thunderbird and Silver Wolf, you have made promises to each other here before your family and friends, underneath Father Sky, and standing in a sacred place on Mother Earth. You have bound yourself, one to the other, with words and you have symbolized your vows with rings. You are bound together forever as you are now bound by a cord from our Brother Buffalo. Let no-one speak evil of your being bound and let none come between you or break the bond which binds you together."

[Then he prayed:]

"Great Spirit, you have given us the good earth and all its creatures. You have shown us your love in the beauty with which you have surrounded us. You call upon us to love all your creation and especially to love each other, to be a comfort and strength to each other in times of sorrow and weakness. Now give Luke Hans Yonghon Tongmu Fire Thunderbird and Matthew Sarang Hanun Pomul Silver Wolf the wisdom and vision, the strength and courage to so live and love that their love may be strength to others. So bless their union that all may see and know that theirs is a holy union and pleasing to you. Hetch etu.

"Matthew Sarang Hanun Pomul Silver Wolf, Luke Hans Yonghon Tongmu Fire Thunderbird, Now you will feel no rain, for each of you will be shelter to the other. Now you will feel no cold, for each of you will be warmth to the other. Now there is no loneliness for you, for now you are no more alone. Now you are two bodies, but there is only one life before you. Now know that you have entered into your days together. And may they be good and long upon earth."

As Taequo finished, the red-tailed hawk shot into the air with a mighty scream and disappeared. Taequo winked at the two of us, and Matt and I embraced in a passionate kiss. As we broke the kiss, we walked, hand in hand among our friends, receiving their hugs and handshakes. When we returned, Fr. Tom began the Eucharist.

When the time for the blessing came, Matt and I had understood that Fr. Tom would not bless us as he would have a married couple, but we were wrong. He had us kneel and, as he pronounced the blessing, he laid his hands upon us and used the blessing he would for a regular wedding. When he finished, he looked at us, smiled, and said, "Sometimes you just have to do what is right!"

Of course there were pictures to be made, but it was obvious that Matt and I were ready to get on with the celebration. After about fifteen minutes of picture taking, Greywolf said, "It's time to celebrate!" and the Fellowship and

Taequo started walking toward the Greywolfs'. The crowd walked or drove behind us.

When we reached the house, we formed a receiving line along the front walk and greeted our friends. I thought I had seen everyone who was present, but was surprised when Ms. Jones gave me a great hug. "Luke, I am very happy for you two. We will miss you this year at Independence."

"I think we're leaving Independence in good hands, Ms. Jones."

"You are indeed. I know you are proud of your little brother."

"We certainly are," Matt said.

Food and drink had been set up on the front and side porches and, as soon as Matt and I had cut the cake, there were toasts but no speeches, then the feasting began. While everyone was eating, the two of us, holding hands all the time, talked with our friends, thanking them for being a part of this, our special day, and for all the things they had done for us in the past. When we had spoken to almost everyone, Linda came from inside and said, "Time for the first dance".

As Matt and I walked inside, the music started, "More", of course. I took Matt in my arms and we danced our first dance as, what?, a married couple. I looked into those black almond eyes and saw tears forming. Sure enough, I could feel the tears forming in my own eyes as I pressed my lips to Matt's, closed my eyes, and we danced.

Soon we were joined by the parents and Michael and Mary Kathryn. As the song continued, Linda and Bill, Jacob and Paula joined in. I wondered what Eugene and Larry would do, but I should have known, they were soon dancing with us. I guess that gave John and Uncle Michael courage because, for the first time, I saw them openly acknowledge they were a couple as they moved onto the floor. Matt and I finally kissed each other and broke in on our dads and moms. Jens broke in on Michael and Mary Kathryn, and Michael promptly broke in on David and Margaret.

As "More" played a second time, the Fellowship all took the floor and even Douglas and Janet were dancing. The dancing continued for some time and, finally, a great fast tune came around and it was outdo-each-other time for the Fellowship, joined by Buddy and Gloria. Douglas and Janet started, but it proved too much for them.

We were all having a grand time, even Millie danced a slow dance with Eugene, when I realized it was past sunset. I asked Dad to play "More" one more time, and Matt and I danced again. I could have danced with him for hours but, when I said so, he said, "I had other things in mind!". I looked at him and had to admit I had other things in mind as well.

When the song finished, Matt said, "I hope all of you stay and enjoy yourselves, but I think Luke and I will be leaving now!". Damn, I blushed! When I did, everyone roared laughing. After lots of hugs and kisses, Matt and I walked, hand in hand, toward the falls, stopping for a kiss now and then. "You remember

when our secret was out because we walked hand in hand and stopped for a kiss?" Matt asked.

"Wow, do I!" I replied. "Now the whole world can know because we are a married couple!"

Linda and Bill had said they would take care of our wedding bed, and we were surprised when we reached the falls and there was nothing there. "I guess they forgot," I said.

"We'll go to our special place and then we can go to my bed or yours if we want to," Matt said. "I'd not have been surprised, with everything going on this week, if 'most anything had been forgotten."

Well, no-one had forgotten anything. When we ducked under the canopy of the willow, there was an air mattress bed resting on the mossy ground. In the limbs of the willows, Japanese lanterns hung, the candles inside giving our special place a soft glow and filling the air with the fragrance of my beloved Matt.

We carefully removed the chest pieces and chokers from each other, then I removed Matt's headband and his black-as-night hair was free. He removed my headband, but there was no cascade of blond hair. If I were Matt, I think I'd feel cheated, but his hands in my hair assured me that it gave him as much pleasure as his did me.

We still were dressed in arm bands, leggings and breech cloths when Matt pulled me to himself, covered my mouth with his and lifted me in his arms. He walked to the waiting bed and gently laid me down. We lay, side by side, just gazing into each other's eyes, drinking in the love reflected there. Matt's eyes sparkled in the flickering candle light and, as I looked into them, I was overwhelmed with my love for him and his love for me. "Matt, what have I ever done to deserve this night and you?" I asked.

"You love me and make my life complete," he smiled. "That's enough to earn you hundreds of nights like this."

"Thousands of nights with you, but never another like this. I think... I don't really know how to say this, but I think this night is more special than that first night. Do you know what I mean?"

"Yes, I do, but don't ask me why. I don't know why, but I know it is," Matt said, as he drew me to himself and covered my mouth with his in a gentle, tender kiss. "Luke, it is different, isn't it?"

I answered by kissing the lips that gave me life as my hands wove themselves in his hair. We lay together, still dressed in leggings and breech cloths, exchanging kisses, our hands exploring each other's body, teasing each other's hair for a long time. "Strange," I thought, "but I'm in no rush to move beyond what we are doing." Stranger still, hot-to-trot Matt was also taking it easy and, as I, enjoying every minute of our gentle, tender love-making.

Of course, it didn't go on all night! Matt finally reached down and removed my breech cloth as I did his. Our love-making became more and more

passionate, our kisses now including tongue duels, our hands touching nipples and cheeks and, finally, each other's manhood. Even though leggings didn't cover anything of importance, they do get in the way, but that was a situation soon remedied.

Still, our love-making had a leisurely pace. Matt entered me slowly, consummating our vows and, when he did, he rested on my chest, kissing me passionately, but slowly, and I savoured every moment. When he started moving in and out of me, I sucked his tongue deep into my mouth, filling my being with the taste of Matt. As Matt's manhood filled me, he fell into a slow, wonderful rhythm. I was enjoying his slow, tender love-making as, I'm sure, I had never done before. But, after all, he was Matt and an eighteen year old. Gradually, his plunging into my body became deeper and faster as I cried, "Yes! Matt, Yes! Yes!" As I did, Matt knelt on his knees and I drew my legs to my chest. He wrapped one arm around a bent knee and his other hand found Little Luke and began stroking him with the same rhythm as his own. Finally, in one climactic moment, I felt his hot seed start to fill me as Little Luke exploded. It was pure Fourth of July fireworks! For us both, I was sure. When we had both regained our regular breathing, Matt lay on my chest, his eyes sought mine and a glorious Matt smile covered his face. We lay that way even after Chili Pepper, in his shrunken state, slipped from my body.

Matt kissed me, again tenderly, gently, and his smiling eyes looked into mine. "Yonghon Tongmu, our vows have been sealed forever now," he said and kissed me again.

We talked of our love, our vows, what lay ahead for us. We talked about how special this day had been for us and other things that lovers, real lovers, talk about. They were silly things, I guess, unless they were, as ours were, another way of making love, of expressing our love. Finally I said, "Sarang Hanun Pomul, I think it is time we made sure our vows are sealed forever". Once again, our love-making was slow, tender, gentle. Once again, we were able to reach a climax together and the second was no less powerful than the first, as I poured my man's seed into the body of the one I loved.

As we lay in the afterglow of the double sealing of our vows, Matt asked, somewhat puzzled, "Luke, I don't think we have ever made love as fully and as completely as we have done tonight, and I know it has never been so slow, tender... well, loving. Why do you think that was the way it was?"

I'll admit that I had realized, and wondered about the same thing, and wasn't sure I had an answer, and said so. "Maybe, before, we were rushing for fear it would be our last time. Now we know we have a whole lifetime of love-making and there is time to slow down and savour every moment."

"I think you're right, Bright Angel," Matt said, and kissed me with a long, slow, passionate kiss. "And I like it!" he said, his eyes aglow.

The river beside where we lay was not really deep enough for swimming but was just right for frolicking, and Matt and I were soon taking advantage of it. I

knew that I wanted to be surrounded by the fragrance of my Matt and had, some time ago, started using the same scented soap and things that he used. When we headed for the river, I grabbed the bar I had brought and we loved soaping each other in the cool waters of our own special place.

When we got out of the river, we rubbed each other vigorously with towels from the basket Bill and Linda had left for us, lay down once more, and soon Matt's fabulous hot mouth covered Little Luke and sent me sailing into the sky. I started to move so I could give him the kind of pleasure he was giving me, but he looked up and shook his head then, taking his mouth from Little Luke, he smiled, "This one's for you, Luke Babe!". Matt drew out his love-making as long as possible but, before either of us really wanted it, I exploded. When I did, he smiled at me and said, "The great taste of Luke! I love it."

When I had recovered, I said, "Now it's your turn, Matt Babe". The sounds Matt made let me know he was enjoying my love-making as much as I had loved his.

Love-making, even on one's wedding night, must finally come to an end. Both of us had exhausted ourselves when we finally lay, cradled in each other's arms, looking into each other's eyes, bathed in that special feeling which comes to two people who have made love, real love, to each other. "Yonghon Tongmu, my love, my soulmate, my Bright Angel, my life, I love you, I love you, I love you!" Matt said, "And, Yonghon Tongmu, you love me. That is the most wonderful thing in the whole wide world."

I kissed Matt gently and said, "Sarang Hanun Pomul, my love, my soulmate, my Dark Angel, my life, I love you, I love you, I love you. And, Sarang Hanun Pomul, you love me. That we love each other and have each other is the reason we have a world."

As we lay, each smiling at the one he loved, the river's soft sounds echoed the deep feeling of peace I felt, we felt, as it lulled us to sleep on our wedding night, our first night as, yes, a married couple.

Sunrise found us awake, making love again. When we had again exhausted our passion, Matt looked at me and laughed, "Luke, I think we have satisfied, at least for the moment, the first of a teenager's wants. Now I'm ready for food!"

"I'm with you, Soulmate!" We bathed in the river, playing around more than a little bit, dressed, and raced to Matt's. When we burst in the front door, Greywolf was fixing breakfast and said, "I see the second need of any teenager has made itself known. Coffee's ready. Breakfast will be ready shortly."

As he spoke, Yong Jin came from their bedroom looking fresh and beautiful. Matt grabbed his mom and kissed her cheek saying, "Mom, I am the happiest man in the world!".

I hugged Yong Jin, kissed her cheek, and said, "I think he's kidding himself. I think your son has made me the happiest man in the world!"

"Well, so long as you're both happy I guess I don't need to worry about a divorce anytime soon," she laughed.

As we ate, Matt kept glancing at me and smiling. I, of course, was doing the same. Finally Greywolf said, "You two are acting like newly-weds".

"Cause we are, Dad," Matt said, leaned over the kitchen table and kissed me passionately.

When we finished eating, Luke and I cleaned the kitchen, and even something as routine and dull as that was joyful because we were together, bound together. Never say that words don't make a difference. The vows we made the day before may have seemed to change nothing, but we both knew our relationship was, somehow, different.

When we finished, we went to Matt's room and dressed for church. When we came down, Greywolf acted surprised. "I thought you two would skip today."

"No way," I said. "We have a thanksgiving to make!"

"Besides, it will be our last Sunday at St. Mary's for ages," Matt added.

For the first time, Matt and I did not sit with our parents. When Matt left for Sewanee, Millie had taken on the job as organist again and, when we returned, I, as always, sat with my family and Matt joined his. This morning, however, we found our own place and sat together as the couple we were. It was very special, and a statement to the world of our new relationship.

Sunday dinner was at the Andrews', and Margaret told Michael to invite the Fellowship. All were there, along with Janet and Douglas, and we had a wonderful time together. After dinner, we went over what we had packed, shipped, and were carrying with us. Sure enough, we had missed a few things, like Matt's stereo and my CD collection. When we were satisfied that everything was ready to go, we went to the falls for a final swim. It was decided we would leave early Monday morning for Ohio, so everyone went home to make final arrangements and spend the night with their parents. We agreed to meet at my place for breakfast, after which we would leave.

Matt and I discussed spending the night in our own beds for some dumb reason, but decided we were now a couple and, in our minds at least, a married couple who no longer had two beds. From now on, we only had our bed. So we spent our second night as a married couple in our bed at my parents' place. Again, our love-making started slow and easy, tender, but ended on a high note of passion. Afterward, as we lay in each other's arms, Matt said, "Luke, this is our last night here. Tomorrow begins a new life for us."

"Another beginning and, tonight, an ending. Next week the Fellowship will be together but, today at the falls, I realized this was really its end. Now there's the Oberlin Five and the Concord Five. I wonder what that will be like."

"So long as I have you, I can face whatever our new life has to offer," Matt said.

"Yes, so long as we have each other we can handle the world," I said as I kissed Matt softly, and I meant every word of what I said. Secure in his arms, I fell asleep and slept peacefully.

Part Fifty-eight

Matt

Early Monday morning, everyone gathered at the Andrews' for breakfast, since David and Margaret had decided it would be less strain on Margaret for them to fly up. They would fly into Cleveland Wednesday, after we had time to get to our place in Ohio. We were all very surprised when Bill's parents, Howard and Helen Lance, showed up, ready to go. The Fellowship ate outside so there would be room inside for the parents. "Bill, what changed your parents' minds?" I asked.

"I'm not sure. I think Jacob had something to do with it."

"Not really," Jacob said. "I just talked to your dad about how great it was to have parents who loved you, and how much I wished mine did and were going to Ohio to spend time with me and my friends. He looked a bit shocked and said, 'Excuse me,' got up and left. A few minutes later, he and your mom came to me and asked what all we would be doing and what they needed to take."

"I guess you reminded them that they had a son who needed them," Eugene smiled.

We had decided we wouldn't go Indian style but would camp on our way up, so Mom and Dad had gotten our camping equipment, the Andrews' and Larsens' and had packed it into their four-wheel-drive. Of course Eugene, Luke and I were driving our cars and truck up. Millie insisted on having her land yacht and Michael was driving his Tracker. Bill's parents were going with the Larsens. Since we had sent most of our things on ahead, except the tools, camping gear and those things we would need on the trip itself, none of the vehicles were really loaded.

"I don't think the newly-weds will want to be separated," Eugene suggested. "Why don't they drive Luke's truck? Bill or Jacob can drive Matt's Jeep and Paula and Linda can go with them."

"Think that's fine," Luke had eagerly agreed.

Millie insisted Janet and Douglas go with her and Larry's mom. "Douglas, you drive, and Mrs. Watley, Claudia, and I will sit in back like queens being driven by their trusty coach driver," she laughed.

We decided it was not really practical to try to keep together in convoy, so we planned meeting places along the way and took off. It was a very strange feeling, leaving the place we had known all our lives. "You can't go home again," I mused. "I wonder if that's just a book title or is really the way it is?"

"I suspect it's really true. Sure, we'll be back, and will spend a lot of time here in the years to come, but I suspect we can never go home again," Luke said, somewhat sadly.

"But we are going home, Yonghon Tongmu, to our home. We're a family now, aren't we?"

Luke took his eye off the road for a moment, kissed me quickly and said, "Damn right, Sarang Hanun Pomul!"

We stopped for lunch somewhere just inside the Kentucky line and did some switching around. We arrived at a state park somewhere beyond Cincinnati about 5:30 in the evening. Dad had reserved a cabin which slept eight, so all the parents slept in the cabin. The Fellowship had five tents which were quickly set up, and a campfire and the grills were started. While supper was cooking, we talked about the day and then the parents got started telling stories about our growing up. They, of course, embarrassed the fool out of us, but I noticed no-one protested since all of us saw Eugene and Jacob looking sad. There was no-one to tell their stories.

Supper was delicious as food always is at a camp. After we had eaten, we sat around the campfire a while longer and Millie excused herself and went inside to bed. The other parents followed suit and soon just the Fellowship was left. We all talked about Luke's and my ceremony for a while and then Bill said, "Look, I know we have all slept, and I mean slept, together before and I'd like nothing more than to hold Linda tonight, and maybe more, but I think, since my parents are here, it would be good if Jacob and I shared a tent".

"I was afraid to say anything, Bill, but I think that's a good idea. Mom's pretty uptight about my leaving and, as much as I'd like to have my redhead beside me tonight, I'd appreciate that," Paula said.

"Thank God, we're married," Douglas said as he kissed Janet, swept her into his arms and carried her to their tent.

"Amen to that," Luke said as he stood up, extended his hand and, when I was on my feet, picked me up and took me to our tent.

The day had been long and, frankly, the emotional strain had been more than I realized. I was tired and I knew Luke was, because he had insisted on doing all the driving. When we got to our tent, we undressed each other, lay down and cuddled, exchanged a few gentle kisses and that was it, because we were both asleep almost by the time our heads touched the pillow.

I hate alarm clocks big time, but Dad made me wish we had one because he aroused all of us by banging on a pot lid with a metal spoon. "Damn, Dad," I shouted, "how about a little peace and quiet?".

Luke looked at me as if in shock and said, "Matt! Your language!".

"Guess I've been spending too much time around you, Lover Boy. Think I need to cut back on that."

"Like frigging hell you will!" he said, and he gave me a passionate morning kiss.

We hopped out of bed, pulled on shorts and went into the cabin for a shower. There were two bathrooms and the parents were all up and dressed, so Luke and I shared a shower as did Larry and Eugene and Douglas and Janet. Sorry to say, the other three couples didn't get to enjoy the same privilege.

Breakfast was ready when we were all dressed, and we soon cleaned up, packed and were ready to go. The second day was not as long as the first and we arrived in Lorain early afternoon. Mom, Gabrielle and Paula went grocery shopping while Dad, Jens and I went to the home improvement place for things we knew we needed to buy. Eugene contacted Professor Roth-Batten and she said the house was easy to find, but she'd meet us in Loraine. Larry and the other guys took the pictures and drawings of the house to the paint store and bought paint for the exterior, as well as brushes and other things needed for that major job.

When we had everything we thought we'd need, we got back together just as Professor Roth-Batten arrived. We all reintroduced ourselves and introduced Douglas and Janet. "Well, I'm glad you had a safe trip and are here at last. I was at the house last week and was thrilled with the idea that it will once again be a living, breathing home. So let's go."

We drove maybe ten miles out of town and turned into a long, tree-lined drive. The huge old trees overlapped overhead, forming a beautiful avenue. The drive made a long, gentle curve and, as we drove around it, the house gradually came into view. Pictures failed to do it justice. We, of course, knew it was huge, but a diagram on paper just didn't convey the real thing, and it was beautiful! Victorian to the core, it had gingerbread all over it. Before the two weeks was over I would change my mind about how I liked gingerbread, the ornate wood trim was a real bitch to paint but, when it was finished, I would fall in love with it all over again.

There was a large circular drive in front of the house as well as parking places in front of the garage, actually it was a carriage house. When everyone had parked and gotten out of the cars, Professor Roth-Batten said, "I hope you don't mind, but I kept a set of keys and came out yesterday and opened the house to air it out. It had been closed so long I knew it needed a good airing." We assured her we not only didn't mind, but also appreciated her thoughtfulness.

She opened the leaded glass front door and we all walked into a large foyer, from which broad stairs went up to the second story. We all walked through the downstairs and out onto the large, huge, sun porch. It overlooked a path leading down to a sandy beach and the lake. The lake was sparkling in the afternoon sun. "I doubt that you'll want to use it, but there has been a vegetable garden beyond the garage and, of course, you can see the flower gardens which, unfortunately, have been pretty much let go over the years. If you want to work on them, they could be beautiful again. Right now, I'm sure you all want to explore. If you need anything, give me a call. I'll run back to Oberlin, but you have my phone number."

"Seems a shame," Paula said, "that you can't stay and have supper with us on our first night. I'm sure it'll be nothing special..."

"Sorry, I'd love to, but I have an evening appointment."

"How about tomorrow evening?" Michael asked. "Mom and Dad will be here then and I'm sure that will be special."

"I'd love to," she smiled. "But right now I've got to run."

As soon as we said goodbye, we started exploring. Of course, the first order of business was checking out the upstairs. As soon as we looked in the bedrooms, one thing became obvious: there would have to be new beds. All four rooms had twin beds! Each pair of bedrooms opened onto a bath so Paula said right away, "I'm not sure who wants what bedroom, but I think it might be wise to put the two couples on the same side of the hall. That way all the heavy breathing and loud groaning won't disturb my sleep!" We all laughed, then she said, "As much as I hate to say this, since there are four of you and only one of me, I think you four guys should get the bedrooms overlooking the lake".

"No disagreement from me," Luke said.

When we crossed the hall, we discovered the other two bedrooms overlooked a garden which had seen better days. "I guess our having the lake view means we'll have to restore the garden so you can have a nice view," Luke said.

"Sounds reasonable," Paula laughed. "There is some method to my madness."

We were joined by the parents, who were obviously awed by the upstairs and the view. "Everything Greywolf and I have checked out seems in perfect working order," Jens said. "I guess we need to unload the cars and see if we can get supper tonight."

While we unloaded, Dad called the phone, electric and gas companies and got the services switched, Professor Roth-Batten had said she had left them all on, since she occasionally came out, and saw no reason to have them disconnected. He also called the cable company and made arrangements for cable to be installed in all the bedrooms as well as in the family room.

While the guys were handling the unloading, the women were taking care of the kitchen. Almost everything had not been used in ages, so Gabrielle decided it all had to be washed. She was loading and unloading the dishwasher, using a short cycle since nothing was really dirty and, as I walked through the kitchen said, "My God, Matt, there's dishes, glasses and flatware here to serve twenty-four".

Just as she spoke, Mom called from the butler's pantry between the kitchen and dining room, "Gabrielle, you're washing the everyday stuff".

"This is everyday stuff? Then the special stuff must be something!"

"It is. Come here," Mom replied. "There's a complete service for twenty-four of fine china, silver and crystal here. I wish I had things as fine as these." Soon the butler's pantry was crowded, with everyone carrying on over the fine table settings.

The house kept revealing treasures of all kinds as the exploration continued. Between exploring and unloading, it was getting to be late afternoon when Luke said, "We haven't seen the carriage house". It held another treasure I thought Professor Roth-Batten would have mentioned, but I guess she wanted it to be a surprise. The downstairs was a garage housing all sorts of tools and equipment, including a practically new garden tractor with a mower attachment, but still having space for two, maybe three, cars. There were steps leading to the upstairs on the outside and when Luke finally found the right key and opened the door, he almost fainted. Obviously the place hadn't been used, even opened, in years, but at one point it had been a studio. As large as the garage below, it had an old-fashioned skylight covering one side, the north side, of the roof. It needed cleaning big time but it was a magnificent studio. "Holy shit!" Michael exclaimed, "Someone must have known you were coming, Luke". Luke just stood there, stunned, his mouth open.

While the women prepared supper, the rest of us worked on sleeping arrangements. Millie, of course, was given the downstairs bedroom, which had the only double bed in the house. The rest of the parents took the upstairs bedrooms, leaving one for David and Margaret when they arrived. The Fellowship, in spite of the fact that it put a bit of a crimp in love-making, got the air mattresses out and put them on the sun porch, but didn't blow them up, leaving the chairs in place for the time being.

Supper, it need not be said, was a joyous affair. When the table had been cleared, Dad, in his usual role as head of the family, called us all into the dining room, with the leaves in the table, I realized it actually did seat twenty-four people, for a planning session.

"Jens and I have taken a look at the outside of the house. We bought paint and scrapers today, but I think that is too much of a job for us to get done. Jens called the paint store and they recommended we hire a sandblasting crew to get the house ready to prime and paint."

Jens filled us in on the details, "I was lucky. The only crew anywhere near was finishing a job today and could start tomorrow morning. It will take a couple or three days to get the house ready. Since we don't want to have grit in the paint, we'll wait until they have finished before we start painting the exterior. The sandblast crew will bring scaffolding I rented so as soon as they are finished we can start. In the meantime, we can work on the inside of the house. And, if we get done, we can start work on the gardens and yard. Actually, maybe some of us can get the grass cut. I really don't like to have the place looking the way it does now and that would be a big improvement."

"I guess the Oberlin Five need to look around and make some decisions about interior paint colors, what you want where and that sort of thing," Dad said.

"Then, the first thing in the morning, you can go to the paint store and get paint, rollers, brushes and drop cloths and we can start painting. Take the house plans with you so you can get enough paint."

"When you are deciding on colors," Janet said, "You need to think about what is already here, draperies, furniture, that sort of thing. They are all in good shape so you probably want to keep them and use colors which will go with them."

"Good idea," Paula said. "Also, I think we need to call a carpet cleaning company and get the carpets, rugs and furniture cleaned. The draperies need to be taken to the cleaners. They are in good shape, but are very dusty."

"Call the carpet people first thing in the morning, Paula," Dad said, "and make sure they know they will be dealing with very fine oriental rugs, as well as wall-to-wall carpet in the bedrooms. Schedule them for Friday at the earliest, but we'd like it done Saturday if possible. They probably don't work on Saturday, but try so the painting will be done."

"I hate to bring this up," Larry said, a bit ill-at-ease, "but who's paying for all this?"

"That you don't have to worry about," Millie said. "It's being taken care of."

"Millie, I feel like a freeloader again," Larry replied.

"Don't. The parents have worked it all out. We want this to be a special place for you five. Anyway, you have a good income from what Eugene has settled on you, so you can pay your part if there's something the parents are not paying for."

"Such as queen-sized beds!" Eugene said.

"Amen to that!" Luke said.

"Think I may as well keep my lonely twins," Paula said in a pouty voice.

"Damn," Douglas said, "I wish Janet and I were going to be here. This sounds great."

"Just wait until the first disagreement among these five hard-headed people," Millie laughed. I had never thought about that possibility.

There was another half hour planning, everyone got an assignment for the following morning and then Dad said, "Meeting adjourned". As we started getting up, Gabrielle and Mom went to the kitchen and came back with coffee and apple pie with ice cream. We all took it to the sun porch and watched the sunset, which was beautiful.

When we finished our dessert, we went for a walk on the beach. Even Millie walked down to the beach, but sat in a chair Eugene had carried down for her. Mrs. Watley and Mrs. Wright had taken towels and sat on the beach with her. I'm not sure who was most demonstrative of their love for their partners, the parents or the kids. It was a great feeling!

It was getting dark when we returned to the house. The air mattresses were quickly blown up and sleeping bags tossed on them. Again, Jacob and Bill slept without their lover beside them, but the two married couples and Eugene and Larry zipped their bags together and slept cuddled in each other's arms. Just before we went to sleep, I heard Michael say, "Something's got to be done about these sleeping arrangements before these two weeks pass". I smiled, knowing that I never had to worry about that again.

The sun woke me and, when I looked around, I saw everyone else stirring. I crawled out of bed after giving Luke a good morning kiss and he was right behind me. It was very early and the parents were all still in bed, so the Fellowship decided we would take a walk along the beach. There was a lot of hugging and kissing going on as we walked, watching the morning sun coloring the rippling surface of the lake. Bill and Linda were just ahead of me and Luke and they turned and waited for us. "Linda just had a great idea," Bill said. "Why don't we have a campfire tonight on the beach? Maybe the parents will decide to turn in before we do and we can get some making out done. Two weeks is a long time to go without at least a heavy make out session." Luke and I heartily agreed, as did the others when they were told.

When we got back to the house, breakfast was ready and we all enjoyed it tremendously. It was still early, 7:15 to be exact, when two trucks loaded with equipment pulled up outside. The occupants quickly put up the scaffolding and started the sand blasting. The Fellowship got the table cleared in record time and we all met in the dining room again, after Paula announced there was a problem with the inside paint. "The draperies are really too heavy to take down and haul to the paint store. I suggest Janet, Luke and Douglas make some notes as we look at the rooms and then go get paint chips so we can decide on colors. Since they are artists, they'll have a better memory of colors than any of us, I suspect." There was immediate approval of her idea and we walked through the house, talking about colors. In some rooms we decided what was there was about right and in others changes were suggested. Fortunately, the house had twelve-foot ceilings downstairs and huge windows, so dark colors could be used if we wanted them. The library, where we would set up the computers and do much of our studying, was one room we all agreed would be a darker color. When we finished the tour, it was 9:00 and Paula called the carpet people right away.

David and Margaret were arriving at noon, so Millie took Mary Kathryn with her to the airport to meet them. Michael hit the yards with the garden tractor and its mower. Bill found a smaller mower to take care of smaller areas and places the larger mower couldn't reach. I found a weed-eater/edger in the garage and started trimming the flower beds and around trees and walks. Paula, Linda and Helen had taken down the sheers behind some of the draperies and were washing them.

Mom and Claudia were chosen to go to town and order queen-sized beds and linen for the two couples. We wanted something which matched the furniture already in the rooms so they could do that as well as we could.

Gabrielle and Sandra worked in the kitchen again. There were still things to get washed, the fine china, crystal and silver, they declared, had to be hand washed.

Dad, Jens and Howard made a careful survey of the house and made a list of small repairs needed, there were few, and started getting those done. When they finished, they were going to start getting the interior ready for painting.

When we broke for lunch, everyone was back except Millie and Mary Kathryn. The beds would be delivered Thursday and, after lunch, the Oberlin Five looked at the paint chips the artists had brought back, and made decisions about colors. After lunch, Douglas went back into town to purchase the interior paint. Luke joined the grounds crew and Janet helped with the curtain washing and ironing, getting them ready for re-hanging when the painting was completed.

We all took a break at 3:00 and, just as we picked up drinks and snacks and went to the front porch, Millie and Mary Kathryn arrived with David and Margaret.

"Looks like you have a winner here," David said as he got out of the car and helped Margaret out. "This is a beautiful place."

"Wait until you see inside and the lake," Michael said. "It's a dream place."

Millie insisted Margaret and David take the downstairs bedroom and that Margaret lie down for a while and get her feet up. Margaret offered no resistance. David changed into work clothes and asked if he could help outside. We welcomed his help. He found pruning shears and worked on the shrubs, making an immediate improvement in the appearance of the front of the house.

When all the grass had been mowed and trimmed, he was about half done with the pruning. He had always been in charge when pruning was to be done at home and he directed the grounds crew when we started helping him. By the time Douglas arrived with Luke's truck loaded with paint, we had finished the front. The place looked so different, it was hard to imagine how overgrown it had been the day before.

The sandblasting crew quit for the day at 5:30 and Dad suggested we do the same. It was only after we had all showered and were in the family room that Luke asked, "Weren't the movers supposed to be here today?"

"I can tell you," Howard said, "their schedule has been a guesstimate every time we have moved. They'll probably be here tomorrow, maybe." The parents were relaxing with a glass of wine or beer and Jens announced, "We have always given our kids wine on special occasions and I think this is one. Of course, if you rather your child didn't, then that's ok." No-one raised an objection and we all had a glass with our parents.

The women in the kitchen had prepared a great dinner and we were really just waiting on Professor Roth-Batten before eating. I think everyone was

starved, but also so tired they didn't mind waiting. She arrived at 7:00 and we had dinner shortly after. Again, dessert and coffee were served on the sun porch.

"Professor Roth-Batten..." Luke started.

"I know that if I have you in class or see you on campus, you will call me that and I expect it but, since all of you seem to be on a first-name basis, call me Ruth here."

"Ruth, I hope you know how much we appreciate what you have done for us and I want you to know we love the house."

"That was obvious as soon as I drove up the drive. I was surprised at how much work you had gotten done and I thought how pleased my aunt would be to see the house regaining the glory it once had."

"Well, you surely kept one good surprise," Luke smiled. "I discovered the studio yesterday."

"It was an easy secret to keep," Ruth said. "It was built for my cousin when she took up painting in high school. Unfortunately, she died of polio a year after it was built. My aunt and uncle were so destroyed by the death of their only child that it was closed and, I suspect, not opened until you opened it yesterday. She died when I was very young and I never saw it, so I just forgot about it. Is it even usable?"

"It's fantastic," Luke said.

We talked about the house and its history and all the things that had gone on here, enjoying stories Ruth had to tell, until well after sunset. Finally Bill said, "We've gathered wood for a fire on the beach. Why don't we go down there?"

"I'd love to join you. I remember a lot of great evenings there, but I need to get back. We're getting ready for registration and the opening of fall session, and I have a lot to do."

"I hope you know that you have an open invitation here," Paula said, and the four guys echoed her statement.

"I may well take you up on that," she replied. "Being here tonight has brought back many happy memories and I am excited about seeing the house come alive again."

It was still somewhat light when Ruth left at 9:30 and we all walked to the beach and lit the campfire. Soon it was casting shadows as the flames danced. It was still warm, borderline hot, so no-one sat close to the fire. Millie and Margaret sat in chairs Michael and Eugene had brought to the beach for them, the rest of us sat on blankets. There was a lot of discussion about the house, what had been done and what awaited us tomorrow. Finally, Millie and Margaret called it an evening and the rest of the parents left as well. When Jens, bringing up the rear, walked through the sun porch door, you would have thought the Fellowship was being attacked as each couple grabbed a blanket and headed in different directions, all well out of the feeble light of the dying fire.

Luke and I walked a distance down the beach, spread our blanket and immediately started undressing each other. This time there was no slow start. As soon as we were undressed, Luke flopped down on the blanket and pulled me atop his hard body. Our kisses were passionate and grew more so as he grabbed a handful of my hair and pulled my lips hard against his. Soon he rolled over and started kissing my body, nipping at my nipples while his hands never stopped moving over my body. His fingers moved to my crack and soon he was fingering my rosebud. Just when I was ready for him to do more he said, "Damn! I forgot again! Will I never learn?".

I laughed at his frustration and reached for my shorts and took a tube from the pocket. Even in the dim light of the night, I could see the smile on his face. We made mad, passionate love there on the beach until both of us were sweating profusely, our bodies emitting that delightful fragrance males have after exhausting themselves making love to someone they love deeply. We were so exhausted by our love-making that we fell asleep, wrapped in each other's arms.

We woke, refreshed, in the darkness of the predawn and made love again, as passionately and as completely as we had the night before. Just as the first fingers of light heralding the near-approach of the dawn colored the sky, we got up and, taking the blanket with us, started walking toward the house. We were joined by the others, all with a definite glow telling us they, too, had enjoyed making out on the beach. When I looked at Michael and Jacob, both grinned and said, "Not yet". Michael added quickly, "But that doesn't mean we didn't make some pretty mad, passionate love". Mary Kathryn smiled up at him as Paula laughed and tiptoed to kiss Jacob on the forehead.

As the five couples walked to the house arm in arm, Bill said, "I do think this bunch better hit the showers before breakfast". Jacob pointed out there were shower heads at the top of the walk leading from the beach, so we all had a cold shower.

As we stood under them, all naked, Bill laughed, "Even with a night of super love-making, I suspect we all really need a cold shower". When we finished, we realized we had no towels and that appearing at the house nude was probably not a good idea.

"Somehow or other, I think appearing in the briefs I wore last night is not a very good idea either," Michael said. We finally decided to just risk walking in without clothes on and, surprisingly, none of the parents were up yet and we were able to get towels and wrap ourselves in them until we could get to our clothes.

"Think we better do a better job of planning next time," Paula said, and we all agreed.

When the parents started coming down, coffee was ready and breakfast well on its way, being prepared by a dozen towel-clad teenagers. With the parents up, the Fellowship went to get clean clothes and, by breakfast, everyone was properly dressed in work clothes for the day.

We had decided to set the organ up in the family room since it was the largest room in the house, so the draperies and furniture were moved out of it soon after the sandblasters arrived. Drop cloths were put down and Jens took Bill and Linda, Janet and Douglas as crew, and started painting. The aim was to get the room ready before the organ arrived. Jens did the trim right behind the wall painters.

Since the beds for Luke's and my room, and for Eugene's and Larry's, would be arriving, those rooms were also on the day's agenda. We wrapped the mattresses and box springs for the twin beds well, in plastic, and stored them in the attic until we could decide what to do with them. The remaining furniture was moved to the middle of the room and painting started. Mom and Dad helped us with Luke doing the trim. Paula's room had Jacob and Sandra working with Paula. Jacob had become very good at painting, working this summer, and did the trim. David did the trim in what would one day be Michael's and Mary Kathryn's room, with those two as his helpers.

Howard and Helen were taking down draperies throughout the house and, when they finished, took them into town to the cleaners. By the time they got back, the upstairs bedrooms were almost done and it was time for lunch. Everyone had insisted that Margaret not take on too hard a job and she and Millie agreed to prepare lunch. We had a leisurely lunch but were back to work by 1:30. The upstairs bedrooms were completed shortly after. While they were being finished, Howard and Helen had started painting the upstairs bathrooms and were finished by the time the bedrooms were done. The hall took no time at all since as each group finished, they started working on the hall. Before the break at 3:00, the upstairs was done.

During the 3:00 o'clock break, Bill said, "Look, Dad and Mom know that Linda and I are having sex. Dad asked if I was 'fucking around again' and I told him, 'No, I'm making love to Linda'. When he asked what difference there was, I asked him if he and Mom were 'fucking around' and he got angry. I thought he was going to bust me one. When he finally calmed down, I asked, 'Do you still need to know the difference?' and he said, 'No, I get your point. But you are having sex?'. I said, 'Yes, we are, but it's love-making, not fucking'. He just nodded and said, 'I hope you are being careful'. I assured him we were. I'm saying all this because I don't think there is any real problem with the two of us sleeping together unless it's going to upset someone other than my parents."

"Mom and Dad know Mary Kathryn and I have slept together, hear me, I said 'slept together', and I think Jens and Gabrielle know it as well, but I don't want to upset any apple carts," Michael said.

"Yea, and I guess if the parents saw us sleeping together, it might upset them," Linda said.

"I really don't know what Mom thinks about me and Jacob," Paula said. "I mean in terms of having sex. Otherwise, she thinks it's a great relationship. We haven't started having sex, but I sure would like to feel the body of my red-

headed man next to mine," she added, kissing Jacob on the top of the head. He didn't think that was enough and engaged her in a full tongue lip lock.

"Seems there is a reasonable solution," Michael said. "I'll make sure we have an alarm clock tonight and we can get up and re-zip the sleeping bags before anyone is awake."

"Great idea!" Bill said.

"But you two married couples and two couples living in sin will have to keep the heavy breathing and groaning down!" Mary Kathryn said.

"Oh, I plan to have that over long before I crawl in a sleeping bag," Larry laughed.

Back from our break, the downstairs was a larger problem than the upstairs had been because it was necessary to get scaffolding in order to do the twelve-foot walls and the high ceiling. Michael and Mary Kathryn joined the family room crew while David, Luke, Greywolf, Howard and I started emptying the book cases in the library. They were only about half full as Ruth's aunt had given many of the books to libraries that wanted them. Nonetheless, it was hard work. Eugene and Larry moved the library furniture to the center of the room while Millie got everyone, not working, organized to clear the living room and foyer.

The long and short of it was that, by 5:30, a great deal of the interior of the house had been painted and it really looked great. Some of the rooms had lighter colors and all of them looked fresh. I was amazed at the difference in appearance of rooms in which almost the same color as the original had been used. The movers showed up at 6:30, ready to unload, but Dad and Jens told them, since they were already a day late, they could wait until the morning. They grumbled, but knew they had met their match. I had called the Rodgers dealer in Cleveland, Wednesday, and told him there had been a delay in getting the organ. He had given me his home phone number so I could call him as soon as the organ arrived. I called him and told him the organ was at the house and could be moved in the following morning. He said he'd come with an electrician friend so they could make any wiring changes needed and get the organ set up Friday. The furniture store also called and said they couldn't deliver the new beds until Friday, which was just as well.

Dad suggested we order pizza for supper and the delivery boy was amazed at the order he brought in. Dad had stocked the fridge with beer and sodas and that, with a prepackaged salad, was supper. Everyone was pretty tired from the day's work and some were sore from using muscles they hadn't used in a long time. Accordingly, the parents just relaxed on the sun porch after supper and the Fellowship went for a walk on the beach. When we got back, Dad had brought out my boom box and was playing some of his tapes he had made from old recordings. We all sat listening, holding our lovers in our arms, occasionally singing along when we knew the song. When THE SONG started, Luke stood up, took my hand, looked me in the eyes and started singing. Larry, Bill and Jacob did the same. When it finished, we all realized that Janet and Douglas had been

left out. "Margaret, remember years and years ago when you 'lined out' our song for Michael and Mary Kathryn?"

"Heavens, it does seem years ago," she laughed. "And it was, what?, less than six months ago?"

"Yea, now do it for Douglas and Janet." She did and, before the night was over, Douglas and Janet were singing along with us.

After our songfest, the parents went off to bed. As soon as it was certain they were in bed, sleeping bags got re-arranged and Michael put an alarm clock beside his and Mary Kathryn's, set for 4:30a.m. I must say that the Fellowship had great respect for each other! Given the fact that we had two pairs of newly-weds and two couples who were getting it on big time, there was no loud groaning or heavy breathing, at least so long as I was awake, and, as tired as we were, Luke and I did an awful lot of loving before finally going to sleep.

As I have said, I hate alarm clocks but I was glad we had one for, when it went off, I was sleeping soundly, wrapped in Luke's arms, and knew that there were others doing the same who did not need to be seen sleeping together. Michael's "Holy shit" expressed his feelings about getting up and separating his and Mary Kathryn's sleeping bags. Bill and Jacob echoed his sentiments.

Later, we all woke up about the same time as the sun announced a new day. After a quick dash for a morning piss, we divided up for showers. Michael and I were ready before any of the other guys because we didn't have to shave. By now, Michael had a very respectable beard which Mary Kathryn kept neatly trimmed. I still don't know why women take so long to get showered and dressed.

When we had all finished, no-one else was yet stirring and the Fellowship fell to work preparing breakfast, the guys cooking and the girls setting the table and getting everything ready. When breakfast was about ten minutes away, Luke got an evil grin on his face, grabbed a pan lid and metal stirring spoon and ran up the stairs. The clamour he made could be heard clearly downstairs. Most of the parents came to breakfast in robes, not having time to shower. Breakfast was a jolly time, mostly because the Fellowship was wide awake. The parents were not so awake and ate somewhat silently. After breakfast, we cleaned up the kitchen and dining room while the parents showered and dressed.

We had barely finished when the movers showed up and wanted to know where things went. In the rooms which had been painted, we told them exactly where things went. In the other rooms, we had them add to the furniture which was in the center of the room. By 10:30 they had unloaded everything and were on their way just as the beds arrived. Right behind the delivery truck were the Rodgers man and the electrician. They got the organ set up quickly, doing very little re-wiring. The speakers were another question altogether. All the guys pitched in to move the speakers from one place to another until the Rodgers man and I were satisfied. He and his friend then went to work installing the speaker cables in a more permanent fashion. They finished just before 1:00p.m. as Linda called us all to dinner. The two guys who set up the organ ate with us and, when

we finished, asked about a bit of a 'concert' to make sure of the speaker placement. It proved perfect. I guess the 'concert' would have gone on, but there was work to be done.

As I thanked them and showed them to the door a car, driven by someone I thought I recognized, pulled up. As soon as I saw a cane and a leg poke out the door, I shouted, "Woody's here!" Everyone came rushing to the foyer and, when Woody and I got inside, I introduced everyone.

"Did you bring all of Concord, Matt?" he laughed.

"Just the important ones. Want to see the house?"

"After I get a drink of water," he replied, and was handed one in short order by Paula. We walked over the house, all of us, pointing out first one thing then the other. I was really excited to see him and kept talking a mile a minute.

When we finished the survey of the house, Dad said, "Ok, back to work. Matt, you're excused to entertain our guest."

"Don't expect to be treated as a guest," Woody said, "but would like a few minutes to talk with Matt, and Luke. Then I'll change and pitch in."

We went into the family room and, when Woody saw the organ, he said, "First things first. How about a bit of Bach?" I obliged him and, when I finished a short piece, he said, "Still retaining the lessons Stinky gave you. That's good, not only for your playing, but it will probably keep you from getting your legs broken when he shows up here as he will one of these days. But tell me how things went after you left Sewanee. I expected a letter, phone call or something." Luke and I both hung our heads and I finally said, without looking up, "It was bad, Woody," and Luke and I told him the whole story. When we finished, Woody said, "Sorry about that. I would never have doubted that all would turn out ok with you two, but I can see I was nearly proven wrong. Well, let's get to work."

The sandblasting crew finished in mid-afternoon and left. The silence they left behind was welcomed. By the time they left, only the kitchen and butler's pantry, which were to be done in a different kind of paint, were left. The rest of the house was made ready for the carpet and furniture cleaners who had agreed to come Saturday. "Good," Helen had said. "The draperies will be done by noon and, while we won't be able to hang them until the carpet's dry, we'll pick them up." With everyone pitching in, the kitchen and butler's pantry were done in record time and the interior of the house was ready, even the new beds were in place.

Jacob announced that he and Paula had located a temple and they and Sandra would be going that evening. "Don't bother about dinner for us. I think we'll make the evening a date."

"Sounds like a good idea," Eugene said, "maybe we all should make it a date evening". His suggestion was welcomed by the Fellowship, but the parents all said they thought they'd like a quiet evening at home. Bill ran down to a convenience store not too far away and came back with a newspaper. We pored

over the movie ads and finally agreed it was foolish for everyone to go to the same movie, since we couldn't agree on one. In the end, Eugene and Larry double-dated with me and Luke, and Bill and Linda with Michael and Mary Kathryn.

Eugene and Larry, Luke and I decided we'd do the early movie and have dinner later. I must confess, I don't think any of the four of us really saw much of the movie. There were very few people in the theatre and they were all down front. We parked on the back row where there was no-one around us and made out, being a bit careful not to be seen, and I don't think we were. After the movie, we went to an Italian place we had spotted and had a great dinner and sat talking for an hour or more.

When we got back, there was a Lexus parked in the drive with North Carolina plates. It was Uncle Michael's! As we rushed inside, I heard the organ and we found the parents in the family room and Millie playing away. "John!" Luke shouted and ran to embrace his former teacher. I grabbed Uncle Michael and then Larry and Eugene got in on the act. "What are you doing here?" Luke asked.

"We figured you would have just about gotten the work done and we decided to come celebrate," John laughed.

"As Millie says, 'There's no rest for the wicked and the righteous don't need it', so I guess you figured wrong," Luke laughed.

"Actually, Concord was so boring with all of you gone, we decided to join the fun," Uncle Michael said.

"Man, have I got a surprise for you," Luke said, grabbing John's hand and pulling him to his feet. "You too, Uncle Michael." The two followed Luke, with me bringing up the rear, out to the garage and up the stairs to the studio. Both were duly impressed.

By the time we got back to the house, everyone had returned and Practical Paula said, "Ok, what about sleeping arrangements?". It was finally decided that two of the stored mattresses would be brought down from the attic and put in the library. I noticed the next morning, when we were preparing for the carpet people, they had been shoved together. So much for only the young being passionate!

The carpet people suggested we take some of the oriental rugs to the sun porch so they could be cleaned there and left to dry and the rooms they were in would still be usable. When they suggested that, Howard suggested taking the rest of them to the large front porch. As a result, the living room, dining room and family room would all be usable. "With all the windows open and some fans running, the wall-to-wall carpets in the bedrooms should be dry by bed time," the carpet man said.

Dad suggested we wait until the following week to start working on the outside of the house, and spend that morning working on the gardens. "How about a crew working on the studio?" Uncle Michael asked.

"Good idea," Luke said immediately. He and I joined Uncle Michael and John in the studio while the others started working on the grounds. By late lunch time, the carpets were done and the studio was pretty well complete except for getting the skylight clean. "I think a good coat of paint would help," John said. "Think you should pick an off-white. It will help with the light."

"Guess we can do that this afternoon," Luke said.

"And clean the skylight," I added.

Luke

When we went down, it was amazing how much work the crew had gotten done in the garden. Even Millie had pitched in, often having to separate the weeds from the flowers for the others. Inside, Mom and Gabrielle had set out stuff for sandwiches and drinks so lunch was ready. After lunch, we all gathered in the family room and the three organists entertained us for over an hour.

"Well, I guess it's back-to-work time," Matt said.

"Not before we think about tomorrow," Dad said. "I think we need to take the day off."

"I'll have to leave this evening or early in the morning to get back," Woody said. "I have a service to attend to."

"Why not wait until the morning and those who like can go with you?" Matt asked.

"Only if you'll play," Woody responded.

"Of course I will. Be happy to," Matt answered.

The carpet people had said they would come back and replace the rugs, but had been assured we could handle that. So that was on the agenda, but we would wait as long as possible to make sure they were dry. Millie suggested we have a picnic on the beach for supper and she and several others went off to plan that. Some went back to work on the gardens and lawn.

Michael, Jacob, Bill and Matt managed to get scaffolding set up so they could get to the skylight. While they were doing that, John and I went into town to get paint for the studio. By the time we got back, the skylight was almost finished and its crew soon joined us in painting the studio. I couldn't believe my eyes when we had finished. I never dreamed I'd ever have such a neat place to work. Once again, when we came down, another part of the grounds had been transformed. It was nearing 5:30 when everyone quit work, showered and dressed for the beach.

None of us had been swimming in the lake, but all jumped at the idea when Paula suggested it. Without thinking, we all started taking our clothes off until Dad said, "Hold it! This is not the falls!" I swear, every single one of us blushed, kept our clothes on and went to the house for swimwear. The water

wasn't as cold as the river, but it was delightful. We played and swam for over an hour, then used the outdoor shower, went inside and got dressed again.

When Matt undressed, I could stand it no longer. I grabbed him and tossed him on our, as yet unused, bed and started covering his body with kisses. Matt started giggling and said, "Is this going to be our first quickie? They are expecting us you know."

"No quickie. This bed has to be properly christened. Just need a few minutes of making out with the man I love." After some passionate kissing, Matt finally said, "I think, if it's going to be properly christened, you'd better stop where you are for I am ready to jump your bones!".

After a few more minutes, we reluctantly got up, dressed and joined the crowd on the beach. I noticed Eugene and Larry were not far behind us. Both had grins on their faces.

It was still light when we ate, and we were just sitting around enjoying the evening and the company when I noticed Woody and Millie were ignoring the rest of us and talking up a blue streak.

"Guys, I guess we need to move the rugs so you kids can have the sun porch," Dad said.

"I have a better idea," Bill said. "Let's leave the rugs and set up the tents under those old trees. It's a nice place and it has been mowed and everything." He might well have added, "And it will be difficult to see what's going on from the house".

"Great idea, Bill," Jacob said, and I could see the wheels spinning in their heads! Before anyone could object, the Fellowship dashed to the house and got the tents from Greywolf's four-wheel-drive where they had been left, and had them set up in no time.

We went back to the beach and stayed until the parents left, then went to the tents. It hardly needs be said that Jacob, Bill and Michael didn't sleep with each other! Our sleeping bags had been christened long ago, but Matt and I practiced how we would christen the bed. Our love-making was getting better all the time, and I had thought it perfect ages ago!

Michael did bring the alarm clock and we all got up early and went for a run or walk on the beach in the early morning light. When we got back, Jacob, Paula and Sandra prepared breakfast while the rest of us got ready to go with Woody. I was surprised that even Janet and Douglas were going with us. They asked Woody if they could ride with him, and he was delighted.

St. Alban's was a small, carpenter gothic church, just what you would have expected in New England and, therefore, in the former Northwestern Territory. The organ was an electronic which, I am sure, Matt didn't like, but he got some fairly decent sounding music from it. there was no choir, but the congregation sang enthusiastically. Woody gave a surprisingly good sermon, using the Family as an example of what it meant to be loving and caring. Woody also surprised us

by telling the congregation he would be with us the following week and said he'd leave a phone number on the answering machine.

At the coffee hour, everyone was very friendly and invited us back as often as we could come.

When we got back, Paula, Jacob and Sandra had dinner waiting. As we were eating, Douglas said, "Janet and I have an announcement to make. As you know, we were married by a judge but, after we met Woody, we decided we wanted our marriage blessed and asked Woody to do it. He agreed and we have decided to do it here. If it's ok, we'll have it next Saturday, since we will be leaving for Florida Sunday."

Needless to say, everyone was excited and made it known.

We lazed around Sunday afternoon and, Sunday evening, Matt, Woody and Millie all played for us after we enjoyed a delicious cold supper and a walk on the beach. We didn't even replace the rugs so we spent another night in the tents. In fact, when the rugs were replaced, no-one mentioned the fact that we continued to sleep in the tents.

Part Fifty-nine

Luke

When we got up Monday morning, Michael said to Matt and me, "Brothers, waiting is really hard".

"I'll bet that's not the only thing that's hard!" Matt laughed.

"You're damn right about that!" he replied.

As soon as we had breakfast, we started priming the outside of the house. Dad and Greywolf were going ahead of the painters, caulking any places which needed it. By lunch, we had only one side almost done. By quitting time, we were well on our way, I thought, but Tuesday we started on the gingerbread trim and it was slow going. In fact, Tuesday night, we still had a long way to go.

"I had thought about us taking Wednesday off and going into Cleveland, art museum, zoo, whatever people wanted to do, but I'm not sure," Greywolf said.

"I think we better wait until we see how long this painting is going to take," Howard said. "It's surely not going as fast as I had hoped."

"Think you're right," Greywolf agreed.

"Think some of us need to stop at 5:30, as we have been doing," Douglas added, "but some of us can keep going. I know I can."

"Well, we could, I guess," Eugene said slowly, "but we wanted this to be fun time as well as a work party, I mean for the parents and those of you who will not be living here."

"I think it is a fun time," Millie said. "I have thoroughly enjoyed myself. I don't think I can work much longer each day than I have been, but I can sure help in the kitchen and relieve someone who can paint longer."

Wednesday we started earlier than we had been doing, and finished the primer coat by mid-afternoon. We took a break and went back to work. Woody said he and Millie would take care of dinner and we painted until after 8:00. As people finished a section, they went inside, showered and got dressed for dinner. The guys of the Fellowship were the last to go in. Luke and I, Eugene and Larry shared a shower, as though we wouldn't had we not been in somewhat of a rush. When we came down, Millie and Woody served a delicious supper. While we were eating, Millie said, "I almost forgot, senior moment I guess, Douglas, the dealer called today and said your car will be delivered Friday".

We had learned a few tricks in applying the primer, you know, by the time you finish a job you have learned how to do it, so the actual painting went faster than the primer coat. In fact, by working longer hours and utilizing the tricks we had learned, the house and garage were all finished by Friday evening. We had planned a celebration when we finished, but everyone was so tired we decided to save that for Saturday, after the blessing of Douglas' and Janet's marriage.

Jacob, Sandra and Paula had washed up early, gone to temple and returned just as we had finally all showered and were ready for dinner. As we were ready to sit down to dinner, two cars pulled into the driveway. The one in front was a bright metallic blue convertible, a real sporty model. We all had to go out and inspect Douglas' car, but decided it would wait for a trial spin until we had eaten.

We had worked so hard this week that I suspect the other couples were like Matt and me. There just wasn't energy for any hot and heavy sex, but we did enjoy our tender love-making and sleeping nestled in each other's arms. I hoped I would never forget how wonderful it was just to hold Matt and be held by him. I also hoped we wouldn't have many weeks we were too tired for sex!

The weather had been very kind to us or we would never have finished the house. Friday night the weather took a sudden change and we got up to a cold, dreary, rainy day Saturday. We had planned to have the blessing of Douglas' and Janet's marriage in the newly recovered garden, but that was definitely out unless there was a change in the weather and, even then, it would probably be too wet. Millie immediately took charge when it was obvious the garden was out. She called a florist and ordered flowers for the living room, had all the men moving furniture, and arranged a table and dressed it as an altar. The women started arranging flowers as soon as they arrived, and soon the living room was transformed into a lovely chapel. The blessing was set for 4:00 in the afternoon and the sun came out about an hour before but, after Millie had finished with the living room, no-one was disappointed that we couldn't use the garden.

The service was beautiful. Matt and Eugene played for it, looking across the hall from the family room. When they finished the opening, they joined us for the service itself, then went back and played a recessional after the nuptial Eucharist. Janet had asked Paula to sing the hymn that was sung at our ceremony and she, of course, did a beautiful job.

After the ceremony, we all danced and had a grand time, then sat down to a meal fit for a king. Woody and Millie had engineered that with the help of all the parents.

Sunday morning, Millie went with Woody to play for the service at St. Alban's, but the rest of us skipped church and spent time with each other, knowing that tomorrow we would be separated until at least Thanksgiving. We had Sunday dinner ready when Woody and Millie got back and enjoyed it thoroughly, sitting at the table talking, long after we had eaten.

Finally Dad said, "I hate to bring this up, but we need to get packed so we can leave early. We all have to get back to work Wednesday, even Greywolf and Yong Jin. School starts a week from tomorrow but you two teachers have to report Wednesday, right?" Yong Jin and Greywolf nodded and made sour faces. I had been around them long enough to know that teachers have the same attitude about school as most students.

"Janet and I have already registered, but we start Monday week as well and need to get ready. In fact, we need to be on our way now. I had planned on leaving earlier today, but I have enjoyed these two weeks so much I hate to see them end."

"I sure wish we were staying," Janet said, "but Sarasota and the wicked mother-in-law call."

"She damn well better call sweetly," Douglas laughed.

The happy couple were packed and ready to leave when Janet said, "We came up to get you guys ready for Oberlin and never even saw the campus. Maybe next time."

"We'll take a quick detour," Douglas said. "That will hold us until you guys can show us around properly." After hugs all around, and more than a few tears, the two left, headed for heaven only knows what in Sarasota.

"The Oberlin Five register Thursday and begin school Monday week as well," Paula said, "and, as Janet said, we haven't even seen the campus."

"We need to do something about that today since the parents are leaving tomorrow," I said. "How about we call and see if Ruth is available to show us around? If not, we can just look around on our own."

Ruth was at home and was surprised that we had not been on campus. I explained that we had gotten so involved with getting the house ready that it slipped our minds. She said she would meet us at the front entrance in twenty minutes or so. "Should take about that long for you to get here."

She gave us a great tour of the very beautiful campus, including opening some buildings which would have been closed had she not been with us. Of course, she made sure Matt saw a couple of the organs. She also showed us where we needed to go to register Thursday. When we finished, Eugene said, "Ruth, why don't you come out and see the house and stay for supper?"

"I was about to invite myself for a look at the house," she laughed. "See you there."

To say she was impressed is a definite understatement. "You don't know how pleased I am that you have the house and have really made it the showplace it once was," she exclaimed as soon as she got out of the car. "You have done a lovely job."

We had supper and Ruth left shortly afterward. The rest of us went for a walk on the beach and, as soon as it was dark, Paula shouted, "Skinny dipping time!". This time no-one stopped us as we stripped off our clothes and hit the water. When we came out, the parents had gone into the house and we walked in our birthday suits to the outdoor shower, showered, and then pairs of lovers dried each other.

As we approached the tents, Michael asked, "Matt, Luke, have you noticed anything about this grove of old trees where we have been sleeping?"

Later I thought that I should have been surprised by his question, but I wasn't. As soon as he asked, I knew what he meant. Before I could answer, Matt said, "I wondered if it were just me but, yes, it's a sacred place". When Michael looked at me, I nodded agreement.

The others overheard us and asked what that was all about. Sleeping bags were dragged out of the tents, and we sat around talking about sacred places and how they were special. "I've no idea how I, we, know a place is sacred," Michael said, "but the three of us do. I felt it when I was mowing here the other day."

"Strange that Luke and I didn't discuss it," Matt said, "but I knew it the first night we slept here. It started me thinking about something else. We did all those strange things this summer, and Red Hawk started your instruction as a medicine man, Michael, and said Luke and I also had that power, but now he's dead and we have had no instruction."

"I think we barely scratched the surface while I was with him," Michael said, "and now we are without an elder to teach us. Maybe Taequo can."

"Don't think so," I said. "He told me he knows little about Indian medicine, in terms of being a medicine man, I mean."

"Heaven knows, Red Hawk said he was finished and I guess his spirit will provide a way for us to continue with whatever training we need," Michael said. "I guess we'll just have to wait and see what develops." On that note, we all went to our tents.

It had been a very relaxed day and, for the first time in almost two weeks, Matt and I were not too tired to make love. Our love-making was passionate, hot and heavy. We began by giving and receiving pleasure as our mouths covered each other's manhood. Each of us brought the other to the brink, then backed off, several times. Finally, I brought Matt to a climax as one shook my body. As he filled my mouth with the taste of himself, I was completely overcome. I know I blacked out for a moment, but his mouth-to-mouth brought me around quickly. I was lying on my back and his hair, free of all restraint, fell around my face and I was in the world that held only the two of us, lovers forever.

As our breathing became regular again, Matt continued kissing me, then he started nipping at an ear. He continued kissing my body, moving from my neck to my nipples, then used his tongue on my chest. I was getting very, very hot when he started kissing my manhood and licking my ball sack. I was so hot that I was groaning, I hoped quietly, for the sake of the others, when he reached for his shorts and took out the tube, which I think he had started carrying all the time, for it was always handy when needed, and handed it to me. As he lay atop my body, kissing me all over, my fingers found what they were seeking and I opened him with them and a generous amount of lube. Finally, he took the tube from me and applied a huge amount from it to Little Luke, stroking him slowly as he did. When he had finished, he said, "Luke, my Yonghon Tongmu, I am ready," as he rolled off of me and lay on his back.

Slowly and smoothly, I entered my Sarang Hanun Pomul. As I did, he grabbed two handfuls of my hair and crushed my lips to his, his tongue carrying the wonderful taste of Matt to my mouth, from which it flowed through my entire being. "Now, Luke, now. I want you deep inside me now!" I pushed as deep as possible into Matt, then withdrew as far as I could without coming out, then entered him again deeply. I was moving in and out of my lover slowly, smoothly, when he started moaning, "Faster, Babe, faster!". He continued to groan as I increased the speed of my thrusts, making sure each was long and deep. I knew I was approaching the edge when he grabbed my hair again, pulled my lips to his and started breathing through my mouth and nose, all the while groaning and making funny noises. We were both sweating profusely, not only because the night was warm but also because of the fantastic love-making we were engaging in. Finally, I thrust deep inside my Dark Angel and Little Luke erupted, pouring pulse after pulse of man's seed into my Matt. As I did, I saw stars, literally, spinning around in my head and before my eyes. When I had finally exhausted my supply of man's seed, I collapsed on Matt, my head resting on his chest, listening to his rapid heartbeat.

"God, I love you, Luke Hans Yonghon Tongmu Fire Thunderbird Larsen," Matt was finally able to say as he again pulled my lips to his. We remained wrapped in each other's arms until Little Luke, satisfied for the moment, slipped from Matt.

Our tent was filled with the fragrance of men having made love and I loved it. I buried my face in Matt's armpit and inhaled the fragrance that only Matt has after making passionate love. But I was not finished. I reached down and took Chili Pepper in my hand and stroked him gently until he was hard and pulsating. Matt's magic fingers knew what to do and he was doing it well. Finally, I lubed Chili Pepper well, and placed my rosebud over Chili Pepper and sat upright. Slowly I lowered myself on Matt, guiding Chili Pepper to where he wanted to be and where I wanted him. When he was all the way inside me, I leaned forward and kissed Matt, then started using my legs to raise and lower myself, sliding Chili Pepper in and out. When Matt started groaning again, I raised and lowered myself faster and faster. Soon both of us were groaning. When I felt Matt's hot seed enter my body, I lowered myself to get Chili Pepper as deep inside as possible. When Matt had finally emptied his seed into me, I leaned forward again and kissed his mouth, his eyes, his nipples, his neck. "Matt, you are the most wonderful lover in the world and you make me the happiest man in the world."

I could imagine his sparkling black almond eyes and his smile, even though I could not see them, when he said, "Wanta bet?".

As I leaned over to kiss him again, Chili Pepper slipped from me and I stretched out on Matt's body and we lay entwined in each other's arms, exchanging soft, gentle kisses until we fell asleep, our passion satisfied.

Sometime in the night, I heard soft voices passing our tent. When I raised up and opened the tent flap slightly, the moon was in its last quarter, but bright

enough for me to see Bill and Linda walking toward the lake, hand in hand. My movement disturbed Matt and he raised up and asked what was going on.

I told him Bill and Linda were headed for the lake. He was immediately awake and said, "Great idea, Luke. Let's join them." As we got out of the tent, I saw that apparently others had been awakened as well, because Eugene and Larry were crawling out of their tent. Luke walked over to where Mary Kathryn and Michael were sleeping, and suddenly started slapping the sides of their tent. "Holy shit," Michael exclaimed, as he came roaring out of the tent. "What the friggling hell are you doing, Luke?"

"Just inviting you and my baby sister for a swim."

Mary Kathryn poked her head out of the tent and said, "You'll find it difficult to swim with two broken legs, which you will have if you pull a stunt like that again". It was clear, however, that both thought the idea was a good one, as they joined Matt and me, walking to the beach. As we walked, Mary Kathryn asked, "Think I should go back and get Jacob and Paula up?"

"Think it might have been their idea," Matt responded, pointing to the two frolicking in the lake.

Soon we were all swimming and playing in the lake. Just in case we might be heard at the house, we kept the shouting down but surely made enough noise otherwise. We must have played for about an hour then, one by one, the couples returned to their tents. Matt and I brought up the rear and as soon as we were in the tent, started making love again. Once we had given each other great love and pleasure, we wrapped our bodies in each other's arms and slept.

I guess it was a combination of the love-making Matt and I had done and the late-night swim, but I wasn't ready to get up when Paula called. "Matt, Luke, I think we need to fix breakfast for the travelers while they check and make sure they are ready to leave. They want to get off early." She was right, of course, but it didn't make getting up any easier.

By the time breakfast was ready, the travelers were sure they were ready to leave right after breakfast. The parents talked about how much they had appreciated being with us the past two weeks and getting to know each other. "I'm especially pleased to learn Bill has the kind of friends he does," Howard said. "And, I'll tell you all, I will always be grateful to Jacob for reminding me I have a son. Bill, I know I have neglected you, and want you to know how proud I am of what you have made of yourself. You are one fine young man." We all shouted our agreement.

After Howard's speech, the breakfast conversation continued on a serious note, but everyone avoided the fact that it was a matter of minutes before the Fellowship would be changed forever, and the Larsens, Greywolfs and Sandra would be leaving their children behind. I think we all put off the separation as long as possible, but it had to come.

It was 8:30 when we were all gathered in the front of the house and the hugging and tears began. I was surprised to see Woody, not just saying goodbye

to Millie but giving her a pretty good kiss, on the mouth already! Everyone was in their cars except Jacob, who would start to get in and then run back for another kiss from Paula. Finally she said, "Get going, redhead, before I decide to keep you".

With that, he turned and ran back to her for a very, very long kiss, while everyone laughed and applauded. But it had to end, so Jacob got in and the caravan left.

Luke and I were standing arm in arm, as were Larry and Eugene. Without thinking, one couple got on one side of Paula and the other couple got on the other side, and the Oberlin Five walked slowly toward the house which suddenly seemed very empty. In the foyer, we five stood together, realizing that this was it. Now there were the Concord Five and the Oberlin Five. And all we had known was way, way, away. We were all very silent, then Larry said, "And now the new adventure really begins". We all nodded.