

Foley-Mashburn Saga #2

Justin

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Chapter 1

(Tim's Perspective)

Kyle and I worked at one of his dad's motels the summer after my dad came back from the war in Afghanistan, and the jobs were pretty good. I made ten dollars an hour as pool boy, and Kyle made the same amount working concessions on the beach. The only difference was he tended to get better tips than I did.

"It's because I'm cuter than you are, Tim. Face reality, dude," he had said.

I knew he was just teasing me, but I also wouldn't argue with how cute he was. At sixteen and a half, he was five feet, ten inches, and he weighed about 170 pounds. A lot of his weight was muscle, and he was built more like a football player than a runner. He had been a standout on our high school's cross country track team when he was a freshman and sophomore, and he planned to run track his junior year, too. He was drop-dead gorgeous, and I wasn't the only one who thought that, either. Just because I was his boyfriend didn't mean I couldn't be objective about him. We both had awesome tans from being out in the sun all day, and we both had our hair bleached light blond so it would contrast with our skin. My hair was sort of a dark blond anyway, but his was dark brown without the bleach.

Kyle and I had been boyfriends since January. Even though I had only turned fifteen in May, we got along great. In fact, we pretty much knew we were in love. We spent a lot of time together, but we also spent a lot of time with our friends Philip and Ryan, who were also sixteen, and our "big brothers," Kevin and Rick, who were both twenty-five. All of us were gay, and Philip and Ryan, and Kevin and Rick were couples, like us. We had a lot of straight friends, too, but I think we all felt most at home with each other. Kevin and Rick were out to everyone, and they had even had a marriage ceremony and wore wedding rings. We weren't that brave, and we really didn't see the need to be, yet. We all knew Kyle and I would probably do it eventually, but it wouldn't happen while we were still in high school. My dad and Kyle's parents were 100% cool with our being gay and being a couple, too, and that really helped.

One of my jobs as pool boy was to sell bottles of water and soft drinks to the people who hung around the pool. The motel was right on the beach of the Gulf of Mexico, and, quite naturally, a lot of people went down there. But the sand and salt water can get pretty old, so most people who stayed at the motel spent at least some time at the pool, too. If I had been interested in eyeing up girls, I would have had lots of opportunities in that job. I checked out the guys, though, and some of them were enough to put a pretty good tent in my bathing suit. Kyle wore a Speedo a lot of the time on the beach, but I preferred trunks. Kyle and I took a shower together every afternoon when we got off work, and his Speedo was usually damp from all the juice he oozed all day long.

One day in mid-June Kyle came up to the pool from the beach. We usually ate lunch together, but it was still about an hour early for that. I was surprised to see him when he walked over to where I was sitting, near the concessions.

"Hey, what's up," I asked.

He plopped down next to me and lit a cigarette. He didn't smoke much, but he did like to smoke a few every day.

"I just got a call from Herman," he said. Herman was the motel manager.

"What did he want?"

"It was a pretty damn strange request. He asked if I would mind going to get some fried chicken for one of the guests." That motel didn't have a restaurant, so all the guests had to eat out every meal.

"So are you going to do it," I asked.

"Well, yeah. Why not?"

"No reason. Can I go with you?"

"That's why I came up here. To see if you wanted to go," he said.

"Do you know what the guy wants," I asked.

"Yeah, Herman told me. I'm supposed to pay for it, and he'll pay me back when I take it to him," he said.

"You know what? I'll bet it's that old guy with the walker. I saw his family pull out earlier this morning, so maybe he's hungry and can't go anywhere to eat."

"I'll bet that's it," Kyle said. "He's a nice old guy, so I don't mind doing it."

We drove to the fried chicken place. Instead of going through the drive-thru, we went inside to order. When we got a whiff of the food, we decided it wasn't too early for us to have lunch, so we ordered the buffet for each of us. We spent the next twenty minutes or so eating our lunch, and then we got the food for the old guy. I was glad I had thought to grab my tee shirt before I left the pool. They might not have served us if we had been bare chested. Kyle's shirt covered his Speedo, so he looked like he could have been naked down below. That would have been totally cool, but he wasn't.

When we got back to the motel, we parked in Kyle's usual spot, and we took the food up to the room that Kyle had been given. It would have been strange for somebody on a walker to be on the second floor, but I didn't think of that then. We knocked on the door.

"Come in. It's open," a voice said. It sounded more like a kid our age than an old guy, but we didn't comment.

When we opened the door, Kyle and I got the shock of the week, if not of our lives. Sitting on the bed was a boy who looked like he was about sixteen, naked. There were no sheets or pillowcases on the bed, and the curtains had been taken down, too. The TV was on what looked like a movie, and the rest of the room was completely bare. There were no suitcases or clothes thrown around or anything to make you think people were staying there. The kid had some kind of metal bar between his ankles about a foot apart, and his ankles were attached to the bar by what looked to me like steel handcuffs.

"Oh, dude. I'm so sorry, man. We'll go," Kyle said. "Shit," he said to me, "Herman gave me the wrong damn room number."

"That's okay. Come in. Please come in," the kid said.

"Are you sure, man," Kyle asked.

"Yeah. It's okay. I don't mind. Did you bring me some food?"

"Yeah. I'll just set it down out here, and you can get it later, after we're gone," Kyle said.

"No, man. Bring it in, please." The guy was sort of pleading with us.

"Maybe he's crippled and can't walk," I said. "Did you see that thing on his ankles?"

"Yeah, maybe you're right. I feel really weird doing it, though. Come in with me," Kyle said.

"Okay," I said.

Kyle pushed the door back, and we walked in. The place had a really nasty odor. It wasn't shit or puke or anything, though. It was just nasty.

"Oh, thanks, guys," the boy said.

We walked over to the bed. I really wanted to check him out good, but I was afraid he'd get pissed off if he caught me looking. I figured Kyle was thinking the same thing. That boy was really nasty, too. He must have shot his load on himself a bunch of times, and it was all dry on his chest. He

didn't smell good, either, when we got up closer. He smelled like somebody who hadn't taken a shower in a week.

"Man, I really appreciate this," he said.

Kyle handed him the box with the chicken and side orders in it, and he tore it open. He grabbed a leg and cleaned the bone in one bite. He ate a wing almost that fast, and then he opened the coleslaw. He ate three huge mouthfuls of that, and then he dove into the fries. After he had eaten that much, he slowed down to a more regular speed.

"Shit, I was so fucking hungry," he said. "I haven't eaten anything since Sunday morning." It was Wednesday.

"Sit down, guys," he said.

Kyle and I looked at each other, and then we each pulled up a chair and sat down. When I knew the boy wasn't looking at me, I checked him out. His penis looked just like Kyle's, circumcised and about as big, and his pubic hair must have been clipped or something. He had some, but very little. I could see some dried cum in it, too. Nasty, I thought. He had dark blond hair about my natural color, and he was almost pure white. I figured he hadn't been out in the sun in a long time. He had gold hoops hanging from each of his nipples, and they looked pretty cool. I wondered if they hurt having them put in.

"What are you doing here like this," Kyle asked him.

"It's a long story. I think I've been fucked, is what I think has happened," he said.

"Can you walk," I asked.

"Not very good with this thing on," he said. "He puts it on me so I can't run away."

"Who does that," Kyle asked.

"My mom's boyfriend," he said.

"Where's your mom," I asked.

"Dead. I think the son of a bitch beat her to death, but I can't prove it. He claimed intruders did it, but I put my money on him." He had finished eating by then, and he had set the carton and bones aside. "You boys got a smoke I could bum," he said.

Kyle took his pack out of his shirt pocket and handed it, and his lighter, to the boy.

The boy lit a cigarette and took a deep drag.

"Thanks, man," he said. "I smoked my last one last night."

"Speaking of money," Kyle said, "you owe me seven fifty for the food."

The boy got a funny look on his face, and he checked out both of us from head to toe, like he was just noticing us for the first time.

"Er, I don't really have any money. That bastard takes everything I earn."

Kyle and I looked at one another, not knowing what to do next.

"But I've got a deal I don't think you can refuse. How about if I pay you off with a blowjob, one for each of you?"

Kyle and I both got kind of nervous when he said that.

"What do you say, guys? Huh? It won't make you queer, and I give great blowjobs," he said.

I saw Kyle begin to smile, and the boy took it that he was seriously thinking about his offer. He looked at me with a full grin.

"It won't make us queer," Kyle said.

I laughed, and the boy really looked puzzled.

"Are you gay," I asked him.

"Yeah. So what? Everybody knows gay boys give the best blowjobs, man. I guarantee I'll give you a better blowjob than your girlfriend, and, if I don't, I'll let you fuck my ass. Whatcha say?"

"I say we're not interested, man. What's your name, anyway," Kyle asked.

"It's Justin. What's yours?"

"Kyle."

"Tim."

"Do you guys work here or something," Justin asked.

"Yeah. Where do you work," Kyle asked.

"Here and there," he said. "Mostly in motel rooms like this one, as a matter of fact."

"What do you do in motel rooms," I asked.

"Turn tricks." He said that as calmly as he might have said, "make the beds."

I thought I knew what that meant, but I wasn't sure.

"You have sex with guys for money," Kyle asked. I knew he was as shocked at that as I was.

"You got it, Kyle," Justin said. "Only I don't get to keep any of it. He keeps me naked all the time like this, and I've got to wear this thing when he's not around." He grabbed the bar between his ankles when he said that.

"Do you want us to help you run away," I asked.

"I appreciate that, Tim, but it would be just my luck he'd come driving up as I was leaving. If he caught me, he'd beat me so bad I couldn't even work for a week. Hell, he might even kill me."

"We can't just leave you here like this, Justin," Kyle said. "We can call the cops."

"Oh, Jesus, no, Kyle. Please don't do that, man. I'm begging you. Please don't." Justin looked really worried. He had a really cute face and a very nice body. I felt sorry for the poor guy.

"I'm not leaving you here like this, Justin," Kyle said. "For one thing, this is my dad's motel, and he could get into all kinds of trouble if anything happened to you. For another, you're in trouble, and I want to help. How old are you, anyway?"

"How old do I look," Justin asked. He smiled like he was flirting with Kyle. He probably went through that age routine pretty often, and he knew how to play it for all it was worth.

"You look like you're sixteen," Kyle said. "Same age as me. Am I right?"

Justin thought a few seconds before answering. "Aw, what they hell. Yeah, I'm sixteen."

"Where are your clothes and your other things," Kyle asked.

"I don't have any. At least, not up here. He keeps a couple of changes of clothes for me in the trunk of his car, but that's all I've got. I hope he never comes back."

"How long has he been gone," I asked.

"We checked in here Sunday afternoon about five o'clock. He left right after that to round up some johns, and I haven't seen him since. Today's Wednesday, ain't it?"

"Yeah. Wednesday," Kyle said. Then he said, "Tim, step outside for a minute so I can talk to you."

I stood up to leave, and Justin got a kind of frantic tone in his voice.

"Don't leave, guys. Please. Please don't leave me. I'm scared shitless if you leave."

"We'll be back," Kyle said.

We stepped out onto the covered balcony that connected all of the rooms.

"Phew. That guy stinks, Babe," I said.

"I know," he replied.

"What do you think we should do," I asked him.

"I don't know. I wish Kevin or Rick was here. They'd know what to do. But we can't just leave the guy."

"I know. Why don't we call them and see if they can come over," I said.

"Good idea."

Kyle tried to reach Rick first, but his office said he was out supervising some landscaping. He tried his cell phone, but Rick must have had it turned off. Kyle didn't leave a message for him. Then he called Kevin's office, and Kevin answered after his secretary put the call through. Kyle explained where

we were and what was going on in very brief terms. Kevin said he would be there in ten minutes.

When we went back inside, Justin was propped up against the headboard, smoking another cigarette. He smiled at us.

"Our friend will be here in a few minutes," Kyle said. "He'll know what to do."

"Who is he," Justin asked, obviously suspicious.

"He's just our friend. Sort of like our big brother. You'll like him," I said.

"He ain't a cop, is he," Justin asked.

"No, he ain't a cop. He's our friend," Kyle said.

Justin spread his knees as far apart as he could get them with the ankle thing on, and his dick flopped against his thigh. In a second, it started moving by itself, and, before I knew it, he was getting hard. Seeing him get hard made me, and I'm sure Kyle, too, start to get hard. I must have blushed noticeably, and Justin smiled at me.

"You want some of this, Tim," he asked seductively.

"Come on, man. Cut it out, Justin," I said.

"It's just my way of letting you know I think both you guys are hot as hell," Justin said. That made me blush more. "We could have some fun together, guys, before your friend gets here. It won't make you queer."

"Let me get you a towel," Kyle said. He got up and went into the bathroom. He came out of there in about ten seconds, empty handed.

"Where the hell are the towels," he asked Justin.

"He took 'em," he said. "He always does that so I can't leave, even if I jump around in this thing to do it," he said, meaning his ankle thing. "That's why the sheets and curtains are gone, too."

"How is it you're with this guy," Kyle asked.

"Well, after my mom died, he just kind of took me, I guess. We stayed living at his trailer, and I just stayed. I didn't have any place else to go. He turned me out when I was thirteen."

"Turned you out? Made you leave," I asked.

"No. Turned me out to trick," he said.

"He made you start having sex for money when you were only thirteen," I asked. I'm sure I sounded dumb, but that stuff was all brand new to me.

"Yeah. Some start younger, but he wanted me to wait until I could shoot cum. And he wanted me to develop some, too. He made me work out with weights starting when I was eleven. You like my muscles?" He flexed his biceps, and, I had to agree, he was built.

Nobody said anything for a few seconds.

"You guys ever have sex," he asked.

Kyle and I looked at each other. Then we both said, "Yeah."

"With a girl or a guy or both," he asked.

"Justin, man, you're laying there with a dripping hard-on. Can we just cool it with the talk about sex? Okay?" Kyle sounded a little impatient.

"Are you afraid I'll turn you on, Kyle? I can see that pole your buddy there is packing. How about you, dude? You want some of this?"

"Okay. That's it. We're waiting outside for Kevin."

Kyle and I went out onto the balcony and waited.

"He's pretty fucked up," I said.

"No kidding," Kyle said. "I feel sorry for him, though, you know? What if that had happened to one of us? Or Philip? Or Ryan? I guess we've been pretty lucky."

"For sure," I said.

We saw Kevin's car pull into the parking lot just then, and we waved him up.

Chapter 2

(Kevin's Perspective)

I was really bored when my phone rang. Business had been decent for the last couple of months, and I had plenty to do, but I just didn't feel like doing it. When my assistant told me Kyle was on the phone, I perked right up.

"Hey, buddy," I said. "What's up?"

"We need you."

There was a seriousness and urgency in his voice that let me know somebody was in trouble.

"Is anybody hurt," I asked.

"No."

"Where are you?"

"We're at work," he said. "We found a boy who's in trouble, Kevin, and we don't know what to do about it. He's sixteen, and he's gay, and he has to have sex for money. He's naked in the room, and he's got this bar between his feet and handcuffs around each ankle. He can't walk with it on, I don't think."

"Where are his parents," I asked.

"His mom is dead, and I don't guess he has a dad. This guy who used to be his mom's boyfriend sort of has him prisoner. Herman, the motel manager, got me and Tim to go buy him some food. That's how we discovered him. He hadn't eaten since Sunday."

"Is he sick or anything," I asked.

"No. I wanted to call the police, but he begged me not to do that. He said the guy would kill him if I did that and he found out about it. Tim and I don't know what to do, but we know we have to do something. We can't just leave him in that room."

"No. You're right. I'm glad you called me. I'll be there in about ten minutes. Let me talk to Tim."

Kyle put Tim on.

"Hey, buddy. Are you all right," I asked.

"Yeah. Kyle's about to shit his pants, he's so scared. But you know me. I'm the brave one."

I heard flesh hit flesh, and Tim said a loud "owww," which was immediately followed by laughter. God, I love those kids, I thought.

"You better come quick to save Kyle. I'm about to throw him off this balcony." More laughter from their end.

"What room," I asked.

"236," Tim said.

"Be there in a minute," I said, and I hung up.

I saw them on the balcony when I drove into the parking lot. The lot was crowded, and it took me a few minutes to find a parking place. Once I did, though, I hurried up the outdoor stairs to where the boys were.

"Hey, little brothers," I said when I got up to them. I put an arm around each of them and hugged them. They smelled good, healthy, clean, like boys are supposed to smell.

"Hey, big brother," they said in unison.

"What have y'all gotten us into here, boys," I asked.

"I don't know," Kyle said. I could tell he thought the situation was serious.

"Well, let's go talk to him," I said.

"He's naked," Tim said.

"And he's hard," Kyle said by way of elaboration.

"Thanks, guys. I think I can handle it," I said.

They both giggled.

I was kind of surprised at how barren the room looked when I first walked in. Then I realized the bedding was all gone, and there weren't any curtains in the room. The room smelled like pot smoke. There, on the bed propped up against the headboard, was a very nice looking boy of about sixteen. He was, indeed, naked, but he wasn't hard, as I had been led to believe he would be.

"Hi," I said.

"Are you a cop," he asked. "You have to tell me if you are, you know." His voice was awfully defensive sounding, and it was pretty obvious he had been around the block a time or two.

"No. I'm not a cop. I'm a friend of these guys," I said, gesturing with my head toward Tim and Kyle. "Their big brother, in fact."

"Big brother," he asked, incredulously.

"Well, honorary big brother," I said. "My name is Kevin. What's yours?"

"Justin. Why are you wearing a tie?"

"I was at work when they called. I wear a suit and tie to work every day. I'll take the tie off, if it bothers you," I said, thinking, If it bothers you as much as it bothers me in this heat.

"No. It makes you look really handsome." He moistened his lips seductively. Justin was quite a piece of work, he was. He didn't know me from Adam, and there he lay, buck naked, flirting with me.

"Tim, would you get Justin a towel, please, son," I asked.

"There aren't any," Kyle volunteered.

"You guys go down to the office and see if they have a hacksaw. I'm going to get him out of this thing," I said, referring to his shackles.

"Yes, sir," my boys said at the same time.

"So, what are you going to do? Are you going to fuck me," Justin asked.

I was quite taken aback by that question, but I decided I could be just as tough as that kid could be.

"No, I'm not going to fuck you. In fact, I'm not even going to touch you. Lose the tough guy stuff, okay? Those two boys don't need that, all right? We ain't your tricks, man. If you're lucky, we might become your friends, but you have to meet us half way. Nobody here is interested in sex with you."

"Yeah, you say that, but..."

"But I mean it. Where do you come from?"

"Alabama," he said.

"That's a big state. Did you live in a town?"

"Outside Birmingham," he said.

"Why did you come here," I asked.

"He got into some trouble on a drug deal. He's a fugitive."

"He?"

"The guy I'm with," he said.

"A lover," I asked.

"Shit, no, man. He's fucked me a bunch of times, and he's made me suck his cock, but he ain't my lover, that's for damn sure. He's more like my master."

"Voluntary," I asked.

"No way. This thing on my legs ain't kink. It's to keep me from running. That's why I ain't got no clothes and this room don't have no sheets or towels or curtains. Hell, he even ripped down the shower curtain to make sure I couldn't cover myself to run."

Justin spread his legs a little, and he started getting an erection. His body was filthy, and his body

odor was pretty powerful.

"I thought I asked you to cool it with the sex stuff, man," I said rather gruffly when I noticed it.

"I ain't doing it on purpose, Kevin. I'm only sixteen, man. It just happens, you know?"

"I know, buddy," I said. "I'm sorry I yelled at you."

He smiled a shy smile at me just then, and I wondered if maybe I could get somewhere with that kid.

Tim and Kyle came back into the room just then, empty handed.

"Herman couldn't find a hacksaw," Kyle said. "Do you want me to go home to get one?" They both saw Justin's erection, and they looked at him with utter contempt and anger. They were protecting me, and I knew it.

"Leave him alone, guys," I said. "It's just a 'free bone.'" That was our term for the spontaneous erections they got constantly. I hoped they understood Justin wasn't putting the make on me, at least not at that moment.

"Do y'all know what a hacksaw looks like," I asked.

"Is it a power saw," Tim asked. "My dad has a power saw, but it's part of this big table thing."

"No, that's not it, Tim. Kyle, let me see your phone, please."

I dialed Rick's cell phone number, and it directed me to his voice mail. I dialed his pager number, and I entered the numeric code we had worked out for when we absolutely, positively had to talk to one another right at that moment. We had only used it about a dozen times, so I knew he would know it was urgent and get back to me as fast as he could. Sure enough, Kyle's phone rang in less than a minute.

"What? Where are you? Is everything all right?" He was almost breathless.

"I'm fine. The kids are fine." I told him where I was and that I needed him to bring me a hacksaw and a couple of extra blades as soon as he could.

"Are you breaking in or breaking out," he asked.

I couldn't help laughing at what he said.

"Breaking out. Now get your ass over here on the double! Please?" He laughed at what I said.

In just a few minutes Rick knocked on the door, and Kyle let him in. He did a double take when he saw Justin on the bed and the rest of us sitting around. He looked at me, at Tim, and at Kyle. He was wearing one of those faces that made me laugh and, under different circumstances, get hard at the same time.

"Er," he said.

"It's a long story," I said. "Just cut that thing off his feet, okay?"

"Okay, but if this is some kind of foot fetish situation and he floods my face, I'm out of here," Rick said.

Justin laughed immediately, and I laughed, too, when I figured out what he had said. It was totally lost on Tim and Kyle, and, frankly, I was glad it was.

"Can we have a towel or something," Rick asked.

"Tim and Kyle, go get some towels from somewhere," I said. "Better yet, run home and get some clothes for him."

"Yes, sir," they both said. They were out of that room in an instant.

"What's your name, buddy," Rick asked. I was absolutely amazed at how gentle he sounded. Rick was an imposing guy by any stretch of the imagination, and hearing him talk to that boy like that warmed my heart.

"Justin," the boy said.

"Hey, Justin. I'm Rick the Liberator." They shook hands.

Rick went to work with his hacksaw on Justin's shackles. The handcuffs were made of steel, but cutting them was the only hope we had of getting that contraption off Justin. He got the first side cut

through in about fifteen minutes. When his right leg was free, Justin stretched his entire body in a way he hadn't been able to do for days.

"God, almighty, that feels so good," he said.

"Are you cramping, buddy," Rick asked.

"Yeah, a little bit. I can handle it, though. Just keep cutting."

The spermlets returned just about then, and they had clothes for Justin. Since both boys wore briefs, that's what they had to bring to Justin.

"What, no boxers," Justin said, teasing.

"Shut up and put the fucking briefs on so you can get that thing out of my face," Rick said. He was teasing, too, and Justin laughed.

Rick had been in the room less than a half hour, and already he and Justin had bonded in a way that I knew I probably never would with that kid. Justin put on the briefs, passing the bar through the left leg hole, and then he put on the khaki shorts the boys had brought for him. I assumed the clothes belonged to Kyle, but they just as well could have belonged to Tim. His growth spurt was well underway, and he, Kyle, Rick, and I were almost identical in height.

Rick worked another twenty minutes on the other handcuff, sweating profusely, and finally Justin was free.

"I feel like I ought to hug you, man," Justin said to Rick, when he was all through.

"That's allowed," Rick said, and Justin hugged him hard. "All right, now let's get the hell out of here."

"How am I gonna pay," Justin asked. "I don't want the cops on my ass for skipping out on the room bill, that's for sure."

"You're not going to pay," Kyle said. "The stay was complimentary."

"What," Justin asked.

"Watch this." Kyle picked up the phone and dialed the front office. He asked to speak to Herman. He told Herman that room 236 was a comp. He was showing off for us and for Justin.

"A 'comp' means it's complimentary. He doesn't have to pay." His voice sounded just a little impatient when he said that.

Pause.

"I'll talk to him about it, Herman. Don't worry, man. It'll be fine with him. Just do the books, okay?" Kyle made a facial expression that said "Sheesh" and communicated his frustration with Herman's thickness.

Pause.

"No, I'm not paying. Nobody is paying. It's free, Herman. Just enter c-o-m-p where you would ordinarily put the charge. They'll know what that means." His frustration was mounting, and when he spelled the word, Rick and I giggled. Tim was watching and listening intently as his boyfriend tried his power play.

Pause.

"I know you are accountable to corporate, Herman. But guess what? I am corporate. I own this place, Herman, or at least I will in a few years. Just go with me on this one, okay?"

Pause.

"I know you're the general manager, Herman. And I know I'm just the beach boy and Tim is just the pool boy. I know that. But I also know my dad, Herman, and you really don't."

Pause.

"If you get the fucking police after this boy, Herman, I will key your car. I will poison your cat. I will make your life miserable, and that's after I convince my dad you've been embezzling from US. Do you now think you can type c-o-m-p?" Kyle was red in the face, and I was doing everything in my power to

keep from laughing my ass off. Rick no longer looked amused.

Pause.

"No, I really didn't mean that. I'm sorry I said it."

Pause

"Yes, I know you have two little kids and a third one on the way, Herman, but please don't call the police on my friend." He had switched to a pleading tone.

Pause.

"That didn't hurt, did it? Thank you, Herman. And have a nice day. Bye." Kyle hung up the phone. "Jesus Christ!"

Everybody in the room had listened with rapt attention, and Tim and I applauded when he hung up the phone.

"Was Herman a little recalcitrant," I asked.

"What does that mean," Kyle asked in return

"Hard to get along with," I said.

"Yeah. What's it to him? He doesn't know my dad like I do. My dad don't give two farts in a windstorm whether he comps this room or not."

Rick, Tim, and I did know Gene Goodson, Kyle's dad, and we knew Kyle was absolutely right.

"You're right, Kyle, but you challenged Herman's authority, didn't you," Rick said. "You were acting like you were the boss, and you're not. Herman is. You really are just the beach boy."

Kyle thought for a few seconds about what Rick had just said.

"I guess what I did was pretty shitty, wasn't it? Trying to pull rank because I'm the boss's son when I don't have any rank to pull."

"No, what you did in saving Justin's ass wasn't shitty at all, buddy," Rick said. "But the way you did it was maybe just a little shitty."

Kyle's eyes started to fill up, and I knew that crying in front of Justin was absolutely the last thing he wanted to do.

"Are you mad at me," he asked Rick.

"This is about how mad I am at you Kyle." Saying that, Rick gathered him into a bear hug. Tim grinned when Rick did that.

We had spent an enormous amount of time with Tim and Kyle in the previous five-and-a-half months, and there had been many teachable moments like that one during that time. Once or twice each boy had bowed up when I got on to them, and the other one usually tried to defend his boyfriend when it happened. When Rick got on to them, as he had more times than I had, they actually seemed grateful that he had set them straight. That was a tribute both to their strength of character and to Rick's way with kids.

"Let's get out of here," Rick said when they finished their hug. "This place makes me nervous."

The boys went back to work pushing bottled water and sun screen, and Rick returned to the golf courses and mowing crews he supervised. I had the pleasure of doing something with Justin. What to do, I wondered. I figured that eventually we'd have to make contact with some kind of authorities, but I didn't even know for sure who those authorities might be. Calling the police was the obvious thing to do, but the kid really hadn't committed any crimes that I knew of, at least not crimes that had victims.

"What's your last name, Justin," I asked as we drove out of the parking lot.

"Davis," he said. "What's yours?"

"Foley," I replied. "Do you have any relatives?"

"I've got some grandparents I think, but they don't really know me, or maybe not even that I'm alive," he said. "My mom ran away from home when she was fourteen, and she never went back home."

They didn't come to my mom's funeral when she died."

"How old were you when that happened," I asked.

"I was eleven."

"Do you miss her," I asked.

"Not really," he said. "I guess I did a little bit when she first died, but she was usually pretty wasted on drugs, best I can remember."

"What about you? Do you do drugs," I asked. I really didn't know what to expect by way of an answer. He had certainly been forthcoming about his lifestyle and profession, so there was a chance he would be honest about that, too.

"I smoke weed sometimes, but that's all. No hard stuff for me. He'd bust my ass for me if I couldn't perform when I'm needed to, and I don't want to be a junkie, anyway."

"You said something about a drug deal gone bad. What happened," I asked.

"I don't know too many details, but I do know he killed a guy. An undercover cop. He came home covered with blood, and he made me wash him. Then we hauled ass for down here. I didn't think that was too smart, what with this place crawling with people from back home, but he didn't ask me." I could tell Justin was used to talking with adults. "Where are we going?"

"I'm taking you to my house," I said. "I'll call the office and tell them I can't come back in today. I'll stay there with you."

"What's your wife going to say about me being there," he asked.

"I don't have a wife. You've met my partner. Rick."

"Your partner? What do you mean?"

"He's my partner. My life partner," I said.

"Are you guys gay?"

I nodded.

"Holy shit! I figured you guys for friends, but straight friends. This kinda changes things, don't it?"

"What do you mean," I asked.

"Well, at least y'all don't think I'm scum just 'cause I'm gay. For starters."

"That's true," I said. "We don't think you're scum just because you're gay. Some of our best friends are gay." I had intended that to be funny, but he didn't laugh.

"I guess so," he said rather seriously. After a pause he asked, "Do you guys do three-ways?"

"You don't really know us, but what do you think the answer to that question is based on what you've already seen of us," I asked.

"It was a dumb question. I'm an idiot. Forget about it," he said.

"No, it wasn't a dumb question," I said. "A lot of couples do three-ways, gay and straight. We don't judge what other people do. And maybe some day we'll decide we'd like to try that for variety or curiosity or something. If that ever happens, though, it will be with another adult, not a kid. Right now we're totally monogamous, though. Do you know what that means?"

"It means you just do each other. That's cool, man. No shame in that. I'd get pretty damn tired of the same ole dick up my ass, day in and day out, but if you don't, then I won't judge you, either."

It occurred to me to have a little talk with him about love and commitment and about life being more than random sex, but I realized I wasn't talking to Tim and Kyle. I had no idea, really, what that boy had been through, and I was pretty sure he wouldn't have many handles from his past to hang those ideas on.

Driving down our street, I pointed out Kyle's house.

"Goddamn! That's a fucking mansion. I been in a place like that a time or two, for tricks."

"That's where Tim lives," I said, "and this is our house." I turned into the driveway and parked in the garage.

"Jesus Christ! This is nice, too," he said. "And Tim and Kyle are your neighbors. Do they know y'all are gay?"

"Oh, yeah. Tim lived with us for five months recently while his dad was on a ship with the Navy. His dad has just been home about two weeks. He's going to be staying with us for the rest of the summer, too, starting this coming weekend. His dad has to go down to the University of Florida to take a prep course for his state license exam."

"Does he know y'all are gay? His dad, I mean?"

"Of course, he does. He's a very good friend of ours."

"And he still left his kid with y'all?" Justin was having a difficult time with what he was discovering about us. I wanted to lecture him about the fact that gay couples could live ordinary, normal, happy lives, but I figured there wasn't much point in it.

We entered the house from the garage into the laundry room, and from the laundry room into the kitchen.

"Damn, this is nice, dude," he said.

"Thanks. It's comfortable for us."

Justin opened the refrigerator and looked around inside. He reached in for what I thought would be a coke, and he pulled out a beer.

"You mind," he asked.

"Yeah, I do mind," I said. "The beer is for the adults. You can have anything else you see in there, but kids don't drink in this house."

He sort of grinned and chuckled a bit at what I'm sure he considered the eccentricity of an old fart, but he put the beer back and pulled out a coke.

"Hand me one, too, please," I said.

He thought for a moment, and I was pretty sure he was going to hand me a beer. After a few seconds, though, he handed me a coke.

"Thanks. Let me show you around," I said. We walked into the den with our cokes.

"This is the den. It's where we spend most of our time. We have a living room and dining room off that way, but they don't have furniture in them yet."

We had a pretty nice entertainment center with all the latest gadgets, and he checked it out pretty thoroughly.

"All this stuff work," he asked.

"Sure," I said.

"Nice. Nice," he said, nodding his head.

"This is our bedroom," I said, opening the door. "And through there is our bathroom, although Rick usually showers in the hall bathroom in the morning to save time."

"This looks like something out of a fucking magazine," he said. He walked to the door to the bathroom. "Oh, wow! This is fucking awesome, dude. I wonder how many guys could fit in that tub all at one time." He winked at me when he said that, and I wasn't sure if he was teasing me or flirting with me.

"I know it'll hold two," I said.

He looked at me like he didn't believe those words had come out of my mouth. Then he grinned.

I showed him down the hall in the other direction. We passed the hall bathroom and then the guest bedroom. Across from those were two smaller bedrooms, Rick's room and a room that didn't have any furniture in it.

"Who sleeps in these rooms," he asked.

"This was Tim's room when he stayed with us, and we promised him and Kyle it could be their room when they sleep over with us. This is just a spare room, and this is Rick's room," I said.

"He don't sleep with you," he asked incredulously.

"Sure he does. He doesn't sleep in here. It's where he keeps his stuff. He comes in here once in a while when he wants some privacy, but that doesn't happen more than three or four times a year. You can sleep in here tonight."

"He won't mind," he asked.

"No," I said. "He won't mind. I suspect Tim and Kyle will spend the night here tonight, too. They'll want to get to know you."

"They're best friends, aren't they?"

"Yes, they are. They're very special boys, and Rick and I love them like they were our sons."

"Must be nice," he said rather dryly.

I wondered at that moment if anyone had ever really loved Justin. I had a sudden surge of compassion for that kid, and I wanted to hug him the way I had hugged Tim and Kyle on so many occasions and squeeze the pain out of him. I didn't, though, for fear he'd think I was coming on to him, and that was the last impression I wanted to give him.

"Let's go outside and see the yard," I said.

We went out through the French doors that led to the patio behind the house. Rick's hard work as a gardener had really paid off, and the yard looked wonderful.

"Goddamn, this looks like a park or something," Justin said. "This is beautiful, dude."

"Thanks, but Rick gets all the credit for it. I help by keeping him company and praising the work he does."

"How long have your guys been together," Justin asked.

"It was four years on May fifth," I said.

"Jesus Christ! Four fucking years! Unbelievable!"

I didn't respond to that. I couldn't tell if he admired the fact we had been together that long or if he pitied us for having to endure the same old dick up our asses for all that time.

"Let's go inside. I want to change clothes, and I want you to take a shower. On second thought, I think you probably need to soak in the tub for a while."

"I guess I stink pretty bad, huh?"

"Let's just say you have kind of a...an earthy smell to you. You could use a shave, too, buddy."

"Will you take a bath with me in that big ole bathtub in there," he asked flirtatiously.

"I didn't appreciate that question, son," I said in a very serious tone of voice. "No, I won't take a bath with you. I think you knew that."

He flashed me a big grin that was quite charming. I noticed that his teeth, while not perfect, were surprisingly straight and white.

"I was just teasing you, dude," he said. "Kevin, I mean."

"That's okay, Jus," I said, "but I really would appreciate it if you didn't make remarks like that, okay, man?"

"Okay, Kev. I understand."

When he called me "Kev," it suddenly occurred to me I might have offended him by calling him an abbreviated form of his name.

"Did it bother you that I called you 'Jus' just now," I asked.

"I can count on one hand, hell, on one finger most of the time, the number of people who even use my name in a week, man. You calling me 'Jus' is like saying you want to be my friend, you know? I've never had any friends. Not one. I loved it that you called me 'Jus,' Kev. I really did."

I smiled at him. He might come across as tough and street-wise and seductive, but under all that he was just a boy.

"Let's get your nasty ass in that tub," I said.

"Will you stay in there and talk to me? I'm kinda scared, you know?"

"Yeah, I'll stay and talk to you," I said. Then I hugged him. He sort of went limp against me during that hug.

He stayed in the tub for almost an hour. I filled the big tub almost to the top, and I made him get down under the water as far as he could. I told him to go underwater and wet his hair, which he did. I could actually see the dirt and grease from his body floating on top of the water. After ten minutes, I made him get out. I let the water out of the tub.

"Let's make this a bubble bath, okay," I said. "Have you ever taken a bubble bath?"

"That trailer we lived in didn't have a bathtub, just a shower. What do you think?"

"I think you might like this, then," I said.

I had gotten a bottle of Bubble Bath for Men for Christmas from somebody at work two years before. I rummaged around in the cabinet and found it. It was still unopened. I poured about a third of the bottle into the tub as I started the water back running to refill it. It must have been pretty potent stuff because the bubbles started rising pretty quickly. Justin laughed delightedly, just as I had when I had taken a bubble bath when I was eight years old.

He got into the tub slowly, afraid to crush the bubbles. He might have been a hustler in another place and time, but at that moment he was a little kid delighted with his surroundings.

The bubbles started breaking up fast.

"Damn, they're going away," he said.

"That's okay. Watch this," I said.

I took off my shirt and tie so they wouldn't get wet. Justin checked me out thoroughly, but I pretended not to notice. I knelt down at the side of the tub.

"Move your legs over," I said.

He did as I requested. I put my hand on the surface of the water and shook it back and forth as fast as I could. That created those big bubbles that I used to love as a kid, and Justin laughed in delight.

"Let me do it," he said. He shook his hand as I had, and in a minute he had a huge cloud of big bubbles all over the tub. "That is so cool," he said.

"Just keep doing that whenever the bubbles start to pop," I said. "Go under and wet your hair and face. Rub it in. The bubbles will get you clean."

He did as I directed. He came up with bubbles all over his head and face, and he looked like the little kids you see in commercials.

Justin played with the bubbles for another ten minutes, and then he settled down for a good soak. He was quiet for a little while.

"Why are you doing this," he asked. "You say you don't want sex from me, so why are you being so nice to me?"

"Has nobody ever been nice to you, just to be nice? Just because they liked you," I asked.

He thought for a moment.

"No," he said. "Guys have been nice to me so I would suck their cock or let them fuck my ass, but it was always for sex."

"What about your teachers? Haven't they been nice to you for no reason other than they liked you?"

He thought for a second. "Yeah, I guess some of them were, but ain't that what they get paid to do? Be nice to kids?"

"You can't pay people to be nice to other people, to really care about other people, Jus. They do it because they...well, because they care. Teachers are people. Rick's mom was a teacher. Now she's the principal of a middle school, and she cares about her students way more than she gets paid. In fact, I think she would be insulted if somebody thought she cared about her kids at school because she got

paid to care about them."

"Well, I don't know that much about teachers. I ain't been to a whole lot of school," he said.

"You haven't been in school," I asked.

"Not since I was thirteen and got turned out. Didn't go a hell of a lot before then, either," he said.

"Er, can you read and write," I asked.

"I can read pretty good, but I can't write writing for shit. I can print, though."

"That's writing, man. I meant, can you get your thoughts down on paper? Can you print stuff that makes sense?"

"I ain't wrote much, you know? I make up things in my head like the stuff I read. I think I could do it."

"Have you ever used a computer to write," I asked.

"Naw. I thought they was just for pictures and movies and shit."

"Not at all, Jus. Why did you think they were for pictures and movies?"

"Well, three or four guys who were some of my regulars took pictures and movies of me, and they put them on their computer. I seen a few of them. Ain't that what computers are for?"

I knew if I stayed there another minute I would be in tears for that boy. I had been sitting on the toilet cover talking to him, but I got up. I found a disposable razor and a can of shaving gel. I put them on the edge of the tub for him. I also set out some deodorant and some aftershave.

"Stay in the tub another little while and use these," I said.

"Hey, did I make you mad at me, Kev?"

I had turned away from him to conceal the emotion I was feeling just then, but I turned back toward him.

"No, Jus. You didn't make me mad at you. I'm mad and I'm upset right now because of what people have done to you, but it is totally and absolutely not at you, son. I'm going to leave some fresh clothes for you on the bed. Put them on when you finish in here, okay?"

"Okay," he said, and I left the bathroom and closed the door.

I was trembling with rage and emotion when I got into our bedroom. I quickly found him some underwear, a shirt, and a pair of Rick's running shorts. I set a pair of old tennis shoes on the floor beside the bed. He had come to our house barefoot, but he needed shoes. I picked up off the floor the clothes he had worn to our house from the motel, and they stank and felt dirty to the touch. They had been clean when he had put them on a short time before. I took them to the laundry room and started a wash. Then I went into the den.

He plopped down on the sofa after his bath. He looked like a new kid, and I was sure he felt that way, too.

"You mind if I check this stuff out a little bit," he asked, meaning the TV, stereo, DVD, VCR, etc., on the entertainment center.

"Help yourself," I said.

I went into our bedroom to change. I called my office while I was in there and told my assistant I wouldn't be in the rest of the day but that I'd see him tomorrow. He told me he would be late because his wife had an ob/gyn appointment in the morning, and they were supposed to hear the baby's heartbeat for the first time. I told him that was no problem and that I would be there with him in spirit. Lucky bastard, I thought as I hung up the phone.

I put on a pair of khaki shorts, a tank top, and a pair of sandals, and I walked back into the den. Justin was busy with some afternoon TV talk show that featured a great deal of screaming and a whole lot of bleeps. He seemed enraptured. I went out and got the mail, and I flipped through the copy of a sports magazine that had come that day when I got back inside. I found the page that had the weekly

piece by my favorite columnist, and I started reading. It was about the evils of state boxing commissions, but I could no more concentrate on what I was reading than I could have worked a calculus problem right then. I was thinking about Justin.

"Fuckin' nigger!" Justin blurted out at the TV.

"Hey, buddy," I said. "We don't use the N word in this house, okay?"

"There's a lot of shit y'all don't do in this house." The vulnerability he had exhibited while he was taking his bath was gone, replaced by his brash and rebellious street persona.

"That's right, and as long as you're in this house, you won't do it either." I used what Rick referred to as my "and I mean business" voice, but I wondered if Justin got the message.

"Do y'all smoke in this house," he asked, back to the uncertain boy with that question.

"Yeah, we do. I smoke, Kyle smokes, and several of our friends smoke. You can smoke if you want to." I tried to make my voice sound like there were no hard feelings from minutes before.

"I know Kyle smokes. He gave me his pack back at the mo-tel." He emphasized the first syllable in a way that I mentally identified as "country." Working in the hospitality industry as I did, I heard ho-tel and mo-tel constantly, but it never ceased to annoy me. I said nothing, of course.

Justin stared at the TV set as another raucous talk show replaced the one he had been watching. Around four o'clock I made a pot of coffee and offered Justin a cup. He accepted it, but without saying "thank you," and we sipped our coffee and smoked our cigarettes in front of the TV.

Chapter 3

At 4:20, the back door burst open and a barrel of monkeys poured in. Tim and Kyle had spent at least some time at our house every day since Tim's dad, George Murphy, had come home from his hospital ship duty in the Indian Ocean. They usually waited until around seven, when we got home from our workout at the gym, but that day was special because of Justin.

They told me and Justin "hi," and they immediately got themselves a snack.

"You want a snack, Justin," Tim asked when he came back into the den with two peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and a glass of milk.

"What are you eating," Justin asked.

"P B and J," Tim answered.

"Like peanut butter," Justin asked. Tim and Kyle used those initials all the time, and I had assumed that was kid talk for peanut butter and jelly. It had been for me and my brother when we were kids.

"Yeah, you want some?"

"Yeah. I wouldn't mind having one or two," Justin said. He started to stand up, but Tim stood up before he was fully off the sofa.

"I'll make 'em for you," Tim said.

Justin got a rather surprised look on his face, but he sat back down. Tim and Kyle came back in together, Tim with two peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and a glass of milk for Justin, Kyle with two hotdogs, chips, and a coke for himself. They started munching away.

"I guess I don't get anything," I said forlornly.

"Shit, I'm sorry, Kevin," Tim said. "That was rude of us."

"I'm fine, Tim," I said, "but it was a little rude, you know? I'm really glad you offered Jus a snack, but you should have included everyone in the room."

"I feel like shit about that, Kevin," Kyle said. "I know better than that."

"I know you do, Kyle, and so does Tim. We forget sometimes, though, you know? You didn't hurt my feelings, but, remember, you could have," I said.

"I know, Kevin. Thanks," Kyle said.

"Jesus Christ! What is this, fucking Leave It to Beaver," Justin asked. Like us and our boys, he obviously knew the old TV shows from Nickelodeon.

"Justin," I said in a serious voice. "That's another thing we don't allow in this house."

"What?"

"Beaver," I said.

It took all three boys a second to get my pun, but, when they did, they all laughed, Justin the loudest.

"Did you guys have a good day at work," I asked Kyle and Tim.

"Yeah. We met this really cool naked guy, and he had a hard-on," Tim said. "It was pretty awesome."

Justin brightened up at that line, his mind's eye no doubt seeing the dollar potential in what they had said.

"Yeah? Who was he," Justin asked.

My boys looked at each other and then at me, and all three of us laughed.

"It was you, man," Tim said.

Justin blushed. It was cute. He was cute when he did that, and my heart did a kind of flip for him.

"We're sleeping here tonight, okay," Kyle asked.

"Of course it is, but you don't have to ask, Kyle," I said.

"We know," he said. "Our parents already know."

"Cool. So what are we going to do tonight," I asked.

"When is Rick coming home," Kyle asked.

"He usually works out on Wednesday. We both usually work out on Wednesday," I said.

Just then we heard Rick's car screech into our driveway. He could do some amazing things with his car that I couldn't do and really didn't want to learn how to do. Laying two month's worth of rubber coming into our driveway was definitely not something I valued, but I knew he had done it to impress the kids. Rick had given Kyle lessons on how to make his tires squeal, but Kyle didn't have the balls to do it like Rick showed him. We all waited for The Man to come inside.

Rick came through the door from the garage and stopped in the kitchen for a few seconds. He picked up two bananas and an apple on his way in. He kissed me hello when he came in, and Justin was all eyes when he saw that happen. Rick sat next to me on the sofa, and his musk filled my nose. I started to get hard, but I knew there was no way anything would come of that right then. He took his shirt off and dropped it onto the floor. Again, Justin was all eyes.

"Did you have a good day, Babe," I asked.

"I met this really cute kid today," he said. "He was wearing some really unusual jewelry, and I had to work my ass off to get him out of it. Oh, that was you, Justin."

Tim and Kyle laughed delightedly at him. In their eyes, Rick was the perfect guy: gorgeous, built like a brick shithouse, and a hell of an endurance athlete. Plus, he was funny and smart and compassionate. What was not to love? I realized I was probably overlooking a flaw or two in my assessment of him, but, hell, he was mine, and I had a right to think what I wanted to.

Justin blushed again, and I wondered if we were actually getting to him at some level.

"What are we going to do tonight," Rick asked

"Who wants to swim," Kyle asked.

"Oh, yeah," Rick said. "Let's swim."

Swimming meant we would go down to Kyle's house and use his pool. Rick and I had keys to the Goodsons' house and to the Murphys' house--Kyle's and Tim's, respectively--and the boys both had keys to our house. That meant the three families were free to come and go as they needed to in each other's

homes. During the summer, the Goodsons were rarely home before nine or ten at night, and, since his discharge from the Navy, George Murphy wasn't home very often, either. He had an oral surgery practice to get off the ground, and he definitely worked at it. Tim and Kyle basically migrated among the three houses, and I doubt that they spent a night apart that whole summer. Rick and I both thought of ourselves as those boys' auxiliary parents, and that little encounter I had had with the two of them over not offering me a snack was typical of the kind of parenting we did.

Tim and Kyle were such good kids that we rarely had to get down on them, but they were still kids. They pushed the envelope from time to time, just as Rick and I had done at their ages. A couple of times when Tim was living with us full time, we heard them come home when we thought they had been drinking. One night in particular they had taken Kyle's car down to the beach a few blocks from our house to meet up with some of their friends, and they had walked home. That, in itself, was a give away, but at least they had walked home and Kyle hadn't driven home. We heard one of them puking in the hall bathroom.

"Shit. One of them's drunk," I said, as I was starting to get out of bed.

Rick grabbed my arm. "Whoa, Babe," he said. "They're probably both drunk. Let 'em be kids, okay?"

Just then we heard a second round of puking, and the sound was distinctly different from the first time. We knew it was the second one, but we didn't know which one it was.

"But they can't do that," I said.

"Why the fuck not, Babe? I did it at their age. Didn't you?"

"Yeah, but..." I started to say.

"Yeah, but nothing," he said, interrupting me. "Let 'em be kids. They acted responsibly. They walked home. Kyle didn't try to drive home. They're probably feeling pretty miserable right now, just like you and I did. It's the ritual, Babe. We did it. Our dads did it. They're doing it. The next generation will do it after them. Just chill, okay?"

"How the fuck did you get to be so smart," I asked him. I knew he was right and that we had to give them freedom to experiment and be a little bad now and then.

"By marrying you, that's how. Now shut up and go to sleep."

We snuggled up against one another and sleep came quickly.

The next morning Rick asked the boys if they felt okay. They both blushed a deeper red than I had ever seen before. Rick insisted they each drink a glass of water with two seltzer tablets in them, and they puked again. They both looked and, I was sure felt, like shit. I offered Kyle a cigarette and blew smoke right at him, and he almost puked again right there. Rick was silently laughing his ass off while that was going on.

I won't say those boys never drank again while they were with us, but what happened that night never happened again.

We piled into Rick's Trooper, us in the front seat and the three boys behind us. Kyle lived in the next block, and the walk would have taken us no more than five minutes. We took the car anyway. I grabbed a bunch of towels before we left our house. Rita Goodson, Kyle's mom, had a maid a couple of times a week, but I always felt like we should take our own towels.

The spermlets and Rick jumped out of the car as soon as Rick parked it. Justin hung back with me, as we walked to the pool in the back yard.

"I don't have a suit," Justin said.

"Yes, you do," I said. I was sort of touched by the fact that our big gay hustler thought he needed a suit to swim with us.

"No, I don't," he said.

"Your birthday suit, man. That's how we're going to swim. You got a problem with being naked in front of other guys," I asked.

"Shit," he said, grinning at me.

All five of us dove into the pool with reckless abandon. We dunked each other, lifted each other by the feet to throw back into the water, dove off the diving board, and had a rollicking good time. Kyle was the first to get on the diving board and bounce up and down so that his penis flapped up and hit his stomach. Tim did it next, and Rick, not to be outdone by his little brothers, did it, too. I noticed that Justin was all eyes when they were up there.

After a long while, I needed a break. I asked Rick to join me poolside, just when the boys were starting a game of "dick tag."

"He's an interesting kid, isn't he," Rick asked.

"You don't know the half of it," I said. Then I proceeded to tell Rick all the stuff that had happened that afternoon after I took Justin home.

"What's going to happen to him," Rick asked.

"I don't know. What do you want to happen," I asked him.

He thought for a few moments. He looked at me, and then he said, "I want him to be our kid, Babe. He's going to have to be in foster care somewhere. Why not with us?"

I laughed and grinned and just about lost it in the tear department, all at the same time. "God, I love you," I said.

"What?"

"I was thinking exactly the same words you just said."

"Jesus, that's fucking scary, but I kind of like that, you know?"

"Oh, Babe. I know. I truly know, man." I kissed him after I said that, and, of course, the boys saw us. Justin screamed out "whoop hoo!" Kyle, our self-appointed protector, jumped on Justin and dunked him deep when he did that.

The next morning all three boys showed up at the breakfast table.

"Justin's going to work with us today," Kyle said. "He's going to be liaison boy between the beach and the pool. It's a new concept I've been working on for some time."

"Bullshit," Rick said. "You've been working on that since last night. Didn't we have a conversation about you and Herman yesterday, Kyle?"

"Yeah, we did Rick, and I said you were right. But I talked to my dad about this last night on the phone when we came home. He's cool with it, Rick."

"Is your dad going to talk to Herman," Rick asked.

"Find out, please, before Justin goes with y'all," I said.

"Call him now, Kyle," Rick said.

"Yes, sir," Kyle said. He tended to use "sir" and "ma'am" a whole lot more often than Tim did, and I attributed it to the fact that he was from the South, where well-raised kids address all older people with one or other of those titles.

Kyle went over to the phone and called his dad. He asked Gene Goodson if he had talked to Herman about Justin.

"What'd he say, Daddy," Kyle asked.

Pause.

"Oh, good. I think you'll like him when you get to meet him. He swam with us at the house last night."

Pause.

"Yes, sir, he is."

Pause.

"No, sir, he's not from here. We'll find him one, though."

Pause.

Kyle laughed. Then, "Bye, Dad. I love you, too. Kiss Mom for me." Then he hung up.

"It's all done," Kyle said when he came back to the table. "I feel better knowing that. I thought about what I did yesterday, and I'm going to talk to Herman and apologize. I really did act like a prick to him."

Nobody said anything, but I knew Rick was beaming with pride at his boy inwardly.

"What did he ask you about me," Justin asked.

"He asked if you were gay," Kyle said. "I told him you are."

"Why'd you do that, man," Justin asked. He pronounced "man" with two syllables.

"He's cool with it, Jus," Kyle said.

"Just 'cause he's cool with these two don't mean he wants his kid hanging around with a fag," Justin said. "It's called guilt by association, you know, Kyle?" Justin looked down at his plate.

Kyle froze in his place. Then he slowly looked at Rick, Tim, and me to see our reactions. Tim mouthed "tell him."

"Jus, you haven't figured it out," Kyle asked.

"Figured what out, dude?" Justin had lit a cigarette a few moments before, and he thumped ashes from it into his plate. I wanted to scream at him at that moment. Instead, I reached for an ashtray that was on the counter and put it down in front of him. He didn't respond in any way.

"Tim and I are gay. We're boyfriends."

It was Justin's turn to freeze. In a few seconds he said, "Jesus Christ. I ain't fucking believing this shit."

"I don't get why you're upset because these guys are gay, Jus," Rick said gently.

"I ain't upset that they're gay. I'm just confused, is all," he said.

"Why are you confused," Rick asked.

"Yesterday I offered these guys blowjobs, and they said 'no.' I tried to come on to Kevin yesterday three or four times, before and after I knew he was gay, and he told me to not do that no more. I just don't know what to think."

"Do you think blowjobs and butt fucking is all there is to being gay," Rick asked.

"Well, ain't it," he asked.

"Jus, everybody at this table likes blowjobs and butt fucking, man. But it's a way of communicating something to the person we care about. The person we love." Tim and Kyle were taking in Rick's every word, and so was I. I had no idea what effect it was having on Justin.

"I don't know nothing about caring about somebody who fucks me or whose cock I suck," Justin said.

"I know you don't, buddy, but fucking ass and sucking cock ain't all that being gay's about," Rick said. "That ain't even ten percent of it."

Justin didn't respond.

"We all need to get to work now, guys," Rick said, "but we're going to talk about this some more, okay, Jus? As a family. Okay, Jus?"

Justin didn't reply.

"Okay, Jus," Rick said again.

"Whatever," Justin said.

I wanted to wring his fucking neck for disrespecting my guy with that comment, for disrespecting all of us. I started to say something in anger, but Rick grabbed my hand. He raised his eyebrows at me, and that meant "lighten up," so I held my tongue.

"Justin, I know you don't have any money," Rick said. He took out his wallet and laid a twenty on the table. "You're going to need some smokes and some lunch and about a gallon of sun screen on that snow white ass of yours. See y'all later, guys." He kissed me goodbye, told me and the kids he loved us, and then he was gone.

"Shit, we're already late for Justin's first day," Tim said. "Let's go."

They were out the door in a flash, leaving me with a pile of dirty dishes. I poured myself another cup of coffee from the thermos pot on the table and lit up a smoke. I thought about many things. I thought about what Rick and I had agreed upon the night before at the pool, and about us taking Justin in as a foster child. I thought about the conversation I had had a few months before with my friend Monte on his boat about the landmines that littered the path of fostering an older kid, especially one with Justin's history. I thought about Tim and Kyle, and how easy they were to love, how wonderful they were as human beings. I had never felt toward them the rage and animosity I had felt toward Justin that morning when he had said "whatever" in that dismissive and contemptuous tone of voice when Rick had tried to reason with him and extend his love to him.

"Jesus," I prayed out loud, "I put it all in your hands. Let me have the kind of patience with Justin that Rick has. Make Justin understand that it's okay to be gay but that being gay isn't really about the life he's been living for so many years. Please bring him around so he can be happy. I know this isn't a very good prayer, but I mean it from my heart, Jesus. Amen."

I got to work an hour late that morning, but nobody even noticed. They all knew I often worked till eleven o'clock, or even midnight, and my boss knew I wasn't a slacker. Jeff, the assistant I shared with the rest of the sales team, wasn't there yet because of his wife's doctor's appointment. The first thing I did after I got some coffee was call my brother.

"What the fuck do you want," he said instead of the usual "hello."

"I was calling my best friend, a guy named Craig Foley. You see him around there anywhere?"

"What's the matter, Kev? You sound like you're in trouble, bro. What's going on? Is Rick okay? Are the kids okay?" He was talking a mile a minute.

"Everybody's fine, bubba. I need some advice, that's all," I said.

"Kevin, I'm sorry I started the conversation the way I did. I figured you just called to rag me about something, that's all."

"I know, Craig. I don't take any offense at your shit. You know that."

"I know, but your voice..."

"Rick and I are distressed, and the boys are a little distressed, too, and we don't know what to do. I need legal advice."

"What the fuck's going on," he asked.

I told him about Justin in pretty good detail.

"Whoa," he said when I was finished. "This kid ain't no Tim or Kyle, is he?"

"This kid ain't worth one of their pubic hairs in the bottom of a urinal," I said.

There was a pause, and then he laughed hard.

"Little brother, if they gave Nobel prizes for metaphors, that one would be a winner, hands down." Pause. "So I gather you don't think all that much of this kid. What's his name?"

It was my turn to laugh. "His name is Justin."

"Does Justin have those big, outrageous tattoos all over him," he asked. He was playing with me, and I suddenly realized it.

"No tattoos, but he has a gold loop through each nipple," I said.

"Oh, my God. I'm getting an erection."

"Shut up and tell me what the fuck to do, asshole," I said.

"Ssssuck them, brother. Ssssuck those nipples," he said.

"Okay. That's it. I'm hanging up now. I'm calling Cherie. I need serious legal advice about what to do with this critically abused, sixteen-year-old gay orphan who happens to be living in my house, so I'm calling your wife. Goodbye."

"HEY," he screamed into the phone. "Don't hang up! Don't call her! I can help you."

"I know you can, Craig. That's why I called you. But will you?"

"I was just playing with you, Kevin. You know that. Please don't be mad at me, man."

"I know you were playing with me, Craig, and 99.9% of the time I love doing that shit with you. But this is serious, bro."

There was a pause for a pretty long time. I could hear him breathing hard, and I knew he was trying to keep from crying. Finally he spoke.

"I know it's serious, Kevin, and I'm sorry I was so immature just now."

He paused, but I didn't say anything.

"Here's what the deal is. You don't want to get the police involved. It's not really a law enforcement issue, at least not from the boy's point of view. But you do need to get the child welfare people involved. I don't know what the agency is called in Florida. Here in Louisiana it's called Children's Protective Services. It might be the same thing there, but, if it isn't exactly that, it's going to be something that means the same thing. Look it up in the white pages of the phone book, under "Florida, State of." Call them and ask to speak to a supervisor. Don't deal with an ordinary worker. Those people are way overworked and underpaid. Talk to a boss. Tell her, or him, what you told me. And call me back after you talk to them, okay?"

"Okay, I'll do it. Thanks."

"Are you mad at me? Please don't be mad at me," he said.

"Yeah, I was mad at you. You really pissed me off," I said.

"Are you still mad at me," he asked in a pitiful voice. "I don't want you mad at me."

He was very close to tears, if he wasn't actually crying at that moment.

"How could I stay mad at my brother and best friend," I asked.

"You're my best friend, too, Kevin, and I love you," he said.

"I know you do, and I love you, too. Let's just forget this conversation ever happened, except for the good stuff you told me just now, okay?"

"Okay, but I can't ever forget that that kid ain't worth one of Tim's or Kyle's pubic hairs at the bottom of a urinal, man. That was fucking poetry."

"Go to work," I said, laughing. "Bye. I love you."

"I love you, too."

We hung up.

I didn't waste any time in pulling out my phone book. I looked up "Florida, State of," and I was amazed at the number of listings. I found a listing for "Children & Families, Department of," but that had a whole array of divisions, too. There was a number for a Child Abuse Hotline, but I decided that wasn't really what I wanted. Then I saw a listing for something like "Foster care and adoptions, legal." I called that number.

I didn't get a person, of course. I got an electronic system that gave me many choices, none of which meant anything to me. I listened to the menu once and couldn't decide whom I needed to talk to, so I went through it a second time. I finally decided to press 4 for Foster Care Services.

"What," a man's voice said.

"Is this Foster Care Services," I asked.

"Yeah, sorry. My secretary must be away from her desk. This is Foster Care. Are you a foster parent?"

"No, I'm not. Not officially, anyway. Can you help me with a problem with a kid?"

"Well, you probably need the school district. Their number is..." and he rattled off a number.

"No, the kid's not in school," I said.

"Well, here's the number for Truancy Control," he said, and he said another number.

"It's the middle of the summer, man. No kids are in school right now," I said.

"Oh, yeah. Right. Why don't you just tell me what the problem is, and maybe I can refer you to the right agency," he said.

I told him Justin's story, including the part about Rick having to cut the handcuffs off his ankles.

"Where are you right now," he asked.

"I'm at work, in the sales department of the hotel at the Surfside Resort."

"Wow, a high roller," he said.

"I'm not a high roller. I just work here, man," I said. "What happens next?"

"I'm going to go out there to see you. Is that okay?"

"Yeah, please come out. I'll be here," I said.

"Okay, I'll be there in thirty minutes," he said.

"Okay. I'll be looking for you."

After we said goodbye, I called Rick.

"Can you come to my office right now? I need you here."

"Is this about Justin," he asked.

"Yeah."

"I'll be there in ten."

He got there in a few minutes. He closed the door to my office when he walked in, and he kissed me.

"Why are you so stressed," he asked.

I told him about my reaction to what Justin had said to him, about my phone call to Craig, and about my adventures with the welfare system's phone thing.

He took them one at a time.

"I knew Justin pissed you off by what he said, Babe, but you can't let that bother you, you know? He's fucked up really bad, you know, and you and I and the boys have to help put him get back together again. Do you know what I mean?"

"Do you think we can do that," I asked.

"I don't know, but we can try. But I know we absolutely can't let him get under our skin the way he got under yours this morning. Are you with me on that?"

"If you keep me balanced, I will be. I need you for this, Rick."

"I know you do. I'm here for you, Kev. You know that, man. I'm here for you first and always. You know I love our boys, but they ain't shit compared to you, okay?"

I knew he meant what he said before he said it, but it sure was good to hear him say it.

"So what about Craig," he asked.

I recapped our conversation for him.

"Kevin, he was joking you, man. You know that. Craig loves you almost as much as I do, and you know he does. I agree he went too far, but you know he loves you, don't you?"

"Yeah, I know that, but he didn't take me seriously at first, you know? That really hurt."

"But it sounds like he did take you seriously, eventually, right?"

"Yeah, but it was only after I said I was going to call Cherie that he got serious," I said.

"Kevin, Craig has never impressed me as the model of maturity. Do you know what I mean?"

"Yeah, I do, and he even said on the phone he had been immature."

"Well, what about the welfare people?"

"The guys going to be here in just a few minutes. That's why I wanted you here."

"Well, here I am," he said.

I didn't say anything for a few seconds. Then I said, "God, I love you."

"I know you love me, and I love you. We both know that. We don't have to say it all the time, but I love you, too."

"What did I do to deserve you," I asked.

"Well, it's your right eye. The one that sort of stares off into space at that funny angle, seeing nothing. I can't resist that."

"You asshole," I said. I hit him affectionately on his arm, and he laughed.

"Where did that come from," I asked.

"Where does anything I say come from?"

"Left field?"

"Yeah, but you can't see it with that funky eye."

I laughed. God, I loved that boy.

The child welfare guy arrived just then, and Rick and I were laughing our asses off when Jeff brought him in to my office.

"How'd it go," I asked Jeff in a quiet aside.

"It was unbelievable, Kevin," he said. He grinned a broad, toothy grin, and I was happy for him. He had heard his baby's heartbeat, and I knew that had to be a wonderful sound to him.

"Let's talk about it when I finish with this, okay?"

"Okay," he said. "I can't wait to tell you about it. Do y'all need coffee?"

"Wait up a minute. Let me see." I turned to the child welfare man. "I'm Kevin Foley, and this is Rick Mashburn," I said.

"Williams. Tyrone Williams," he said, shaking my hand first and then Rick's.

"Please have a seat, Mr. Williams. Can I offer you some coffee, or maybe some water or juice," I asked.

"Coffee sounds good," Williams said.

"I'll have some coffee, too, Jeff. Do you want anything," I asked Rick.

"Some water, please, Jeff," Rick said.

"Mr. Williams, I told you pretty much all I know about Justin on the phone a little while ago," I said by way of an opener.

"Please call me Tyrone, and may I call you Rick and you Kevin," he asked, looking first at me and then at Rick.

"No. Call me Kevin and him Rick," I said.

Tyrone chuckled. "Sorry about that, fellas. I think it must be the heat." We chuckled politely. "First of all, you did the right thing by calling me, Kevin. I know it probably took you a half hour to get to me through that damn telephone system we have, but you made some lucky guesses and got to the right place."

You got that right about the lucky guesses, I thought.

"Do you know if the boy has any relatives who might be interested in him," he asked.

"He thinks he might have some grandparents, but he's never met them," I said.

Jeff brought the refreshments in at that moment, and we took a few seconds to get those sorted out.

"So, effectively, he really doesn't have anybody, is that your read, Kevin?"

"That's our read," I said.

"Our' read," Tyrone asked. He sounded puzzled. "You and your wife?"

"Rick's and mine," I said. "We're a gay couple, Tyrone."

"Oh, I see. I was wondering why you were here, Rick, but now it makes perfect sense."

"Does that present a problem," I asked.

"Not to me," Tyrone said.

"To us being his foster parents," Rick asked.

Tyrone's face sort of lit up at those words.

"Would y'all be willing to do that," he asked, rays of hope shining from his face.

"Yeah. I thought that's what this was all about," Rick said.

"I hadn't said that yet, Babe," I said.

"No, he hadn't, but, my God, that changes everything. I had no idea what I was going to do with that kid," Tyrone said. "Do either of y'all have any experience working with kids?"

We told him about Tim and our involvement with him over the last six months or so.

"Jesus be surely smiling on me today," Tyrone said. That was the first African Americanism I had detected in his speech, and it truly did seem to fit perfectly. "I'd like to talk to Justin."

"He's at work with Tim and Kyle right now," I said.

"Now, who's Kyle," Tyrone asked.

I explain who Kyle was.

"You fellas are pretty remarkable," Tyrone said.

"Well, I don't know about that. Let's go talk to Justin," I said.

Chapter 4

We each took our own vehicles to the motel to meet with Justin. Rick and I started to ride together, but then we decided we didn't know what would have to be done after Tyrone interviewed the boy. I might have needed to go in one direction, and Rick might have needed to go in another.

Tim was the first one we saw when we drove into the parking lot. There were only a handful of people around the pool, and he didn't look very busy. He was wearing a Speedo for some reason that day, and it looked like he might have just finished a workout with the weights. For whatever reason, he looked really impressive.

We introduced Tim to Tyrone. Tim said that Justin was on the beach with Kyle, so he used his cell phone to call them up to the pool. Kyle was in a Speedo, too, and he, too, looked unusually good. Poor Justin most closely resembled a plucked chicken, with his too-white skin and very baggy board shorts. He looked pumped up, too, but, without so much as a trace of a tan, his physique didn't really compare very well to the other boys.

After the introductions, Tyrone moved aside with Justin to one of the tables that had an umbrella so they could talk privately. That left the four of us together.

"Have y'all been working out," I asked.

"Yeah. Can you tell," Kyle asked.

"Definitely," Rick said. "Y'all are looking pretty good there, little brothers."

They beamed.

"Do you guys want some water or something," Tim asked.

We all said "yes" to the water, and Tim got us each a bottle. We sat down at one of the other tables that had an umbrella.

"What's going to happen," Tim asked, after we had settled down.

"He's going to live with us," I said.

Tim and Kyle looked at one another, grinned, and touched their fists together.

"What," Rick asked.

"We knew that was going to happen," Kyle said.

"Are y'all okay with that," Rick asked.

"Of course we are," Kyle answered for both of them.

"What about you, Tim," I asked. "You're going to be with us while your dad is gone. Is that all right with you?"

"When Kyle first said he thought you guys were going to take him in, I got a little jealous. But he made me see that Jus needs us, and I am very cool with having another brother."

"It's going to have to be a team effort, boys," I said. "All four of us. Y'all are probably going to end up spending more time with him than we do. Are you sure you can handle that?"

"Piece-o-cake, buddy," Tim said.

Rick and I grinned at our boys. "Y'all are something else, you know that," I said, and they both grinned. In some ways Tim and Kyle were grown-ups in a full-fledged sexual relationship that could easily last a lifetime, but in other ways they were still little boys who craved the attention and approval of the adults they cared about.

"Y'all are the ones, Kevin, not us," Kyle said. "Do you happen to have cigarettes with you? I gave mine to Justin yesterday, and I haven't had one since yesterday morning."

I reached into my pocket to take out my pack. "If you haven't had a cigarette in over twenty-four hours, why don't you just quit," I asked.

"Why don't you," he replied.

"Touché," I said, chuckling.

Kyle and I lit up smokes, and Tim got up to look after a customer who wanted a bottle of sun screen. He came back to the table with a deck of cards.

"Who wants to play cards," Tim asked.

"I do. Let's play strip poker," Kyle said.

"Very funny," I said, and all of us laughed a little.

"Let me see those cards," Rick said.

Tim handed them to him, and Rick proceeded to entertain us with card tricks. At one point, Kyle stood up and started digging into his butt with his hand, obviously scratching himself.

"What the hell are you doing," Rick asked.

"My butt itches. I'm scratching it," he said.

"Ain't that supposed to be his job," Rick said, indicating Tim.

"Jeez," Tim said. There was no trace of embarrassment on the face of either of them. We've come a long way with these two, I thought.

After talking with Justin for a half hour or more, Tyrone walked over to our table.

"What's up," Rick asked.

"Would you excuse us, please, boys," he said to Tim and Kyle. They started to get up to leave.

"Can't they stay," I asked. "They're going to play as big, or bigger, role in looking after him as we are."

"Yeah. Sure," Tyrone said. "He seems to be pretty excited about living with y'all. At first he grilled me about who I was and what I wanted, and so on, but then he relaxed and opened up a little. He's been through a lot, but I think he's got potential."

"Well, that's good," Rick said. "Did he proposition you?"

"Yes, as a matter of fact, he did, but that's one of the hazards of working with street kids. It happens all the time," Tyrone said. "He seemed really pleased about having you two as brothers, boys. Then he said something I really didn't understand. He said he felt like Eddie Haskell. Do y'all know what that means?"

It took us all a second to process the reference to the kid on Leave It to Beaver who was always dripping with politeness around adults but who was a pure jerk with the other kids. When we got it, we all

laughed.

Tyrone looked a little puzzled at our reaction, but an explanation would have taken too much time.

"Well, anyway, there is going to have to be some paperwork, of course. I'll need to do a background check on the two of you, and that means being fingerprinted. You'll both have to apply for licenses as foster parents, and that might take a couple of weeks to process, unless I can get them to accept this as an emergency placement. Ordinarily, with a couple who are legally married, we license the home, but I think it's a good idea to license both of you individually. That way you can both act as his guardians. In the meantime, though, Justin will continue to live with you fellas."

"What happens if there's an emergency," Rick asked. "We both have power of attorney to take care of Tim if we need it. Who do we call or what do we do if that happens with Justin?"

"That's a good question. I'll request a decree of temporary custody just as soon as I get back to the office. In fact, can I use that phone, son?"

Tim handed him his phone. Tyrone dialed a number and gave instructions to someone to get temporary custody papers in the works. He asked us for the exact spelling of our legal names, and he also needed our Social Security numbers, our address, and our phone numbers at home and at work. He asked if we could stop by his office that afternoon to sign the papers. We said we could.

The whole time we were talking to Tyrone, Justin was waiting patiently at the other table. When we were finished with our conference, Rick said,

"Tim, go get your brother. Y'all put some clothes on, and we'll go eat lunch."

Tim got up and walked over to Justin. Kyle got up, too, and headed off to get their clothes.

"Go get your brother," Tyrone asked, somewhat in disbelief.

"Was that okay," Rick asked.

"You're kidding, right," Tyrone asked.

Rick didn't answer, but he looked confused.

"That is so okay, Rick, I don't even know how to begin explaining it," Tyrone said. "Justin is one lucky young man. I sure hope he can learn from you guys."

Tim and Kyle didn't spend that night at our house. George was leaving on Saturday for two months of intensive study at the dental school of the University of Florida to get ready to take his state licensing exam, and Tim would be with us while he was gone. George had wanted to do something alone with his two "sons," as he put it, that night.

George had been over the previous Saturday afternoon, and we had talked about Tim and Kyle.

"When you guys told me Kyle might very well turn out to be my son-in-law, I was a little shocked at first. Now that I've been around the two of them together, I think you guys might be right," George said.

"What do you think about that," I asked.

"Kyle seems like an extremely nice kid," he said.

"But...," Rick interjected.

"But they're so young. They seem to be very much in love with one another. Do you think they're having sex," George asked.

"They haven't said anything to you about it," I asked.

"No. Not yet."

"Would it bother you if they were, George," Rick asked.

"We're Catholics, as you know, and all my life I've been taught that premarital sex is wrong. It's sinful. I'm worried that I'm condoning something I've always been taught was wrong."

"So, it's not the fact that two guys might be having sex that bothers you. It's the fact that the two guys aren't married to each other yet. Is that the problem," Rick asked.

"I know it makes absolutely no sense, guys. I mean, I've thought about it and thought about it. I

can't get comfortable with it at their ages."

"George, the day you left, we had friends over for a Super Bowl party, and Tim invited Kyle. That was the first time we had met him, and he charmed us and our friends completely," I said.

"Oh, I have no doubt. It isn't Kyle, Kevin, believe me."

"Let me finish my story. There was a guy here with his brother and his brother's partner. I wasn't sure the brother, Fred, was gay, so I asked his brother, Mont, if he was. Mont told me that Fred had lost his partner in a diving accident the previous April. He said they had been together since they were the ages of our boys."

"That's tragic. I'm sorry," George said.

"When was it okay for Fred and his partner to start having sex? I don't know if those guys ever had any kind of commitment ceremony or anything, like we did, but let's assume they didn't. Would it ever have been okay for them to have sex?"

George was apparently troubled by what I had said.

"The Church used to teach that being homosexual was intrinsically disordered, George. Now they say it's okay to be gay, but you just can't have sex because you aren't married. They won't let you get married, and they fight hard against laws that allow same-sex civil marriages, but they say guys like Rick and me can't express our love for one another physically because we aren't married."

"Well, to me that whole position is absurd. I see your point. But they're just so young," he said.

"Is it that they're too young to have sex, or are they too young to be sexual," Rick asked.

All of a sudden, it was as though a light bulb had gone on in George's head and he could see clearly.

"I guess that's it, Rick. I guess I want him to continue being my little boy. God, how stupid of me," he said.

"I don't think it's stupid at all, George. I think it must be a natural parental instinct," I said.

"George, you've honored our relationship many times, Kevin's and mine. Sure, we made a public commitment to one another, but if we hadn't fit well sexually, it never would have happened. The boys are horny, no question. But there's much more to their relationship than that. They've both said a bunch of times that they want to be like us, and, except for the age difference, they are like us, as best I can tell."

There was a long pause. I knew George was thinking. He was one of the most decent men I had ever known, and I knew he wanted to be right and do right by his son.

"I think you're right, Rick. Thank you both for helping me with this. I feel much better about it now."

"So, are you going to let the boys fuck," Rick asked facetiously.

George laughed. "Like I could stop them if I wanted to. But after this talk, I don't even want to."

I was already home from work when Kyle dropped Justin off that first day. He came in, and I told him to get himself a snack, if he wanted one.

"In fact, Justin, just help yourself to anything but booze, okay? We don't do a sit-down dinner, usually. It's pretty much a snack for us at night."

"That's cool. After that lunch I had today, I'm really not very hungry," he said.

He came into the den with a bowl of ice cream and a coke.

"How do you feel about Rick and me being your foster parents? Tyrone said you seemed excited about it? We're excited about having you here."

"It's great. Is the state going to pay you something to help out with me?"

"Yeah. Speaking of that, we need to see about getting you some clothes, don't we," I said.

"I guess so. I don't have anything."

"I know. Do you feel like going shopping tonight?"

"Sure. Where's Rick?"

"He belongs to a club that has a meeting on Thursday night. He usually goes directly from work to the meeting. I guess that's what he did tonight," I said.

He ate his ice cream quietly.

"Tim and Kyle are boyfriends, huh? That sort of surprised me this morning," he said. Then, "I wish I had a boyfriend."

"Maybe you'll meet somebody," I said. "You've only been here a day. They have lots of friends, and I know they know some other gay guys."

"I'm not sure I'd know how to act with a boyfriend. I've never even had a friend before, much less a boyfriend," he said.

"You have friends now, Jus. You'll see just how many before too long. Rick and I have lots of friends, and they'll be your friends, too."

"I sort of like older guys, you know," he said. He smiled shyly.

"How old," I asked.

"I don't know. Between twenty and thirty, I guess. Would you have a problem if I got a boyfriend who was older than you?"

"I don't know. There might be some legal things to consider if you guys were having sex. Did you ever think of that," I asked.

"No, I didn't. You mean like he could get into trouble, or something?"

"That's what I mean. You wouldn't want a boyfriend to get into trouble because of you, would you," I asked.

"How would anybody know we were having sex," he asked.

"Well, I guess they wouldn't, unless you told them. Were most of the johns you had sex with older," I asked.

"All of them were. I've never been with a boy my age." He was quiet for a few minutes. "Kevin, I'm sorry I was such a jerk yesterday. I knew I shouldn't be coming on to you. Thanks for not being mad at me and for still wanting to be my friend."

I found that pretty moving.

He had finished his ice cream and had lit up a cigarette. He stretched out on the sofa when he finished it, and pretty soon he was asleep. I looked at his face, and I saw that he was really better looking than I had noticed at first. With all the stress gone, he actually looked rather innocent, like any kid his age would look.

Justin took about an hour's nap. When he woke up, he went in and took a shower. I had washed the clothes he had worn home from the motel the day before, and he put those on. He looked okay to do what we were going to do.

We went to a few discount stores, and, for not a whole lot of money, we bought him what was essentially a complete wardrobe. He needed a few bathing suits for his job, whatever Kyle's hastily-concocted "beach-pool liaison boy" actually did.

I thought, for the first time, about the fact that Kyle had come up with a job for him and had gotten him all settled in employment in less than a day. Kyle owed nothing to Justin, but it was as though he had taken him under his wing and wanted to help us with him. Frankly, if Jus hadn't had a job, he would have had to hang around the house by himself all day, and that would have been a ticket to temptation for him. I made a mental note to talk to Rick about it and to let Kyle know how grateful we were to him for helping Jus, and us, out.

We bought ten tee shirts, four tank tops, and a couple of button-up shirts he could wear to church and other activities that called for more than a tee shirt. We also bought him underwear, shorts, a couple

of pairs of long pants to go with the nicer shirts, and a pair of jeans. He wanted Levi 501's, and, even though they were a good bit more expensive than the discount brands, we bought those. I had worn 501's all my life, and Rick had, too. I knew they were good quality and, if he didn't grow too much, he could wear those to school the next year. He had to have shoes, too, of course, so we got a pair of Nikes and a pair of loafers to wear with dressier clothes. We also picked up a cheap pair of sandals. In about three hours, we had Justin fully outfitted.

That shopping trip was productive insofar as we got him what he needed, but we also had fun. We were both really relaxed, and we joked with each other the whole time. The ultimate criterion for whether to buy something or not was whether it was "boyfriend bait." After clothes shopping, we had to pick up a few personal items, such as a razor and shaving gel. He needed to shave every day, or at least be able to, so we bought those supplies, too. I realized, when you had to buy it all at one time, that you take for granted all the stuff you use in a day. He had literally come into our world as naked as the day he was born, and he needed everything.

Rick was home when we got there. After he kissed me hello, he commented on the ton of stuff we had to unload from my car.

"Am I gonna get to see it all," he asked.

"Absolutely," Justin said.

He sat on the floor of the den with his purchases piled up around him. He took out each item, one at a time, and showed them off for Rick. He was so excited that Rick and I giggled when he squealed a time or two over some piece of "boyfriend bait" or other.

"This is just like Christmas morning," Rick said. He was excited about the stuff we had bought, too.

"It's a million times better than any damn Christmas I ever had," Jus said.

"Oh, yeah," Rick asked. "What did you get last year for Christmas?"

"A carton of cigarettes and two twelve-packs of condoms," Jus said without any emotion, positive or negative. He was sorting and playing with his new stuff like a little kid.

Rick was sitting next to me on the sofa, and he grabbed my hand hard when Justin said that. I glanced at him briefly, and I knew he was close to tears.

Justin gathered up all of his stuff to take back to his bedroom.

"Put your stuff in that room that doesn't have anything in it, buddy," Rick said. "That's going to be your room."

"But it don't have any furniture," Jus pointed out.

"It will after this weekend," Rick said. "You and I have some furniture shopping to do. Kevin and them can come with us if they want to, Jus, but you and I are going to fix your room up good."

I squeezed his hand to let him know how glad that made me.

"He deserves his own room, don't you think," Rick asked me after Justin had left to put his stuff away.

"Absolutely, Babe," I said.

"Can you imagine giving a sixteen-year-old kid a carton of cigarettes and two packs of condoms for Christmas?"

"That must have cost all of thirty dollars," I said.

"If that," Rick replied. "And the guy probably shoplifted them, to boot."

I laughed.

"Oh, the guy has a name," I said. "Jus told it to me tonight. It's Burl Jackson, but Jus doesn't know if that's his real name or not."

"God, almighty! Who would name a kid Burl?"

The next morning around eleven I had a call from Herman at the motel. It scared me at first when Jeff told me who it was before he transferred the call. I immediately thought one of the boys had gotten hurt, and, I'm ashamed to say, I thought of my foster son third after Tim and Kyle.

"Can you come over here right away, please," Herman asked me. "The state police are here, and they want to question Justin."

I told Herman I would be there in ten minutes. I immediately called Rick and told him what was going on, and he said he would be there by the time I got there.

The "state police" turned out to be two suits from the Florida Department of Law Enforcement. The Florida Highway Patrol had apprehended Burl Jackson for a traffic infraction on an Interstate leading down to South Florida, and they found out there was a warrant for his arrest in Alabama for the murder of a policeman. He had still had the key to room 236 at the motel in his pocket when they arrested him, and they had showed up with a warrant to search the room. When they found out that Justin actually worked there, they had decided to question him.

We immediately called Tyrone Williams when we figured out what was going on. Tyrone said he would be there ASAP, and the officers agreed to wait until he got there to talk to Jus. While we waited for Tyrone, Herman ushered us back to the room that Justin was waiting in. To my total surprise, Tim and Kyle were in the room with him. The three of them were seated side by side, with Justin in the middle. They were holding hands.

"Kevin! Rick!" the three of them said, all at the same time, when we went into the room.

Rick took over.

"Are you okay, Jus," he asked.

"He's scared shitless, Dad, and so are we," Kyle said to Rick. By that point Kyle and Tim called each of us "Dad" as often as they used our names.

Rick squatted down in front of Justin and put his hand on his knee.

"You don't have anything to be scared about, Jus. Your family is here, man. You didn't do anything wrong, buddy."

Justin dropped the hands he had been holding, and he wrapped his arms around Rick's neck in a desperate hug. He started crying. He made deep, heart-wrenching sobs, and Rick just held him and rocked back and forth a little with him in his arms.

I motioned for Tim and Kyle to come with me, and they did, but only after they looked at Justin and Rick to make sure Rick had the matter in hand.

"Thank you for doing that," I said to them, once we were in another office.

"Doing what," Kyle asked.

"For holding his hands," I said. "That was support, and he needed that until we got here."

Both of them looked at me like I had just released a turd into the punch bowl.

"He's our brother, Kevin," Kyle said.

"Yeah," Tim said in rapid tandem. "What should we have done instead?"

"You did exactly the right thing, Tim," I said. "Thank you. Both of you."

"He's really scared they're going to take him away from you and Rick," Kyle said. "From us."

"Why," I asked. "He hasn't done anything wrong."

"He thinks he has, though," Tim said, "because those guys did sex things with him. He's really scared about that."

"Y'all know what child abuse is, don't you," I asked.

They both nodded.

"Well, Jus is a victim of child abuse big time. That guy, Burl Jackson, abused Jus by making him have sex with all those guys. Jus is totally innocent, guys."

"He's afraid they'll find out he's gay," Tim said.

"For once, that won't matter, Tim," I said. "We're going to stand by our brother, right," I asked. "Right," they said in unison.

Tyrone finally got there, and the questioning was ready to begin. At first the police officers didn't want Tim and Kyle in the room, but Tyrone insisted that his "brothers" be present. The two suits were gentle and kind in the way they talked to Justin, and I thought they were thoroughly professional in the way they handled the questioning. They kept at it for about two hours, and they made furious notes as Jus detailed some of the things that Burl guy had done to him over the years. Justin told them the little he knew about the murder of the undercover policeman. They searched Room 236 when they were finished with Justin, but that turned up no evidence whatsoever.

When the questioning was over, Tyrone joined us for a big, but late, lunch at the hotel buffet the kids ate for lunch on school days. I learned during that lunch that the state of Florida would pay for all the clothes we had bought the night before and that they would pay a lot toward the furniture we were going to buy that coming weekend.

After lunch, the boys called Herman, and he told them not to bother coming back that day and to take Saturday off, as well. Rick and I each called our offices to tell them we wouldn't be in the rest of the day, either. We all went swimming at Kyle's house that afternoon, and we had a great time being a family together.

Chapter 5

Things settled into a pretty normal pace at the Foley-Mashburn residence fairly quickly. Tim was once again in our charge while his dad was away studying, and when we saw Tim we almost always saw Kyle, as well. They spent most of their nights at our house, mainly, I think, because Rick and I were there to talk to and play with. Occasionally, though, they wanted to be alone, and on those nights they slept at Kyle's house.

Justin fit in more and more as the days passed. He went to work with them every day, and Kyle would always stop to pick him up in the morning if he and Tim had spent the night before at his house.

There was a period of adjustment, of course, and the need for it was never more apparent than it was the first Sunday morning Justin was with us. Tim and Kyle knew that Sunday morning was private time for Rick and me. We used the first waking hours of Sunday to make slow, prolonged love, to hold one another, to talk quietly and intimately, and to be lovers, unconcerned about anything in the world but each other. We made love many mornings, and sometimes at night, as well, but Sunday morning was special, a time for us to recharge the batteries of our relationship.

That particular Sunday morning Rick woke up before I did. He put his hand on my chest, and he gently brought me to full consciousness. He leaned over and kissed me, and we held our kiss, tongues playing with one another, a long time. We were already hard with morning stiffness, but I felt mine grow larger and harder with sexual arousal, and I knew his was doing the same thing. He licked his way down my chest and stomach, and he dabbed his tongue at the little puddle of pre-cum that had formed on the head of my penis. He pushed my foreskin down with his tongue and gently sucked the head of my cock into his mouth. He moved on from there to my anus, and his tongue had its way with me there.

"God, that's good," I said.

He kept that up for a while. Then he reached into the drawer of his night stand for a tube of lube. He inserted the nozzle into me and squirted a generous amount. He used his "fuck finger" to spread it around inside. I moaned loudly when he rubbed my prostate.

"You like it when I do the finger, don't you, you little sex monkey," he asked.

Ordinarily that would have made me laugh, but that time all I could do was gasp out "Ohhh, yeah!"

He lubed himself and entered me. His dick knew all the right places, and he moved my legs even higher so his angle was perfect. Rick thrust in and out of me repeatedly, and I made a noise of pleasure on each of his downward thrusts.

"You're really into this today," he said, smiling at me.

"Oh, yeah. Oh! Oh! Keep doing that. Don't stop," I said.

After bringing us to the edge and back several times, we both climaxed long and hard and loudly. He lowered my feet to the bed, and he stayed in me while we cuddled.

"Justin!" It was Tim's voice outside our door. He had tried to whisper, no doubt so we wouldn't hear, but the sound came right through our door, as I was sure our sound had gone in the opposite direction. Our room was at the other end of the house from the den and the other bedrooms, and, with the door to the little hall that led to our room closed, our "suite" was completely private. We didn't scream and carry on when we made love, like some people I'd read about and seen in movies, but we did respond vocally to the pleasure we gave one another.

"What the fuck are you doing, man," Kyle whispered.

"Shhhh," Justin said. "Rick's fucking Kevin."

"Get away from there, man," Kyle said.

"Yeah, like you've never done this," Justin said.

"God! Justin! What are you doing," Tim asked, panic intruding itself into his voice.

"I'm jacking my cock, what does it look like I'm doing," Justin answered.

I moved in a way to indicate to Rick that I wanted to get up to take care of the matter, but he put his finger to my lips.

"Let's see how they handle it," he whispered so softly that I could barely hear him.

"Jesus Christ, Justin," Kyle said. In a second, "Get your fucking hand off me!" It was all Kyle could do to keep from shouting.

"Nice bone you got there," Justin said. His voice was low, but it was more than a whisper on that line.

I heard what sounded like a physical struggle. Then Kyle said, "If you ever touch my dick like that again I'll kick your fucking ass."

"But it's okay for Timmy there to touch it, right?"

I heard something hard hit the wall, and Justin laughed. "That's none of your fucking business, dude," Kyle said. I had never seen Kyle angry, but he was obviously livid at that moment.

"Oh, shit," Kyle said. Then, after a pause, "Clean it up, Justin. Now!"

"Fuck you," Justin said.

I heard footsteps go down the hall.

"I'll get something to clean it up," Tim said.

He must have come back in a few seconds with a wet towel or something.

"I couldn't believe he just laughed when you slammed him into the wall," Tim said. I heard scraping against the carpet, so he must have been taking care of the mess.

"I know. It was like he didn't care if I hurt him, or something. I know they heard that, if they didn't hear the rest of it," he said. "That fucker's got a lot to learn about how to be a part of this family, and we're going to teach him. Did you get it all up?"

"Yeah, I think so," Tim said.

"Kyle," Rick said in a normal voice, "no blood, and no broken bones or teeth, okay?"

The boys were deathly quiet. Then Kyle spoke.

"We're sorry, Rick."

"It's okay," I said.

"Okay," he said to us. Then, to Tim, "Come on." We heard them leave our area and close the hall

door into the den.

"Well, well, well," Rick said. "I wouldn't want to be Justin right now, would you?"

"What do you think we should do," I asked.

"I think we should just pretend it never happened and let Tim and Kyle take care of their business with Justin themselves," he said.

"I've never seen Kyle angry before, have you," I asked.

"No. I was pretty surprised. I wasn't even sure he could get angry."

"Do you think they'll beat Justin up? I don't think we can allow that, do you?"

"I really don't think they'll beat him up, unless he attacks them first. They'll talk to him in a language he can understand. That's all."

At that moment we heard the sound of raised voices coming from the other side of the house. We couldn't understand what they were saying, but it was obvious somebody was being told a mouthful.

"Why don't we get up," I said. "You were great, by the way. Both times."

"Both times," he asked, slightly confused.

"Yeah. During and after," I said.

"Get your ass up, you little sex monkey, before I'm all over you again." Pause. "How much should we price the tickets at?"

I laughed hard at that line, and he joined me in my laughter.

We got cups of coffee and settled in on the sofa in the den. Rick's room, the one Justin had slept in the night before, was right behind the den and shared a wall with it. We could hear voices, but we couldn't make out what they were saying. It sounded like Kyle was doing most of the talking.

We sat there in silence for about ten minutes. Then Rick said,

"I'm going to get the paper."

He went outside in just his briefs, as he or Tim or Kyle did every Sunday, and he came back inside with the local Sunday newspaper and the Sunday edition of The New York Times. He refilled our coffee cups before settling down to read.

We read the papers in silence for close to forty-five minutes. The voices in the next room steadily got quieter. At one point it sounded like somebody was crying. Since we hadn't heard any noise that suggested fighting, we didn't get up to see about it. Rick looked up from his paper, smiled, and nodded. I smiled back.

A few minutes later we heard laughter coming from the room.

"It sounds like somebody in there has your gift," I said.

"What are you talking about?"

"Your gift for turning tears into laughter." Rick just grinned at me, but the way he did it let me know he was immensely pleased with what I had said.

About fifteen minutes later we heard the bedroom door open. All three boys appeared in the den in just their briefs, our Sunday morning uniform. They stood in front of us in a row, with Justin in the middle. Kyle and Tim each took one of Justin's hands in their own, as they had done at the motel.

"Justin wants to say something," Kyle said in a very serious voice.

Rick and I looked up.

"I did something bad this morning," Justin said. His eyes were still red from crying. "If you don't send me away, I won't ever do anything like that again. I'm sorry for what I did."

Justin was obviously very nervous at that moment. Nobody said anything for a few seconds, and then Rick said,

"Come here."

Justin didn't move, but Kyle and Tim tugged on his hands to indicate that he needed to go to Rick. When he got to Rick's place, Rick grabbed him in a big hug. Kyle and Tim were grinning, and they

obviously wanted in on the affection, too. They climbed onto the sofa with us, and all five of us put our arms around each other. We were poking each other, tickling, laughing, and having fun.

"I'm hungry. Let's cook," Kyle said. The boys got busy in the kitchen.

I snuggled up against Rick.

"How is it you always know the right thing to do--or not do," I said, low enough so the kids couldn't hear us.

"I just do what feels right. I don't know ahead of time if it's going to work or not," he said.

"Pretty good instincts, I'd say."

Rick kissed me, softly, warmly, and for a long time.

"Okay, love birds. Break it up. Breakfast is ready."

Kyle's voice startled us, and we jumped a bit. The three boys laughed. When we stood up, the bulges in our briefs were bigger than normal. We weren't hard, but it wouldn't have taken much to get us there. Tim noticed and pointed.

"Pudgy, pudgy, pudgy," he said in sing-song.

Rick took a playful swipe at his head, but Tim dodged it. Kyle laughed, but Justin looked confused. Rick shrugged and said, "So what?"

The furniture we had bought for Justin's room was delivered the next week, and I didn't think I had ever seen a kid more excited than he was that day. We were all in the den, kids on the floor, Rick and I on the sofa. Not only was Justin chattering incessantly about his new stuff, but every few minutes he would pop up to go look at it or make some minor adjustment to how it was arranged.

After the fifth or sixth time he did that, he came back in and wanted Tim and Kyle to go look again.

"I'll look at it later, Jus. I'm trying to watch this game. You're getting on my nerves," Kyle said.

Justin got kind of a hurt look on his face.

Tim said, "I want to see it," and he got up to go with Justin. He purposely kicked Kyle's feet when he passed him. Kyle didn't say anything, and Tim looked back at him over his shoulder to see his reaction.

"Why is Jus so excited," Kyle asked us.

"It's his new stuff," I said.

"I know, but it's just furniture," Kyle said.

"I'm sorry I'm getting on your nerves, bro," Justin said to Kyle when they returned. He sat close to Kyle and put his hand on Kyle's shoulder. It was a gesture of friendship and reconciliation and apology, all at once.

"That's okay," Kyle said. "I want to look at it later. But it's just furniture, you know."

"I've been in your room, Kyle. I know what it looks like. I know how nice it is. There's more furniture in that room back there right now than there ever was in the whole trailer I grew up in, and we never got anything new. Ever."

"Were y'all poor," Kyle asked in disbelief. Kyle came from a family that had money, apparently a lot of it, and I was sure "poor" was just an abstract concept in his mind.

"Yeah, we were poor," Jus said.

"Kyle, they were so poor," Rick chimed in, "that if he didn't wake up with a hard-on, he didn't have anything to play with all day."

All of us laughed at that line, but Justin thought it was hilarious.

"What happened to the money you made," Tim asked.

"I had to give it to him. To Buel, the guy I lived with."

"What did he do with it," Tim asked.

"Drugs. Booze. I don't know what else," Jus said.

"Were there ever days when you didn't get enough to eat," Tim asked again.

"Yeah, there were a lot of those days. That's why I started swallowing," Justin replied.

It took us all a few seconds to realize what he was referring to. When Rick got it, he roared with laughter louder and harder than he usually did. Everyone else laughed, too, but Justin turned around with a huge grin on his face to watch Rick for his approval. I wondered at that moment how Justin perceived our relationship.

"Jus, when you were having sex for money, were you top or bottom," I asked.

"Always the bottom, Kev, just like you," he replied. "I'm the submissive type, too."

Rick looked at me, and I knew he wanted to explore that topic and set Justin straight. My hunch about how Jus saw us had been correct.

"Kyle, hit the mute button," Rick said.

Kyle turned his head to look at Rick and made a face to indicate he wasn't please with what Rick had told him to do.

"Mute it, and y'all face us so we can talk," Rick said.

Kyle hit the mute button, and the three boys turned in our direction. Kyle had a shit-eating grin on his face, and I knew he and Rick were communicating something nonverbally that I didn't get.

"Justin," Rick started, "there's absolutely nothing wrong with being a total bottom, or being submissive, if that's what you and your partner want. But Kevin doesn't bottom any more often than I do. As for being submissive, our goal is to be submissive to each other. Nobody dominates in our relationship."

"You let him fuck you," Jus asked Rick.

"I don't let him fuck me, Jus, I invite him to, I ask him to share himself with me that way," Rick said.

I had to remind myself that Justin had a lot of baggage from his past to overcome and that it was at times like that one that Rick and I might be able to help him do it.

"You invite him to do you," Justin asked incredulously.

"Yeah, I do. Do you think being the receiving guy is bad," Rick asked.

"It's not bad. It's just being the girl, that's all" Justin said.

"You think Kevin is a girl," Kyle asked. There was an edge to his voice that we had only heard once or twice before Justin came into our lives. Since the Sunday morning episode when he had gotten so angry at Justin for eavesdropping, we had heard that in his voice several times in his interaction with his new brother.

"He don't act girlish or anything, but I just thought he was the bottom. That's all, Kyle. Don't get mad at me, man. I didn't know."

"I'm not mad at you, man," Kyle said, irritation even more obvious in his voice that time.

"Kyle," I said gently.

"Sorry," he said.

"Justin, is anal the only way you've ever had sex," I asked. I tried to be as gentle and non-threatening as Rick would have been.

"I've sucked guys off a good bit, but I don't know if you would really call that sex. Most of the time I didn't even come unless I jacked my own cock," he said. "But, yeah, I always got fucked."

"Bill Clinton," Kyle said. Rick and I chuckled.

"What," Tim asked.

"I'll tell you later," Kyle said.

"Jus, would you believe that some gay couples never have anal sex," I asked. "Rick and I probably have anal intercourse less than half the times we make love."

The look on Justin's face let us all know that what I had said was, indeed, a revelation to him.

"What do you do, then," he asked.

"Oh, there's lots of stuff to do," Tim said enthusiastically.

"Yeah," Kyle said, with equal enthusiasm.

"You guys don't do it every time, either," Justin asked in disbelief.

"We just started doing that about two months ago," Kyle said. "We've been boyfriends since January, and we've been making love with sex since then, too."

I liked Kyle's expression, "making love with sex." In fact, I liked it a lot. It reminded me that everything Rick and I did together, including having that conversation, was a way of making love to one another. Kyle often amazed me with his insights.

"So what do you do if you don't fuck," Justin asked.

"We kiss a lot," Kyle said. "That makes us hard, and we rub our dicks together."

"I didn't know you could get hard just from kissing," Jus said. "I've never kissed anybody."

"We didn't know it, either," Tim said, "but you do get hard. Kyle has made me shoot a few times just by kissing me."

"The smoker," Rick said, and I laughed hard.

"What's so funny," Tim asked.

"Private joke," I said. "I'm sorry."

"Y'all have a lot of private jokes," Justin said, "and y'all do, too," meaning the boys.

"That's one of the great things about being in love, Jus," Kyle said.

"Must be nice," Jus said in reply. "What else do y'all do?"

"Kyle likes for me to suck his nipples and play with them with my hands," Tim said. "I can make him shoot just by doing that to him."

"Guilty," Rick said.

"What," Tim demanded.

"I do the same thing to him, Tim," I said. "I make him shoot that way, too."

Justin looked a bit confused, but Kyle was absolutely loving that conversation.

"Do those rings in your nipples make them more sensitive, Jus," Rick asked. "I've read that they do."

Tim and Kyle both perked up even more when Rick said that.

"I don't really know," Justin said. "Nobody's ever played with 'em."

"Did it hurt to get those rings," Kyle asked. "I know a place where they do that."

"They were a little sore for a few days, but not bad. Are you thinking about getting some?"

Tim and Kyle looked back and forth expectantly between Rick and me.

"It's up to you, guys. It's entirely up to you," I said. I could tell by the looks on their faces that they'd have them by the next afternoon.

"What else do y'all do," Justin asked.

"A lot of stuff," Tim said.

"We jerk each other off, suck each other's dicks, rub up and down on each other till we shoot. What else, Babe," Kyle asked Tim.

"Y'all do the finger, don't you," Rick asked.

He looked at me to see my reaction. I knew that was coming sooner or later, so I was prepared not to laugh. Instead, I just grinned at him.

"Oh, yeah! How could we forget that," Tim asked with enthusiasm.

"What does 'do the finger' mean," Justin asked.

"Here, I'll show you," Kyle said, his voice full of devilment.

"Just explain it, Kyle. A demonstration won't be necessary," Rick said.

"He wasn't really going to do it, Rick," Tim said. His tone of voice was defensive of Kyle, and I

thought that was too cute for words.

"We know, buddy," Rick said. "Tell him, Kyle."

Kyle explained to Justin about lubing up a finger and inserting it into the other guy's anus to massage his prostate. He wasn't quite that clinical in his choice of words, but he got the point across.

"Don't that hurt," Jus asked.

"You've had dicks up your ass and you think a finger would hurt," Tim asked in disbelief.

"Yeah, and dicks hurt like hell, Tim," Justin replied. Justin lit a cigarette. Kyle looked like he wanted a smoke just then, too.

"Can I have one, Jus," Kyle asked.

"Hell, yeah, man. You gave me the whole damn carton," Justin said, tossing his box of smokes to Kyle. Kyle fished a lighter out of his pocket and fired one up.

"Kyle's dick doesn't hurt me," Tim said, bringing the conversation back on topic.

"His don't hurt me, either," Kyle said. "We wouldn't do it if it hurt."

Justin looked at Rick and me. "What about you guys? Don't it hurt y'all?"

Rick and I both shook our heads "no."

"Well, y'all must be taking some baby dicks, then," Justin said.

"Jus, you've seen every one of us when we were swimming at my house. You know what we look like, man," Kyle said. "We just do it nice and slow and soft and loving and gentle. It doesn't hurt when your guy cares about you, man."

"Well, I wouldn't know about that," Jus said. "What else do y'all do, Tim?"

Tim looked at Kyle with a sort of embarrassed grin.

"You can tell 'em, Babe. We ain't ashamed for doing that, are we," Kyle asked.

"Jesus Christ, what on earth are y'all talking about," Rick asked.

Kyle glanced at Tim, and then he looked down. "We like to lick each other's butt holes," Kyle said.

"Ewwww," Justin said, as Rick burst out laughing.

"What's so funny," Kyle demanded.

"Sorry, buddy. I just didn't know what you were going to say. I was trying to picture some bizarre act. Justin, don't knock it till you've tried it," Rick said to him.

"Y'all do that, too," Justin asked.

"All the time, buddy," I said to Justin.

"God!" he said. "Do y'all do everything they said," he asked us.

"Yeah. Pretty much," Rick said. "They didn't mention one thing that we like, though."

"What," Tim and Kyle said in unison.

"Docking," I said.

"What's docking? Maybe we do it but call it something else," Tim said.

"Not every couple can do it," I said. "At least one guy has to be uncircumcised. We slide my foreskin over the head of Rick's penis, and we take turns masturbating ourselves and each other like that."

"Whoa!" Kyle said. "We don't do that." He was cute when he looked at Tim, and they both registered excitement on their faces.

Yet, I thought.

"Damn," Justin said.

I could tell he had slowly had his street-tough mind blown already that evening, but that bit of information put him over the top.

"I thought I knew everything there was to know about queer sex," Jus said. "Turns out I didn't know nothing compared to you guys. I wish I had somebody to try all that stuff with."

"We need to find you a boyfriend, don't we," Kyle said.

"What about my friend David," Tim asked. "He's wanted a boyfriend ever since you and I got together. Philip and Ryan might know somebody, too."

"David. Yeah, David!" Kyle said.

"Who's David," I asked. "Do we know him?"

"He lives two doors down from me," Kyle said.

"This guy ain't no flaming drama queen, is he," Justin asked. "I ain't interested in no drama queens."

"No, he's a baseball queen. Kyle's the drama queen," Tim said.

"Bullshit! Kyle ain't no drama queen, man," Justin said rather vigorously, almost like he had been offended when Tim called his boyfriend that.

"Yes, he is," Tim said. "He's been in three plays at school, and he's a great actor. I'm going to be a drama queen, too, next year."

I sensed a fundamental misunderstanding of the term "drama queen," and, frankly, it was amusing the hell out of me.

"What do y'all think a drama queen is? Kyle," I asked.

Kyle turned up his hands to indicate he was at a loss and shook his head. "I don't know. I've never heard of that."

"Tim, what do you think?"

"What I said before. Somebody like Kyle who likes to be in plays. That's drama, isn't it?"

I nodded. "Okay, Justin. What do you think a drama queen is?"

"It's a guy, doesn't have to really be gay, but he acts like a girl, talks funny, holds a cigarette like this." He pulled out a cigarette to demonstrate.

"I think Justin's right, Tim. I think a drama queen is an effeminate boy or man," I said.

"Oh. Dave ain't like that at all," Tim said.

"Dave's all boy, Jus," Kyle said. "We'll introduce you to him. But be nice, okay? Don't do to him what those guys used to do to you, 'cause that was wrong, man."

"Don't even tell him about that stuff, Jus," Tim said. "That's just family stuff, just for us to know about you, okay? Just forget about all that shit that happened to you and pretend you're a virgin. Let Dave take the lead, if he's interested, okay?"

"Is he cute," Jus asked.

"Yeah, he's really cute," Tim said.

"Where do you know him from, Tim," Rick asked.

"He was the guy who played short stop when I played third base in middle school."

Rick and I suddenly realized who they were talking about.

"He is very cute, Jus," Rick said. "I see him sometimes when I run. Are you sure he's gay, guys?"

"Oh, yeah," they said in unison.

"Y'all are out to each other," Justin asked.

Tim and Kyle both nodded.

"Who else are you out to, so I won't out you on accident," Jus said.

"Smart boy, Jus," I said. "We should have done that the other day. Who are y'all out to, guys?"

They took turns rattling off a list of names, starting with their parents and running through our gay friends. They also listed some kids that we didn't know. When I asked, they said they were mostly guys in scouts with them, but there were one or two neighborhood kids, as well.

"Are all them guys gay, too," Jus asked.

"Our parents aren't," Kyle said. "The rest are, though."

"You didn't mention your brother, Kyle. Are y'all out to him," I asked.

"Oh, yeah. I forgot him. Yeah, we're out to him, but I'm thinking he might be serving some closet

time right now himself."

We had met Kyle's older brother, Clay, when he was home with his roommate for Spring Break. Our friend Mont, the gaydar expert, had asked me if Clay and his roomie were gay when he had met them at a pool party at Kyle's house. I had forgotten about it until Kyle said that about him.

"Well, if he is, Kyle, he knows where his two big brothers are, right, man," Rick said.

"Absolutely, bubba," Kyle said. "Guy's, I'm having fun, but I am really tired."

"It's only 9:30," Rick said.

"I know, but we worked outside in the hot sun all day, and it makes us tired, you know," Kyle said. "I love y'all. Good night."

That started a round of "I love you's" that even included Jus, for the first time. Kyle led Tim by the hand back to their room.

When Tim and Kyle left, I got into my usual position on the sofa, and Rick got into his. Justin didn't go to his room, and he looked like he wanted to talk. Out of deference to him, we kept our tee shirts on that night.

"Sit up here and talk to us, bud" Rick said. He crossed his legs yoga style to make room for Jus. Justin sat crossed legged too, facing us.

"I want to thank you for my new room," he said. "It's beautiful, and I love it."

"You're more than welcome, son," Rick said.

"And I want to say again that I'm sorry for what I did Sunday. I thought Kyle was going to beat me up, and I wasn't even going to fight back. I thought y'all were going to kick me out, after I saw how mad him and Tim got. When y'all didn't say anything, I felt so glad. I got no place else to go, except on the street. Nobody else would be nice to me, and I still don't know why y'all are."

Tears were streaming down his face, and he used the bottom of his tee shirt to wipe his face.

"I don't ever remember crying in front of anybody before I came here," he said, "but now it seems like I cry all the time. Y'all must think I'm a pussy or something."

"Jus, we cry all the time, too. All four of us. There's no shame in that, man. Those look like happy tears to me, though," Rick said.

"I'm not sad right now, if that's what you mean," he said. Pause. "I don't say 'please' and 'thank you' like Tim and Kyle do, but I want to. I want to be nice like those boys. Will you help me be like them?"

It was our time to show Justin what our happy tears were like. Rick and I both started crying quietly. A look of panic came over Justin's face when he saw that happening. Rick sat up between my legs, and I sat up behind him. He grabbed Jus in a big hug.

"Thank you for trusting us, Jus," he said.

"I got really scared just now," Jus said.

"I know. I can feel you trembling a little," Rick replied. "Never be scared of us or of Tim and Kyle. We're your dads, and they're your brothers."

"Can I be your little brother like they are," he asked.

"Would you be more comfortable thinking of us that way," I asked.

"Yes," he said softly. "I'll still do what you say, just like they do, but I want to be just like them."

"We're glad you like your brothers," I said.

"Y'all really love them, don't you," he asked.

"Yes, we do," we said in unison.

"I can tell. Do you think y'all will ever love me like that?"

"I know we will," I said.

"No question about it, bud," Rick said. "Kev, do you remember those big bowls of ice cream you and Kyle made for us that time? Let's make some like that right now."

We made sundaes with fruit, nuts, cherries, chocolate sauce, marshmallow cream, and anything else we had in stock that went with ice cream. We ate those great huge bowls of stuff, and then we went to bed.

"Did you really want all that ice cream," I asked Rick. He watched what he ate very carefully, and he very seldom ate that much before going to bed.

"That's the only thing I could think of to get out of that conversation. I was about to lose it totally when he asked us to love him," he said.

"Well, I was glad you did. Tim and Kyle are cute and funny, but they're not needy like Jus is. I'm so glad we took him in," I said.

"Speaking of them, could Kyle have been any more transparent about wanting to get back to their room? Was that funny, or what?"

"It was cute as hell," I said. "I sure hope and pray he and Tim make it together. Do you ever think of puppies when you think of those two?"

"All the time. That's what they are. They're going to be awesome men in a few years, and I'm glad we're getting to play a part in making that happen. Do you remember what George said when he thanked us for all we've done for Tim? I can't imagine him anything but fun loving and well adjusted, can you?"

"No, I can't," Rick said. "I haven't been around very many kids that age, but those two seem incredibly happy and, well, well adjusted. That's our goal for Jus, right?"

"Absolutely. What he said tonight about anal sex always hurting a lot made me realized he was raped for years by every john he was with," I said.

"I thought the same thing. I wonder if he's even really gay. I almost wish Kyle would take him to bed so he could experience what it's really like," he said.

"Kyle and not Tim," I asked.

"I'm sure Tim could do it, too, but Kyle just seems more adventurous or something."

"You like Kyle better than you like Tim, don't you," I asked.

"I don't play favorites with my children," he said.

"I didn't say you played favorites. I said you like Kyle better."

Rick had been stroking my chest, but he stopped doing that when he heard my last line. What I had said troubled him, I could tell.

"That's something I'm working on," he said.

"I'm sorry I brought it up, Babe," I said.

"No. It's something I need to address. I don't love Kyle any more than I do Tim, but Kyle's personality just appeals to me more. It's like we're more attuned to one another than I am with Tim," Rick said.

"There's nonverbal communication between the two of you that you don't have with Tim. I saw it tonight," I said.

"When I told him to mute the TV and he balked a little?"

"Exactly," I said. "He worships you, you know? They both do, but especially Kyle."

"I know. Are you jealous," he asked.

"I'm way too proud of you to be even a little bit jealous, Babe. I think you already knew that," I said.

"I hoped it," he said. "Yeah, I knew it. I love you so much." With those words he kissed me good night.

The next morning was Friday, and Rick didn't run because we had stayed up later than usual the

night before. He was rarely awake after nine o'clock most nights, either in bed or on the sofa in the den, and the night before we hadn't gone to sleep until eleven. We were both awake by six o'clock, and we "made love with sex." We had time for a big breakfast, and it was on the table by the time the kids came out, already dressed for work.

Rick and I knew that Kyle had dragged Tim to bed when he did so they could make love, and we were sure it included docking. Rick had been unusually rambunctious with me in bed that morning, probably because he was better rested than he usually was at that time of day. I figured that would transfer over to teasing the boys.

"Kyle, I've been meaning to ask you," he said, "is there a dock at the motel?"

Kyle was bright, very bright, in fact, and he picked up on what was going on immediately.

"Yeah, there is. A pretty big one, and it has this long protruding slip that a boat can slide right into."

"I ain't seen it," Justin said, oblivious to what was going on.

"Well, there hasn't been too much docking there yet this summer, Jus, but I think that's probably going to change today," Kyle said.

"Does the slip accommodate large boats," Rick asked.

"Only one boat ever uses it, Rick, and it's more like average-plus than large."

Tim finally caught on to what they were doing. I attributed that to a lack of attention more than to a failure to grasp.

"Kyle and I are the two dockers, Rick, and I was amazed at how much that slip stretched when we slid that boat into it yesterday," Tim said.

Rick and the two kids were doing all of that totally deadpan, but I was having to suppress laughter every time one of them said anything.

"Can I have some more," Jus asked. Then he added, "please?" I winked at him, and he grinned at my approval. I handed him the platter of eggs, and he dished up seconds.

"Have you tried to do any docking in the rain," Rick asked.

"That's on the schedule for this afternoon," Kyle said.

"Is it going to rain today," Jus asked.

"I don't know," I said. He and I had finished eating and were both smoking. He had actually gotten up from the table, put his dirty plate and silverware into the dishwasher, and brought an ashtray to the table for him and me.

"Tim, do you and Kyle enjoy docking," Rick asked.

"Oh, yeah. It's really cool," Tim said. "I'm really glad we learned how."

"Good, I thought you'd enjoy it. It's probably not something to do every day, but it's fun to do in the rain," Rick said.

"Y'all are talking about something," Jus said. "I don't think it's me you're talking about, so I ain't worried, but it's making me wonder."

"We're playing a word game, buddy," Rick said. "Do you remember us talking about docking last night? Using a foreskin?"

"Yeah, I thought that might be it at first, but doing it in the rain didn't make sense," he said.

"That's the shower, bubba," Kyle said.

"Oh, that makes sense, I guess," Jus said. "I knew that's what y'all were doing while we were eating ice cream last night. I hope it was good enough to pass up that ice cream for."

Rick and I chuckled, and then we all went about the business of the day.

Chapter 6

(Tim's Perspective)

Kevin and Rick adopted Justin the day after we found him in the motel room. Kyle and I knew they would.

"Would you like it if they adopted him," he asked me as we were lying in bed that night. We had made love, and we always talked for a little while before we went to sleep after we did that.

"Can they adopt a kid," I asked. I thought about the fact that my dad's will said they would be my guardians, but it didn't say anything about adoption.

"I guess they can. Why couldn't they," he asked.

"I thought gay guys couldn't adopt kids."

"Well, maybe just as foster parents and not real adopted parents, but it would be the same thing, don't you think," he asked.

"I don't know about that. We're their kids, you and me. I think two kids are enough, don't you," I asked.

"Do you like him," he asked.

"Do you," I asked in return.

Kyle shrugged. "I guess he's okay. It's kind of embarrassing the way he's always coming on to us. Does he know we're boyfriends?"

"I didn't tell him. I loved it when you dunked him tonight for making that sound when Kevin and Rick were kissing. He deserved that," I said. "We need to keep an eye on him."

"He's going to be working with us, so that shouldn't be too hard," he said.

"Working with us? Really?"

"Yeah, I called my dad tonight while you were taking a shit, and he said he could work at the motel with us. I hope Herman don't get pissed off about it. I felt kind of bad today when Rick got on to me for ragging Herman."

"I knew you did, Babe, but Rick was right," I said.

"Oh, I know he was right. Really, I guess I got pissed off at myself for acting like such a jerk to poor old Herman. He can't help that he's dumb."

I laughed. "Herman ain't dumb, Babe," I said.

"I know, but he acts dumb sometimes. Like today. I'm going to talk to him tomorrow and apologize for being a prick. Gimme a kiss."

We kissed each other good night.

"Good night. I love you," he said.

"I love you, too. Good night."

The next morning Kyle told us about getting a job for Justin. When Kyle called his dad to make sure he had told Herman about Jus, Jus got pissed off when Kyle told his dad Jus was gay. I didn't know what to say. Kyle had gone out of his way to do something good for the guy, and Jus didn't seem to appreciate it at all. I didn't understand why he was like that. When he found out Kyle and I are gay, he got all weirded out because we hadn't let him suck our dicks the day before.

We went to work, and Kev and Rick showed up with this enormous black guy from the adoption office or foster office or whatever it was, and he talked to Jus. After they finished talking, the man said Justin was excited about being with Kev and Rick, and he was looking forward to having Kyle and me as brothers. I started feeling a lot better about it. I wasn't too surprised, after what Kyle and I had talked about the night before.

Everything changed, though, Sunday morning. We caught Justin listening at the guys' door when they were making love. That was something Kyle and I had never done and would never do. Kyle got really mad at Justin, and I thought he was going to really beat his ass when he touched Kyle's dick

through his underwear. Justin was jerking off, so naturally Kyle and I both got hard. That didn't mean we wanted anything from him, though. That was just a natural reaction to seeing a guy hard and jerking. Kyle body slammed Justin into the wall, and all Justin did was laugh.

I cleaned up the cum Justin spilled all over the carpet right outside the guys' bedroom. I didn't like doing it, but we sure couldn't leave it there. When I was finished, Kyle and I went back to Justin's room. He was still naked, although his hard-on had gone down, probably from shooting his load in the hall. We didn't even knock. Kyle just opened the door, and we walked in.

"You dumb motherfucker," Kyle shouted at him. "Don't you have any fucking respect, man? Are you so fucking horny that you can't control yourself?"

"What the fuck is it to you, dude," Justin asked.

"You just disrespected the two greatest men on this earth, motherfucker, and you disrespected me and you disrespected my boyfriend. That's what it is to me." Kyle was really red in the face, and he was talking loud. I hoped Kevin and Rick couldn't hear him.

"Whatever," Justin said.

That really made Kyle mad. He grabbed Justin by his upper arm and jerked him to his feet. Kyle raised his fist to smash it into Justin's face, but Justin didn't do anything to protect himself or to hit Kyle. Kyle threw him back onto the bed.

"You ain't worth hurting my knuckles on," Kyle said. "Let's go, Tim," he said to me.

We started to leave the room, but Justin stopped us.

"Don't go, man," he said.

"What did you say," Kyle shouted as he turned toward Justin.

"I said don't go. I want to talk to you," Justin said.

"Well talk," Kyle said. I could tell he was still way mad, but he was calming down some.

"What I did was wrong, man, but I didn't know it was wrong when I did it," he said.

"You didn't know it was wrong to listen outside their door while they made love? You didn't know it was wrong to jerk off in the hall all over the carpet?" Kyle's voice was loud again, and it sounded like he couldn't believe what Justin was saying.

"I figured you and Tim did it every chance you got, man. I got hard right away when I heard the sounds Kevin was making, and I just started jacking. I wasn't thinking."

"We never have done that, Jus," Kyle said. He was much calmer than he had been just a few seconds before. He even called him "Jus."

"I'm sorry I did it, Kyle, and I won't ever do anything like that again, not to them and not to y'all."

Justin started crying. Kyle got onto the bed with him and hugged him. Jus was really sobbing hard, and I knew Kyle was feeling really sorry for him. Jus started getting hard, and he moved his hand down toward his dick.

"Leave it alone, Justin," Kyle said softly, and Jus took his hand away from his crotch.

I didn't say a word the whole time, but Kyle kept looking at me for support. I was really proud of Kyle for not hitting Jus and for forgiving him when Jus needed to be forgiven. I loved Kyle, and I thought I might want us to be like Rick and Kevin, for the rest of our lives. That morning, though, I switched from "thought I might" to "knew I did."

Justin was really scared about going out to talk to Kevin and Rick.

"They're going to kick me out. I know they will," Justin kept saying. He started crying again when he said that.

"Those are the best guys in the world, man," Kyle said. "They're not going to kick you out. You're our brother."

Kyle tickled Justin a little, and Jus laughed. That made Kyle and me smile.

Kyle told me to hold Justin's hand when we went out there. He made Justin put on the pair of

underwear he had worn the day before, and we went out to talk to them. Justin told them he was sorry and he would never do it again. Rick made us all get on the sofa together, and in a few seconds he and Kevin were tickling us and making us all laugh. That was a very rough morning, and I was glad when it was over.

The day before we had all gone shopping for furniture for Justin's room. Rick had a good friend from his running club who had a furniture store downtown, and that's where we went to look for it. The guy's name was Larry, and it looked like he was a good friend of Kevin, too. They introduced us, and we shook hands. Larry was long and lean, and his hands were the size of a shovel. They got busy talking about furniture, and Kyle and I looked around the store.

"That Larry guy is built like a runner," Kyle said.

"What do you mean," I asked.

"Did you see how tall he is, and how skinny? He ain't built like me and Rick. We're both built like football players," he said.

"But you both run," I said.

"Yeah, but we don't have the natural body for it. We ain't as efficient as Larry is at running, I bet."

"Do you like running," I asked. Kyle had run cross country for two years, but he never did training runs like Rick did every day, at least as far as I knew.

"Not really," he said.

"Why do you do it then," I asked.

"To have something to do, I guess. I told you before, I was really lonely before I met you and the guys, Babe. I had friends, but almost all of them had girlfriends. I was sort of like a fish out of water," he said.

"Are you going to run again next year," I asked.

"Probably not."

We walked around the store as we talked. They had nice stuff in it, but we got bored pretty fast. Kevin found us sitting on two chairs up near the front of the store.

"You guys don't have to hang around in here. You can go see what's going on out there, if you want to. Just be back here in an hour," Kev said.

That was all we needed to hear, and we were out of there in a heartbeat. There were a whole bunch of shops and stuff all around. We went into an army surplus store, and we checked out all the uniforms. They had some pretty neat clothes, but it all looked like it was for cold weather. Kyle found some pins of eagles, and we each bought one. We figured we ought to each have one since we were both Eagle Scouts.

We left there and went down a few doors to a coffee house. I had never been in one of those places before. There were about a dozen computers, and about half of them were in use. They had decorations from all the local high schools and the two colleges that were there. We saw one table where this guy and girl were sitting. They were both dressed in all black. She had on a long black dress and black lipstick. The guy had on a black long sleeve shirt, and he had black fingernail polish on all his fingers. It looked like everybody in the place was smoking.

We ordered cups of coffee and a pastry each at the counter, and we found a table. The place really wasn't all that crowded, and the people were spread out all over the place. There were a couple of older guys, like around my dad's age. One of them was sitting with a fat woman who was showing a lot of the tops of her tits. She was smoking, too, but she had her cigarette in a long black holder. It was almost like she was in a costume.

"There are some weird fucks in this place," Kyle said under his breath. "Did you check her out," he said, meaning the woman in the costume.

"Yeah, I know. Did you see the dude with the black fingernails," I asked.

"Goths," he said.

After we finished eating our snack, Kyle pulled out his cigarettes. He smoked so few of them that sometimes I forgot he smoked at all. He lit one up.

"You gotta have one in here, dude," he said, pushing his pack toward me. I took one and lit up, too.

In a few seconds, a guy came over and sat down at our table. He stared into Kyle face, and then he looked away.

"Sorry," he said. "I thought you were a guy I know. You look just like him."

"Who," Kyle blurted out before the guy could get all the way up.

"Clay Goodson. Do you know him. We dated for a few weeks last summer. Nothing real serious, but I really liked him."

"Yeah, I know him. He's my brother. You dated my brother?" Kyle had a look of total surprise on his face.

"Oh, shit! You didn't know," the guy asked.

"What's your name, man," Kyle asked. "I'm Kyle Goodson, and this is Tim Murphy."

"Jason Foster. Nice to meet you." We both shook hands with Jason. He was very red right at that moment, and his hand was sweaty when I shook it. He was very good looking, and he was dressed in a button-up shirt and khaki shorts. It didn't look like Jason fit in that place any more than we did.

"Did I, er, say something I shouldn't have said," he asked. He seemed nervous.

"Naw, that's cool man. I already knew. Not about you, but I knew my brother dated guys," Kyle said.

He was lying big time, and he knew I knew it. One of the things I liked about Kyle was the fact that he would never embarrass another person, even if he had to lie to keep from doing it.

We chatted with Jason. We found out he was going into his senior year of high school and that he worked at a shoe store across the street. He lived in town, but he liked to hang out at the beach. He and Clay had met somewhere the summer before, and they had had a few dates before it was time for Clay to leave for college. Jason hadn't heard from Clay since then, but he said he would like to catch back up with him. After a while, he glanced at his watch and said he had to get back to work.

"Give me your phone number so I can give it to Clay the next time he comes home," Kyle said.

Jason had a pen in his shirt pocket, so he wrote his number on a napkin and gave it to Kyle.

"Thanks, Kyle," Jason said. "Nice to meet you guys."

"Same here," Kyle and I said at the same time.

When he was gone, I asked, "Did you know your brother dated guys?"

"No, and it kind of pisses me off, you know?"

"Why would that piss you off? Gayness runs in families, you know? It's like a gene we got, or something."

"I know. It doesn't piss me off that he's gay. It pisses me off that he hasn't told me. I mean, we're both out to him. He knows Mom and Dad are fine with it. What's his problem? I gotta find out about my own brother in some fucking dive of a coffee shop?"

"Well, there's nothing you can do about it," I said.

"Yes, there is, Babe. I could introduce him to Rick and Kevin. They could be his big brother, too."

"How old is Clay," I asked.

"He's only eighteen. I got held back in kindergarten; he got promoted from kindergarten to second grade. It's like together we had to spend twenty-six years in school. He spent twelve and I'm spending fourteen. It's like together we have to add up to the right amount, you know?"

"You're crazy, man," I said. I didn't really think he was crazy, I thought he was the cutest guy on

the planet.

"I know, and that scares me."

My dad had to go to Gainesville to attend some kind of class to become an oral surgeon in Florida. He had been one in the Navy, but he had to take some big test to be one in Florida. I thought I would miss him, probably, but I was happy that I got to stay with Rick and Kevin while he was gone.

"Are you going to become a fucking Gator," Rick asked my dad when we had gone to their house to talk about it right after he had gotten home.

"Not in heart, my friend," my dad had said.

"We're trying to raise this kid right, aren't we," Rick asked, meaning me.

"My brother is a Gator, and my parents both went there, too," Kyle said.

"Yeah, that's right. I had forgotten about that. You have to leave now, and never come back," Rick said.

Everybody, including Kyle, knew Rick was just carrying on. He and Kevin were die-hard Florida State University Seminoles, and Rick hated the Gator football team more than he hated the devil. He thought the actual university was one of the greats in the South, and he liked all the Florida alums he knew. But Rick, Kyle, and Kyle's parents had grown up in Florida, and part of the culture of the state was the bitter rivalry between those two schools. Toss in the University of Miami, and you had football rivalries that divided families worse than the Civil War had.

Kyle stood up. "Good bye, Rick. Good bye, Kevin. Good bye, my love. Good bye, Mister Murphy. I love you all, and I always will," he said in the saddest voice I had ever heard in my life. There were real tears in his eyes, and, for a second, I forgot it was a joke and thought the guy I loved was gone, just like that. "But I must go, never to return." He turned to walk toward the door.

Rick jumped up and started clapping. "Bravo! Bravo!" he said. My dad and Kevin did the same thing, so I stood up and clapped, too.

Kyle turned around with a huge grin on his face. It was only then I realized what a good actor he was. He was just playing a part in a play. He came back and sat down at the table with us. He was proud of himself, and I was proud of him, too.

The day Larry's store delivered Justin's new furniture, he got so happy and excited and proud about it that he got on Kyle's nerves. To tell you the truth, he got on my nerves about it, too. We all had to go look at it about fifteen times, and, every time, he had just moved one little thing an inch or two. The last time he wanted us to look at it, Kyle even told him he was getting on his nerves. Justin looked really sad that nobody wanted to look at his room again, so I got up to go see it. We were watching a Braves game, which was boring the piss out of me. Kyle said he wanted to watch the game, but it was one-one in the fourth inning, and I knew he just didn't want to get up again. I kicked him when I passed by, going to Jus's room. Kyle didn't say anything or react when I did that, but he knew I had done it on purpose.

That turned out to be kind of an interesting night when Jus and I got back. We started talking about sex, and we learned some cool stuff. First of all, we learned that Justin thought sex was just ass fucking and that it was supposed to hurt. Then we learned about docking.

We went to bed around 9:30 that night. Kyle started taking my clothes off before I even got the door locked. He tickled me a little, so I was giggling. I knew he wanted to try docking, and I wanted to see what it felt like, too.

"You're pretty damn horny tonight," I joked.

"I've been hard for an hour," he said. "I can't sit around talking about fucking and sucking dick and that stuff and not get horny, can you?"

"What do you think," I asked. We were naked by then, and I pulled him to me for a deep kiss.

Our dicks touched, and we rubbed back and forth against each other to make them feel good. I loved to see Kyle naked, and I loved to feel his naked skin on my naked skin.

"You want to try it," he asked.

"Yeah, don't you," I asked.

He took my dick in his hand and pulled the foreskin forward as far as it would go.

"Tell me if this hurts, okay?"

"Okay," I said, "but so far it just feels good."

"Does it stretch a lot," he asked.

"Yeah, but let me do it. I know how much it will stretch, and you don't--yet." We grinned at each other when we said that.

Getting my foreskin over the head of his dick wasn't all that easy at first. I would just about get it on him when it would slip out of my hands, and I'd have to start all over.

"What you're doing feels really good," he said. "Does it feel good to you?"

"Yeah, but I keep losing it," I said.

"Don't force it if it won't go," he said.

We had both been looking down at what I was doing. Kyle had his hands on my shoulders, but he moved them down to my chest and started playing with my nipples. That felt great, and I shot all over Kyle's dick in just a few seconds. I thought he would be mad at me, but he wasn't.

"Watch this," he said.

He took some of my juice and started rubbing it into his own nipples. In about a half a minute he groaned, and his dick started spurting. He hadn't even touched it.

We got in bed and tried docking a few more times. We finally did it the third time, and it was okay.

"That wasn't all that good, was it," he said.

"It was okay. I think we just need practice."

He laughed, and then he kissed me.

We learned that night that Jus wanted a boyfriend. We had several gay friends who were looking for boyfriends, but David was number one on the list.

The next day at work, Kyle came up to the pool, where I worked. Justin's title was "beach-pool liaison boy," and what that really meant was he took over the beach while Kyle came up to the pool to talk to me. Sometimes I went down to the beach while Justin did the pool. It didn't matter to Herman, who just did what Mr. Goodson told him to do, and it didn't matter to Mr. Goodson, who thought Kyle and I "hung the moon," as he had said many times about us.

"Let's call Dave to see if he wants to eat lunch with us," Kyle said.

Kyle had gotten Dave a job at one of their other motels. I couldn't remember if he was beach boy or pool boy, but he was one of those two. Kyle called the motel where he worked and asked for him. Whoever answered the phone said that Dave was off from the middle of June until the middle of July.

"This is Kyle Goodson," he said. "Do you know who I am?"

"Of course, Kyle. This is Barry Clark. Do you remember me?" Kyle had the phone wedged between our ears so I could hear, too.

"Sure, Barry. Wazzup?" Kyle asked.

"Not much. What's up with you?"

"Not much. Do you know Dave's home number?"

"Yeah, I got it right here," he said. Barry gave the number, and I wrote it in some dirt that we were next to.

"Thanks, Barry," Kyle said. "I owe you, man."

"I'm going to remember that in a few years, Kyle," Barry said.

Kyle did a motion like he was jerking off a really big dick, and I laughed a little.

"For sure, Barry. Thanks and bye."

"Do you really know that guy," I asked.

"We have eleven motels and sixteen gift shops. What do you think? There is only one of me to remember, but there are a lot of them."

"Call Dave at home, man," I said.

"Okay."

He dialed the number, and he must have gotten it wrong because the recording said the number wasn't in service at this time. He dialed again.

"Hello, Mrs. Fugate," Kyle said. "This is Kyle Goodson, and I'm a friend of Dave's."

"I know, Kyle. Your mother is a friend of mine. I haven't seen you and Dave shooting baskets for a while."

"No, ma'am, but we hang out some at school. Is he there?"

"No, he's not, Kyle. He's at church camp. He's a junior counselor. He won't be home until the middle of next month. Is there a message I can give him?"

"No, ma'am. I was just calling to see if he wanted to have lunch."

"Kyle, I have lunch with my friends several times a week. Having lunch with your friends is a Southern tradition, and I'm so glad to see that it's caught on already in the next generation. Oh, Kyle, I know your mother, too. She's a very dear friend of mine. I have lunch with her sometimes, too, and we play bridge together occasionally. Do you play bridge, Kyle. It's a wonderful game, and you're never too young to learn. I wish I could talk David into learning how to play bridge. I'd be happy to teach you boys, if you'd like."

Kyle snapped his fingers against his thumb to mean that that lady was a real talker.

"Yes, ma'am, I know. Well, I have to go now, Mrs. Fugate. I look forward to seeing you soon, ma'am. Bye." Kyle was talking fast.

"Bye, Kyle. I'm so glad David has nice friends like you. Say hello to your parents for me. Bye."

"What was that all about," I asked, when Kyle got off the phone.

"That was all about being a Southerner when you talk to your friends' parents, man. They're much better friends with my parents than Dave and I are. If people know your parents, they think they know you, too. That's just the way it is."

"She talks a lot, doesn't she," I asked.

"That wasn't even a taste of it, if she's like most ladies my mom hangs out with," he said. Then, "Shit, I wish I could think of somebody to call."

"Why are you so interested in finding Justin a boyfriend," I asked.

"So his lily white ass won't be sniffing around your golden brown ass, that's why." He punched me lightly, and I laughed.

"Speaking of that, he sure hasn't tanned very much," I said.

"I know. Maybe he doesn't need to use so much sun screen," he said.

"What's he using," I asked.

"SPF 40. Do you think that's too high? Kevin told me to make sure he doesn't get burned," he said.

"Jeez, Kyle. He could live on the sun with 40 on and not get burned," I said. "He ought to cut it back to about 20, don't you think?"

"Yeah." He was distracted trying to think of guys to introduce to Justin. He got up and walked over to his backpack. He got his shorts out and dug for his wallet. He found the napkin with Jason's number on it. He held it up triumphantly. "Jason!" he said.

Kyle called Jason's number.

"Hello. This is Kyle Goodson. May I speak to Jason, please," he said. He held the phone so I could listen, too.

"Hi, Kyle. This is Jason. What's up?"

"Not much. What's up with you?"

"Not much. Pretty bored, actually," Jason said.

"Oh, yeah? You feel like eating some lunch?"

"Sure. With you?"

"Yeah, with me and Tim Goodson, the other guy you met last Saturday, and with another friend of ours," Kyle said.

"Who is he," Jason asked.

"His name is Justin Davis, and he's new here. He's cute, too, Jason."

"Why did you say that," Jason asked.

"I thought that you'd like to know, that's all. You're gay, right?"

"Er, well, er..."

"It's cool, Jason. You said you dated my brother, and I sort of assumed, you know? Tim and I are gay. We're boyfriends."

"Really?"

"Yeah, really. Are you dating anyone right now," Kyle asked.

"No," he said.

"Well, come and meet Justin. You guys might like each other."

"Okay. Where?"

Kyle gave Jason details about when and where.

"You're good at that," I said, after they had hung up.

"Let's wait and see if he shows up," he said. I hadn't thought about that.

We had a "staff meeting" with the beach-pool liaison boy to talk about lunch. After Kyle explained what he had done, Justin asked,

"Why are you doing all of this for me?"

"Because you're my brother, and I like you," Kyle said.

"You like me?"

"Is that so hard to believe, Jus? We both like you. Plus, I think you're a cute guy, too."

He looked at me and asked, "You, too?"

"Yeah, me, too. Don't you believe us?"

He smiled a really nice smile.

On the way to the pizza place, we talked to Justin about not talking with food in his mouth and about not interrupting anybody when they were talking. He did both of those things, and they didn't make such a good impression.

"I want y'all to tell me stuff like that, okay," he said. "I don't have good manners like y'all do, but I want to."

"Okay. Just don't get mad if we tell you stuff you don't like, okay," Kyle said.

"Kyle, if you see me talking with food in my mouth, nudge me under the table, okay," he said.

"Okay, bubba," Kyle said.

"Why do you call him 'bubba,'" I asked.

Kyle and Justin both laughed.

"It's Southern for 'brother,' Tim," Jus said.

"There's a guy at school named Bubba," I said.

"That's his nickname, Tim," Jus said. "They call him that 'cause he's somebody's brother. They

also say 'Bub' sometimes."

"Jus, why do you talk so Southern. Kyle doesn't talk like you?"

"He ain't from Alabama, that's why. He's one of them Florida crackers. They talk funny."

"Tim, hit him for me, would you please, Babe? I can't hit and drive, too."

"That's the first time either one of you guys has teased me, you know that, Kyle?"

"Well, you better get used to it, Jus, with him and Rick around," I said.

"That Rick's a rascal, ain't he? You know something, I never did say 'thank you' to the two of you for saving my ass back at the mo-tel last week. It was a week ago day before yesterday, you know?"

"You don't have to thank us, Jus. We did it 'cause you smelled so good," Kyle said.

"Sh-et," he said and laughed. Kyle and I laughed, too.

"By the way," Kyle said, "we don't have to go back after lunch, and we don't have to work tomorrow, either."

"When are we going to get paid," Jus asked. "That twenty Rick give me last Thursday morning's about gone. Kyle, if you hadn't given me that carton of smokes, I'd be bumming butts."

"I thought your days of bumming butts were over, Jus," Kyle said.

It took Jus a second to figure out what Kyle had said, but he laughed when he did.

"Shit, you're pretty cute, Kyle. You're cute, too, Tim. Y'all are both cute."

For the first time, it seemed like Justin was just a guy, like us. He wasn't some poor creature we had to feel sorry for or some street kid that our guys had taken in. He just seemed like an ordinary guy who liked to joke and have fun, just like we did.

"To answer your question, Jus, here's your pay."

Kyle handed an envelop over the seat to Justin. We worked ten hours a day in the summer, and we made \$10 an hour, so Justin's pay for the four-and-a-half days we worked was \$450.00 in cash.

"Holy fuckin' shit, man," Justin said when he took the money out of the envelope. "I ain't never had this much loot that I could keep in my whole life put together." He laughed excitedly.

"My dad always pays in cash the first time, Justin, but you'll get a check with tax taken out next week," Kyle said. "By the way, Tim, I have your check and mine, too."

Justin tried to hand Kyle \$25.

"What are you doing, Bubba," Kyle asked.

"I'm paying you back for them smokes, Bubba," he said.

"Don't pay him for them, Jus. He didn't buy 'em," I said.

"What'd you do? Shoplift 'em?"

"Naw, he gets them from his dad's warehouse, Jus," I said. "Bubba, I mean."

"It's a art to talk Southern, Tim. You're a smart boy. You'll catch on, eventually. Now Kyle's another story."

Kyle and I both laughed at what he said. Justin beamed over the fact that we thought what he had said was funny.

Jason pulled his car into the parking lot of the restaurant just as we were getting out of the car. We walked over and introduced him to Justin. They checked each other out the way guys do when they meet for the first time.

"They were both thinking, 'I wonder what his dick looks like,'" Kyle whispered to me once they were far enough ahead of us not to hear. I laughed out loud.

Lunch went much better than I thought it would. It turned out that Jason had relatives who lived within "spittin' distance" of where Justin grew up, and they even knew a few of the same people. Jason had spent a good bit of time visiting his grandparents up there, and before long his speech was sounding more and more like Justin and less and less like Kyle and me. I mentioned that when Kyle and I went to

the restroom to pee. "That there's a gud syhn," Kyle said. I laughed, of course.

After lunch we went to Kyle's house. We had to chill for about a half hour until the maid left, but then we all got "nekkid," as Justin said, and got in the pool. Jason was right at home swimming nude, and he played all the games and had as much fun as we did.

After about an hour, Kyle said he wanted my opinion about something that was in his room, so he and I wrapped towels around our waists and went inside. Once we were in his room, I asked what he had to show me.

"I didn't want to show you anything. I just wanted to give them some privacy. This is going better than I ever hoped," he said.

"You are such a nice person, you know it?"

"I'm only nice 'cause I'm in love," he said.

"Oh, yeah? Who are you in love with," I teased.

"Jason. Who do you think?"

"Oh." I made my voice sound real pathetic.

He grabbed me and hugged me.

"I'm in love with you, you little monkey," he said. He ruffled my hair, and water from it went all over the place.

"You know what I thought you were going to say," I asked.

"What?"

"I thought you were going to say 'you little sex monkey.' I overheard Rick say that to Kevin one time."

"Man, I love that. That is so cute. You are my little sex monkey, aren't you? That is your nickname to me from now on." He chuckled.

I got real emotional all of a sudden. "I love you," I said. "You are such a good person."

"The way you said that was different from the way you've ever said it before. This is tearing me up. I love you so much I could explode with it."

Kyle's love exploded, all right, very deep into my guts about thirty minutes later. We both slept for about a half hour after that.

"What time is it," he asked me.

I looked at his alarm clock next to the bed. "It's four o'clock. Do you want to get up?"

"I never want to get out of bed with you, not for the rest of my life."

I didn't say anything.

"You're supposed to say how romantic that line was," he said.

I laughed. He was so cute.

"Lez git up and see what dem boh z is up to," he said, imitating Justin and Jason.

I laughed again, but we got up. We wrapped our towels around our waists again. It didn't make any sense to do that, but we did it. We went into the kitchen so Kyle could make a pot of coffee. He drank coffee every afternoon, just like a grownup. He stood at the sink, which had a window into the back yard right above it.

"Tim, come see this," he said excitedly. He sort of whispered it, and for the life of me I couldn't figure out why. "Look at 'em."

Justin and Jason were in the middle of the pool. They had their arms around one another, and they were kissing.

"We are here today, sports fans, watching our brother's First Kiss." He was holding a scrub brush for pots and pans up to his mouth like it was a microphone. "The lips are parting. Justin leans into Jason, and Jason leans back. The erection meter is on a full ten for both contestants. Ah. There they go. Jason dips a bit to run his dick all the way up Justin's. Justin responds with a slight shiver, and he

thrusts back into Jason. They're showing remarkable tongue power, it seems."

They were doing every bit of what he said, and listening to him made me laugh so hard I could hardly breathe.

"Oh. Oh. Oh, my God. Jason appears poised to shoot. Justin reaches down and grabs Jason's butt. He clutches his opponent to him with a mighty force. Justin grinds in on him. Jason's face has that orgasmic look we've come to expect and love here on ESPN-69. I think...yes...yes...Oh, my God!"

I was hard as a rock from watching them, but I was totally weak from laughing so hard. I fell down onto the floor, and I pulled Kyle's towel off him when I did. He started laughing because I was laughing so hard, and he crumpled onto the floor with me.

After I had gotten control of myself, I lay on my back on the kitchen floor, totally naked with a hard-on. Kyle was right beside me, equally hard.

"Do you know what's not funny," he asked.

"What," I gasped.

"Now I've got to clean that fucking pool."

The way he said that was hilarious to me, and I laughed hard again.

There was absolutely no way we could go out there with them. In a few minutes they got out of the pool, and it was pretty obvious they were on the coming-down side of erections. They both got dressed, and then they kissed again. Kyle and I ducked down so they wouldn't see us, and then we put our towels back on. When we went outside, Jus was lighting up a cigarette, and Jason was gone.

He grinned so hard when he saw us I thought I'd have to call my dad to sew his cheeks back together.

"Hey. Did you have fun, Bubba," Kyle asked.

"This was the most fun I've ever had in my life. I've got a date tonight." He was cute when he said that, real proud of himself and all.

"Oh, man," Kyle shouted, and he jumped on Jus in a huge hug.

Kyle wrapped his arms around his neck and head, and his legs around his waist, and Justin danced with him that way. Kyle had lost his towel in doing that, and he was completely naked.

"Come here, you," Justin said to me. "Jump up here with us."

I jumped on Justin's back, and the three brothers hugged and kissed one another in odd places. Eventually, Justin's strength gave out, and we all collapsed in the grass, laughing hard.

"I love y'all, guys. Thank you for saving me," he said. He started crying tears of happiness and joy, and it didn't take me and Kyle more than a few seconds to join him.

Chapter 7

(Kevin's Perspective)

The music from Rocky was blaring out of the house when I got home that Friday afternoon. Rick pulled into the garage right after I did, and we walked in together, after he kissed me hello out there.

"What the hell's going on here," he asked when we went inside.

"Beats me," I said. I turned down the stereo to a comfortable volume.

Kyle came out of Justin's room just then, and he greeted us.

"Jus has a date tonight. Come on," he said. Kyle was dead serious, but it was obvious he was excited. Rick and I grinned at one another over how cute he was acting.

We followed him into Justin's room. He and Tim had all of his new clothes spread out on his bed, and they were obviously in the process of trying to decide what Jus should wear. Kyle joined in the

decision-making process, too. Justin was in only his briefs, no doubt for convenience so he could try things on.

"Put this on," Kyle said, handing him a polo-type tee shirt.

Jus did as he said.

"Now try these," Kyle said again, that time about a pair of shorts. "Do you like that," Kyle asked us.

"It looks fine," Rick said. Tim and I let our agreement be known.

"What about jeans," Jus said. "I got some new ones I ain't worn yet."

"Get 'em," Kyle said.

Jus got his jeans from his closet and put them on.

"That's the look," Kyle said, "but they haven't been washed yet. What time is he picking you up, again?"

"Not till seven," Jus said.

"Okay, let's wash 'em," Kyle said. "We'll wash 'em in hot water, and that'll make 'em tighter. I'll show you how to fix your dick so it'll show more."

Justin grinned.

"Come on, Babe," I said to Rick.

"Don't you want to see how Kyle fixes Justin's dick," he asked, devilment in his voice.

"Y'all got time for coffee," Kyle said. "I won't do it till the jeans are washed."

Rick and I laughed.

"What are y'all laughing at," Kyle wanted to know.

"They're laughing cause you're so damn cute, Bubba," Jus said.

That made us laugh again, and we left them to get Justin ready for his date.

Rick and I got coffee, and we talked about the way the day had gone for us at work. We watched the news, and we each got something to snack on. In a little while we heard the buzzer on the dryer go off, and Kyle hurried through the den and kitchen into the laundry room.

When he came back through, Rick asked,

"Kyle, what's up with the tight jeans? I thought baggy was the cool look."

"It is, but not with that shirt, and not on him. He doesn't have the rest of the look to be cool in baggies. Besides," he said in a confidential tone, "he and the other guy are both sort of country, you know?" He held out the jeans. "I need to get back there."

"He's incredible," Rick said.

"I know. He's just like you in so many ways, too," I said.

"He's such a little man, you know? He's the organizer. He knows how to get things done."

"I know," I said. "It's been fascinating to me watching him with Justin. It's like he's taken Justin on as a project, or something."

"I think Kyle's just a genuinely nice guy, Babe."

"I just said he's just like you in so many ways, didn't I," I said.

"Come here, you little sex monkey," he said, leaping at me from his end of the sofa.

"Sorry," Kyle said, as he interrupted us.

"It's no problem, buddy," I said. "What's up?"

"Do y'all want to watch me fix Justin's dick," he asked. He almost sounded shy when he said that.

"I think we'll take a pass on that," Rick said. "Don't put anything around it too tight, you hear?"

"Yes, sir. I won't. I know how to do it," he answered. And then he left.

"What were you two talking about? A cock ring," I asked.

"I assume so. Now where were we," he asked.

"We might want to wait, don't you think?"

"Yeah. You're right."

The boys came out into the den just then.

"Wow," Rick said when he saw Justin.

Kyle and Tim had worked on Justin's hair, and it was done up in the gelled style they both wore. It looked good on him, too. His clothes looked good, as well, and the bulge in his crotch, while certainly noticeable, wasn't any bigger than a lot I'd seen. His face was freshly shaved, and the aftershave he wore smelled good.

"So who's the lucky guy," I asked.

"You mean besides me," Jus said. That sent a ripple of warmth through me.

"Yeah. Who's your date?"

"His name is Jason. My brothers introduced me to him," he said.

"That's what brothers are for, isn't it," I asked. "To help you meet guys?"

"Queer brother are," he said, and we all laughed.

"Do you need some money," Rick asked, going for his wallet.

"Nope. I got paid today," Justin said, beaming.

"I thought y'all got paid on Saturday," Rick asked Kyle and Tim.

"We usually do, but tomorrow's a holiday for us," Kyle said.

"Oh," Rick said.

"Jus, I found out today that you've got a birthday coming up pretty soon," I said.

"How'd you find that out," he asked.

"A box of your things arrived at my office today. It must have been stuff that was in the trunk of that guy's car, and the police sent it to me. It had your birth certificate and some other papers. Clothes, too."

"When's your birthday," Tim asked.

"July fourth," Jus replied.

"Are you going to be seventeen," Kyle asked.

"Yeah. Kev, was there a pair of boots in that box," Jus asked.

"Yes, there was," I said.

"Good. Them boots is the nicest thing I ever had. One of my regulars gave 'em to me. Is the box here right now?"

"It's in my car. Do you want to get it," I asked.

"Yeah."

I gave Jus the keys to my car, and he and the other boys went out to get the box. When they came back, Justin put the boots on. They made him slightly taller.

"What do y'all think," he asked Kyle and Tim.

"I don't know," Kyle said. "I mean, they're really cool boots, and they go good with what you're wearing, but..."

"I think he should wear 'em, Babe," Tim said.

"Tim's right," Kyle said. "Wear 'em, Bubba."

A horn sounded in our driveway, and Justin got up to leave. Before he did, though, he leaned down and gave Kyle and Tim each a kiss on the cheek.

"Thanks," he said, and they smiled. He was out the door.

"I like what just happened, fellas," Rick said.

"So do I. Very much, in fact," I said. "I have never seen him more excited or happier."

"He trusts us now," Kyle said. "It was kinda rough for him at first, and he was scared. You know what I mean? He acted tough, but he ain't really tough. We all cried together this afternoon."

"Happy or sad," I asked.

"Oh, definitely happy," Tim said.

Kyle's cell phone rang, and he went into the kitchen to talk. In about a minute, he came back in. "It's Philip. He wants to know if he and Ryan can come over. He sounds pretty upset," Kyle said.

"Of course they can come over," I said. "What's the matter?"

"I dunno." He went back into the kitchen to finish his conversation.

"Philip was crying," Kyle said when he returned.

"What's going on? Is he in trouble," Tim asked.

"He didn't want to tell me till he got here. I'll bet his parents found out about him and Ryan."

"They don't know about them," I asked.

"Just that they're best friends. They don't know they're boyfriends," Kyle said.

"Oh, shit," Rick said. "Why can't every gay kid have the parents like the four of us?"

"I know," I said. "We'll see what we can do, guys. Are they in love, do y'all think?"

"Oh, yeah," the boys said in unison.

"They're our best kid friends," Kyle said.

"They're to us what Monte and Terry are to you guys," Tim said.

"We know they are," Rick said. "We like them a lot. They're really neat kids."

There was a tentative knock on the front door in a few minutes, and the boys jumped up to answer it. They came back into the den with Philip and Ryan. They both had been crying, and Philip sported an ugly bruise on his right cheek, just under his eye.

"Hey, guys," I said. "Sit down. Kyle, get Philip some ice."

"Yes, sir," Kyle said and bounded into the kitchen. He came back seconds later with a glass full of ice cubes and handed it to Philip.

"No, son. Put it in a plastic bag so he can use it on his face," I said.

"Oh. Right. Duh."

"Dumbass," Rick said.

"Dumbass," Kyle said in a mimicking voice to tease Rick. Whether they had intended it to be funny or not wasn't clear, but it had the desired effect. Everyone laughed, including Philip and Ryan.

"He did that on purpose to make us laugh, didn't he," I said.

"He sure did," Rick said, the pride evident in his voice.

Once Kyle was back in the room with the ice for Philip, he settled down on the floor next to Tim. He took Tim's hand in his.

"What happened, guys," Rick asked.

Philip started to speak, but Ryan interrupted him.

"I'll tell it." Philip nodded.

"This afternoon we were at Philip's house. We were sitting on the couch in their den, and we were sitting real close, like we are now. I had my hand on his leg. Like this." He demonstrated having his hand on the inside of Philip's thigh. "We weren't making out. We were just sitting there. We didn't know anybody was home, but his dad came into the den without us hearing him. We had the TV on pretty loud, I guess. Anyway, he saw us and got really mad."

"Did your dad hit you, Philip," I asked.

Philip shook his head "no."

"He didn't hit him, but he jerked him up off the couch and slammed him into the wall. He hit it so hard a picture fell down and the glass broke."

"Did he say anything," I asked.

"No, sir, but he started toward Philip like he was going to do something to him. I jumped off the couch and grabbed him from behind before he could hit him. He's not as big as I am, but he flung me off. Philip and I hauled ass."

"When did all this happen," I asked.

"A little while ago," Ryan said. "A half hour, an hour? I didn't know what time it was."

"What were you watching," Tim asked.

Kyle looked at him like he had just asked what color the Easter Bunny was.

"I don't remember. Do you," Ryan asked Philip. He shook his head "no."

"If you could remember, we could look it up and tell what time it happened, maybe," Tim said.

"That's a good idea, Babe, but, you know, I don't think that's all that important," Kyle said. He mouthed "dumbass" to Rick, and Rick had to suddenly leave the room to keep from laughing on the spot.

"Yeah, I guess you're right," Tim said. It was at times like that one that the year and a half difference in Tim's and Kyle's ages really showed.

Rick came back into the room, blowing his nose and wiping his eyes on a paper towel.

"Are you okay, Dad," Tim asked.

"I'm fine. Just a little allergy attack, that's all." Kyle was grinning.

"We don't know what to do," Ryan said.

"Well, you did the right thing by getting out of there," I said.

"And by coming here," Rick said. "Is your dad prejudiced against gay people?"

"I didn't think so," Philip said. "My mom's brother is gay, and my dad has always been really nice to him and his partner."

"I'll bet it was the shock," Kyle said.

"I'll bet that's exactly what it was," I said.

"How's the face, Philip," Rick asked.

"It's okay."

"Really? It's killing me," Rick said.

Oh, please, I thought. How corny is that? The boys, though, thought it was hilarious, and all four of them laughed.

Rick, as though he had read my mind, said, "See?"

"Turning tears into laughter," I said.

"Hey, that's a cool quote," Kyle said. "Who said that?"

"As far as I know, you did, dumbass," Rick said.

"I said that?"

"Yeah, but you don't get credit for it anymore since you don't remember saying it," he said.

"You say a lot of cool stuff like that, Babe," Tim said.

"Like what?"

"Let's talk about that another time, okay? Philip and Ryan, I think y'all need to call your parents and ask them if y'all can spend the night here," I said.

Ryan was fine with that, but Philip obviously didn't want to call home.

"I'll call for you, Philip," I said.

"Okay," he said, obviously relieved.

Ryan called home, and his mom said it was okay if he spent the night. Rick and I had met her at Tim's Eagle Court of Honor, and she had thanked us for being nice to Ryan and taking time with him. Nothing at all came up about homosexuality, but we knew she knew about us, and I got the distinct impression she knew about Ryan and Philip, too. She was a school psychologist with the school district, and she was a very, very impressive lady.

Philip dialed his number for me and handed me the phone. A woman answered.

"Mrs. Andrews? This is Kevin Foley. I'm one of Tim Murphy's guardians."

"Is Philip all right?"

"Yes, ma'am, he's fine," I said.

"My husband is a basket case right now, Kevin. He is so distraught over what happened."

I wasn't exactly sure how to interpret that.

"Would it be okay if Philip spent the night here tonight," I asked.

She didn't say anything for a few seconds. Then she said, "I hate to put you and Rick out. That's your partner's name, isn't it? Rick?"

"Yes, ma'am, but it's no trouble. He's spent the night here before."

"Of course. I know that. Kevin, my husband is feeling very, very bad about what happened tonight. I want you to know that that wasn't him. He's not like that at all."

"That's what Philip said," I said.

"Oh, thank God he knows that, Kevin. May I speak with him, please."

"Sure."

I handed the phone to Philip. It was a cordless, so he took it back to the boys' room for privacy.

"What did she say," Rick asked.

I recapped the conversation for all of them.

"Ry. Tim. Are y'all hungry? I am," Kyle said.

"What about us? I'm hungry," Rick said.

"Yeah, but you're always hungry," Kyle said.

"You better be careful, mister. I just might have to eat me a boy and spit out the bones," Rick said.

Kyle broke out into an outrageous grin, and his face got the look of a smiling Satan, minus the pointy ears.

"Stop it! Stop it! Stop it! I know what you're about to say, and you know I didn't mean it that way."

"I don't understand. Why would you spit out the bone? Isn't that the best part?"

"Get your ass in that kitchen and make us big bowls of ice cream right now, mister," Rick said.

Kyle was laughing so hard he looked like he was about to wet his pants.

He stood up to go to the kitchen. "Yes, sir." Pause until he got to the archway into the kitchen.

"Bone breath."

Rick hurled a small pillow from the sofa at him, but it hit the wall instead of its intended target. I was laughing so hard I could barely breathe. Tim and Ryan were grinning at the general merriment, but it was obvious they didn't really know what was going on.

"What's going on here," Ryan asked.

"It's pretty complicated, Ry," I said. Then, "Y'all go help your brother."

"Yes, sir," Ryan said, and he and Tim went to help Kyle. Two seconds later, we heard the boys laughing hard in the kitchen.

"You are too much," I said to Rick.

"Me? That was all him, not me."

"You said you knew what he was going to say. Did he say what you thought he would?"

"Word for word," Rick said. "And I knew he was going to say it, even though I told him not to. It's like we have ESP or something. It's scaring me."

"Why? You were obviously separated at birth," I said.

My Ricky grinned, and I knew he was greatly pleased by what I had said.

The boys brought out the ice cream just then, and the bowls were huge. Rick had twice as much as anybody else, though, and his had a whole banana sticking up out of it like an erect penis. When I looked at it more closely, I saw that there were two globes of ice cream on either side of it, and the globes were covered in coconut shreds. The banana had a little dab of whipped cream on the tip. The three boys were obviously excited about Rick's bowl of ice cream, and Tim was wiggling so hard I thought he was going to drop his. Kyle placed Rick's bowl of ice cream in front of him on the coffee

table.

Rick laughed, and he looked up at Kyle.

"You knew, didn't you," Kyle asked.

Rick nodded and laughed some more.

"I knew you did," Kyle said.

"Did you know this was how I was going to eat it," Rick asked. He leaned over and bit the banana off right above the ice cream.

"Yep," Kyle said, and he and Rick laughed.

We settled into our ice cream. We can't keep doing this every night, I thought. This has way too many calories. Then I thought, Yes, we can.

When everybody was about half finished, Philip rejoined us. He had a smile on his face, so I figured everything had gone well on the phone. The boys had made him a bowl of ice cream, too.

"Did it go okay," I asked.

"Yeah. Everything's fine. And my Dad's fine with us, Ry." Philip smiled at his boyfriend, and that was good.

"That ice cream is for you, Philip," I said. "I'm afraid it's a little melted, though," I said.

"Oh, that's okay. I like it when it's soft," he said.

"That ain't what Ryan told me," Kyle said in a flash.

"SHIT! I was going to say that, but I had a mouthful," Rick said.

"A mouth full of what," Kyle asked.

That line broke everybody but Philip up. He hadn't been in on everything that had led up to that, but he laughed anyway because we did.

Rick nodded at Kyle, and Kyle said, "I know."

"You guys are the best," Ryan said.

"Not everyone," Kyle said.

"You fucker! You beat me again," Rick said. He hurled another pillow at Kyle, and that one got him in the chest. Kyle laughed his ass off.

"Can you believe them," Rick said when we were in bed. He was splayed up against me, and he had his left leg between my legs. His left arm was over my torso.

"No. They're so cute. Especially Kyle."

"Babe, I think you've been trying to tell me this, but I realized tonight, he really is my child."

"Oh, absolutely. Tim's mine, I think, but he might just be more ours as a couple."

"Whose is Justin," he asked.

"Kyle's. And yours," I said. "In that order." He chuckled.

"Can you believe how cute they all were together tonight? How happy and excited Tim and Kyle were for Justin?"

"Our family's coming together," I said. "And it makes me so happy."

"Me, too." Pause. "Let's go to sleep now, okay?"

Rick was asleep in about thirty seconds, but I had too much on my mind to go to sleep that quickly. I thought about Philip and what he had been through that night. I thought about Rick and Kyle, and the show they put on. For good or bad, for better or worse, Kyle really was Rick, and Rick really was Kyle. Their faces didn't look alike, but their coloring did, and their bodies looked a lot alike. I said a prayer to thank God that I had found Rick and that Tim had found Kyle. Unless I was very wrong, I thought they would be together for the rest of their lives, and that made me happy.

I heard the front door open, and I knew it was Justin.

God, what a transformation in a week, I thought. He had come into our lives just a week ago the

previous Wednesday, tough, nasty, and naked. That night he had kissed his two brothers to thank them for helping him. Unbelievable.

I got out of bed slowly and carefully to not wake Rick, but I knew a freight train going through our room wouldn't have roused him when he was that deep in sleep. I put on my briefs and went out into the den. My pretense was going to be that I was getting a glass of water, if I needed an excuse.

"Hey, Kev," he said when I stepped into the room.

"Hey, buddy. Are you just getting home," I asked.

"Yeah. Jason has to be home by one o'clock."

"Did you have fun tonight," I asked.

"Ohhhh, man. Ohhhh, man," he said.

I grinned.

"This is a whole new world to me, you know? I've never known anybody like you and Rick and Kyle and Tim and Jason before, you know?"

"Are you happy here, Jus," I asked.

"You have to ask that question? You don't know?"

"Yeah, I do know, and it makes me happy, too."

Justin and I sat down and smoked cigarettes together. He told me about where they ate, about the movie they saw, and about the place they went to shoot pool after the movie. He told me they kissed that afternoon in the pool and again that night. There was a boy, sitting right before me, who had been raped by untold numbers of men and who was excited about his first kiss with another boy. My heart didn't know which way to go: down for what had happened to him in the past, or up for what was happening to him in the present.

"You know what else," Jus asked.

"No. What?"

"Jay asked me if we could be boyfriends."

"Wow. That was fast. What did you say," I asked.

"I said hell yeah. He was worried about it being too fast, too, but he's the one who brought it up. He likes me, and I really like him."

"I'm happy for you, Jus," I said. "Really happy for you."

We were quiet for a few moments.

"Whose car is that in the driveway," he asked.

"I think it's probably Ryan's. He and his boyfriend Philip are spending the night here. They're friends of Tim and Kyle."

"I figured they had friends," he said. "Guys that nice and that cute have friends."

"You like them, don't you," I asked.

"I think it's more than like. I think I love them. And I think I love you and Rick, too."

"You asked us last night if we would love you sometime in the future. Jus, I know Tim and Kyle love you now, and I know Rick and I do, too. We love you, man."

We smiled at each other, and tears of happiness were streaming down our faces. Without another word, we went to bed.

Chapter 8

(Justin's Perspective)

When he came home covered with blood, I knew the shit was fixin' to hit the fan. He had come home bloody before, but he had always had cuts and bruises on him from some fight he had been in. That night there was just blood.

"What the fuck happened to you," I said.

"None of your fucking business," he said. "Clean me up."

"What the fuck do you want me to do," I asked.

"Get a pan of warm water and some soap, asshole, and clean me up. Wash this blood off me."

"Whose is it," I asked.

"This fucking guy got in my FACE. He ain't gonna do that no more, to me or nobody else, that's for damn fucking sure. Get your ass in gear, boy."

"What'd you do, kill him," I asked.

"He needed killing. Damn undercover cop."

"You want to take this fucking thing off me so I can fucking walk," I asked. He had my feet shackled together, as he usually did when he went out, and I was naked.

He unlocked the handcuffs that were around my ankles. He had had that shackle made up by some friend of his a couple of years before, and I hated when I had to wear it. I wasn't going to run nowhere. I didn't have nowhere to run to, and he knew it. I spent most of my life naked, so that didn't bother me, but that shackle did. I had figured out how to walk in it, so at least I could get around the trailer to use the bathroom and such. The first few times he put me in it, I had shit and pissed myself right there on the floor 'cause I couldn't get around.

"Bring that bottle of bourbon back with you too, you hear?"

I didn't answer him. I ran some hot water in a cook pot, and I got a bar of soap and a rag. He thought I was his fucking slave, having to bathe him, and all. It wasn't bad enough he had turned my ass out to trick for him when I turned thirteen. He had to treat me like a slave, too.

"Take my clothes off me and throw them away," he said. I did as he said, and I got full view of his fat, hairy body. He was a little on the short side, around five-six, and he must have weighed 225 pounds. Everything about him was gut, and he was so fat that his navel wasn't an innie or an outie anymore. It was pure flat. It had some nasty black shit in it, too, from not washing good. He really smelled bad when I took his clothes off. He wasn't wearing no underwear, and I saw these nasty dark stains on the inside seat of his jeans. We hadn't washed clothes in a good six weeks, and he had worn those same jeans every day. I looked at the outside seat, too, and some of the shit stains had bled through. He might have kept me naked, but at least I was clean, most of the time.

"Don't let your queer ass get your dick hard when you're looking at me and touching me, you hear, motherfucker," he said.

I didn't say nothing. He was so fat, all you could see was a piece of the head of his dick under that apron of blubber he wore around his middle. He worked my ass out every day, so I was pretty muscular. He was the absolute opposite of that, though. I thought his body was disgusting, and I couldn't have gotten hard looking at him if my life had depended on it.

I washed the blood off him like he told me to do. Most of it had already dried, and it was like a stain on his skin. He had three or four ugly-ass tattoos that had faded into smears of dark blue ink so that you couldn't make out the design anymore, and that's what the blood on him reminded me of.

When I had finished washing him, he told me to go out to the car and get us each a fresh set of clothes. Our clothes really weren't fresh because they hadn't been washed in a long time, but at least they were different from the ones that had blood on them. I went outside buck naked to get the clothes out of the trunk. I had done that a bunch of times, so it didn't bother me, but a couple of kids who were playing in the street saw me and laughed at me.

We left for Florida as soon as we were dressed. It was a pretty long trip, and he drove for a few hours while I just looked out of the window. When we stopped for gas, he bought me a coke and a pack of cigarettes. I was grateful for that 'cause I hadn't had a smoke since the day before, and I was wanting one bad. He made me drive the rest of the way to Florida. I didn't have a license, but I had been driving

him around since I was thirteen, and I drove good.

He bought me some lunch around two o'clock that afternoon, but we got out of the place without paying for it. We checked into a motel on the beach. I wanted to go down and walk around and look at the ocean. I hadn't ever seen it before, and I figured that might be my only chance to see it. He said "no," though, and he made me get naked and into my shackle. He left without telling me when he'd be back. I figured it was going out to score tricks for me.

He didn't come back that night or the next day or the day after that one. By what I figured was Wednesday, I was so hungry I was starting to get lightheaded. I took a chance and called the desk. I asked the man if he would order me some food. I told him I wanted some of that New Orleans-style fried chicken. He said he had some boys he'd send for it after I told him I couldn't walk.

These two beauties came in with that big ole box of chicken. I ate it fast 'cause I was so hungry. I could tell they didn't feel right being there with me naked and all. They asked me for the money I owed them for the food, but I didn't have a dime. I offered them blowjobs, but they refused. That had never happened to me before, and I was a little confused. I figured them for Boy Scouts or something, earning merit badges by being nice to me. One boy smoked, though, and he gave me his pack of cigarettes. They were Marlboro Reds in the box, just the kind I liked, and it only had like three missing from it.

They called some friend of theirs cause they didn't know what to do. The two boys were really cute, and the friend was cute, too. Then the friend called a friend of his to bring a hacksaw and cut me aloose, and he looked like this fucking god or something. I was horny as hell, and I tried putting moves on all four of them. I had learned that a straight boy liked to have his cock sucked by me just as much as a gay boy did, but those guys didn't want it.

Anyway, they cut me aloose and then this one guy, Kevin, took me to his house. When I asked him what his wife would say, he said he was married, or something, to Rick, the real hot one. That freaked me out, but I tried to stay cool. At their house, Kevin put me in this humongous tub with bubbles. I hadn't ever done anything like that before, but I had fun taking a bath. He stayed in there and talked to me for a while, but he got really mad when I told him about guys taking pictures and movies of me getting fucked and sucking cock to put on their computers.

Those two hot boys spent the night, but before they did, we went swimming at Kyle's mansion. That boy must have really been rich, that's all I've got to say. We swam naked. I got hard as a rock watching them bounce up and down on the diving board with their dicks hitting their stomachs, but I stayed underwater, so nobody noticed.

Those two boys were as big as me, but that one boy, Tim, seemed like he was younger. He didn't tell me how old he was, but I thought I could tell he wasn't too up on sex and all. That Kyle, though, was a different story. That boy oozed sex out of him. Damn, his face was beautiful, and his body was something else. I thought he was probably a football player, just like that guy Rick, but it later turned out they both liked to run. I didn't see any point in running unless somebody was chasing me, but to each his own, I thought.

To make a kind of long story short, they sort of adopted me, Rick and Kevin I mean. I wasn't real sure how Tim and Kyle fit in to the picture, because they both had parents, but after a few days I really started liking those boys. I couldn't figure out why they were being nice to me, but they were. I asked Kevin why he was, but he never really answered me. He asked me if any teacher had been nice to me. I didn't know that he wasn't a teacher.

I almost got kicked out on the first Sunday I was there. I now know that Sunday morning is Kevin and Rick's special time together, but I didn't know that then. I got up to piss that first Sunday, and I heard noise coming from their bedroom. It sounded like fucking going on, so I went down this little hall to listen at the door. They were fucking, and it made me hard just hearing it. I started jacking my cock, thinking what else do you do, when all of a sudden Tim, and then Kyle, caught me. They were both mad as hell,

and Kyle slammed me into the wall when I rubbed his cock. He was hard, and I knew by then he and Tim were gay, so I figured he'd like that. Well, sir, he didn't like it one damn bit. I figured I was in for an ass kicking, so I went ahead and tossed myself off right then. Tim freaked out.

They both barged into my room, and I was ready to take my beating. I didn't know why I was going to get a beating, really, but I was ready to take it. Kyle huffed and puffed around a little bit, calling me names and such, but he never did hit me. When I finally realized I had done wrong, at least the way they saw it, I cried. All of a sudden, Kyle became like a different person. He was really nice to me. I just knew Kevin and Rick were going to kick me out, and probably without the nice new clothes they had bought me, but I knew I had it coming. I always knew you couldn't make chicken salad out of chicken shit, and that's exactly what I was. Chicken shit. Kyle told me I had to tell Kevin and Rick I was sorry and that I wouldn't do it again. By then I was ready to do it. I didn't want to get bounced out onto the street, and I would have done anything to keep that from happening.

Kyle did a really nice thing, though. He told Tim to hold my hand and he would hold the other one when I told the guys I was sorry. They did that, and it all worked out good. They didn't kick me out.

Over the next few days, I fell in love with those boys, all four of them. Kevin and Rick were men, sort of, but they weren't all that much older than me. In that next week, I think I figured out what love was. They called me by my name all the time, and they even called me Jus. Kevin asked me if I minded that. Shit. That was the best thing anybody had ever called me. I thought it was great. Kyle got me a real job right away, and I was making money that I didn't have to turn over to nobody. I thought about paying for my room and board, which is what Buel, the guy who ran my ass for tricks, said I was paying him when he took the money I made. But I knew the state was paying for me to be there, and I also knew those guys didn't need the money. Hell, they were feeding and putting up Tim and Kyle for free.

The best thing Tim and Kyle did for me, though, was introduce me to Jason. Oh, what a guy he was. He was kind of preppy like them, but he was also just as down-home and country as I was. He had relatives in my part of Alabama, and I even knew some of his kinfolk. Jason was a real good looking boy. He was almost exactly the same size as Kyle, Tim, and me, and he had the nicest smile I think I had ever seen. The day I met him was probably the happiest day of my life.

We were in the pool at Kyle's house after the four of us had eaten lunch at a pizza place. They had gone inside to look at something. Jason and I were playing around in the water. He could swim real good, but I could just do the dog paddle and barely make it across the pool. He grabbed me, all of a sudden, and he kissed me. That was the first time anybody had kissed me in my life, and he did it on my lips. I pulled back after a few seconds.

"Open your mouth so I can give you some tongue," he said.

I did what he said, and, whoa, that was so good. We did it some more, and I got brave and stuck my tongue into his mouth, too. That felt really good, and I started getting hard. I knew he felt it 'cause he was standing right up on me.

"Have you done this before," he asked.

I shook my head "no."

"I didn't think so," he said. "Just let me show you what to do, okay?"

"Okay," I said.

He was already hard, too, and he started rubbing his cock against me. Then he started rubbing in on my cock, and we kissed again. That was a long one, and we played with each other's tongues in our mouths. I was loving what we were doing to one another. We both rubbed our cocks together, and it was like some kind of spark to me, or something.

He reached down with his mouth and got my right tit. Whoa! I thought. That was fucking great. He kept it up a while, and then we kissed mouth to mouth some more. We were rubbing our cocks together the whole time. I was so hard I didn't know what was going to happen. And then it did happen.

I stiffened up and shot my load. He did the same thing a second behind me. I looked down into the water, and I saw the plumes of our cum shoot out our cocks. The stuff sort of clumped together, like oil does in water. I had jacked off all my life, but I had never done it like that with somebody else. I was sort of weak in the knees.

We didn't stay in that pool too long after that. We got out and he said he had to go home. He asked me to go out with him that night, and I said "hell yes" before he could change his mind. I had gotten paid for my first week's work, so I had some money to spend.

Kyle and Tim came out the house after Jason left, and I told them I had a date that night with Jason. They both got real excited for me, and I knew right then they liked me. We were all three kissing each other and carrying on. They jumped up on me, and we danced around a little until they got too heavy for me to hold anymore. We all fell down in the grass. I cried for the second time since I had met those boys, but that time I cried because I was happy. They cried, too. I finally got me some friends, I thought. These boys really care about me.

I had made a pure fool of myself over my new furniture and my new room the night before. Kyle got sort of pissed at me, but Tim put up with me that night. After Tim and I had looked at my room for the last of a bunch of times, Kevin wanted to talk about sex. I thought I knew all about sex, but they taught me a lot of new stuff that night. I was hard as a rock the whole time we were talking, and I figured Tim and Kyle must be, too. Kevin told us about something called docking. I can't do it cause my skin's been cut off, but I knew Tim and Kyle could do it.

Kyle was really cute. He said they were tired and had to get to sleep. He said they had worked outside in the hot sun all day and were drained. Nobody said nothing about them wanting to get after that docking, but everybody knew that's what ole Kyle was wanting. I couldn't blame him, of course. Tim was such a cute guy, and I was so damn horny. I saw they were both hard when they stood up to go to bed. They did something I won't ever forget, though. They both said they loved me when they told Kevin and Rick they loved them.

I wanted to be like Tim and Kyle in the worse way. I knew I didn't have no manners, and they had good manners. They weren't fruity about it, though. It was just natural with them. I told Kevin and Rick that, and I told them I could tell they loved Tim and Kyle. I wanted them to love me like that, too, and I told them so. I didn't really know what was going on, but it looked to me like both of them stud horses were fixin' to bust out crying. We made us some big ole bowls of ice cream before we went to bed.

Laying in bed that night, I could hear Tim and Kyle giggling. I knew they were doing sex, and I was still horny from before. I blew two big loads that night thinking about them and what they were probably doing.

The next day was when they fixed me up with Jason. That night they helped me get ready for my date. They helped me pick out clothes, and Kyle even washed my new jeans to make them fit tighter on me. Kyle said he knew what to do to make my dick look bigger, so I wanted him to do it.

He made me get naked, of course, so he could work on my cock and balls.

"If I touch it, don't get mad at me, okay, Jus," Kyle said.

"Okay," I said. What I wanted to say was, "You can touch it any damn time you want to, buddy," but I didn't. They really didn't like for me to say stuff like that. Kevin had told me he and Rick didn't fuck with nobody but each other, and I guessed Kyle and Tim were that way, too.

Ole Kyle took a white shoestring out of his pocket. He wrapped it around my balls and the base of my cock a few times, and then he tied it in a bow knot like you use on shoes. I figured I'd get hard with him fooling around down there, but he did it so fast I didn't have time to.

"Look at it in the mirror," Kyle said. When I did, I could tell that the whole package was standing out a lot more than usual.

"Okay, now put your briefs on," he said. I did, and I had me a right substantial bulge.

"Now your jeans," he said again.

I put my jeans on. They were a good bit tighter than they were when I bought them, and they were still a little warm from the dryer. It really felt good for them to fit so snug. When I checked myself out in the mirror again, I had me a nice little pouch in front. I smiled.

"That looks hot," Tim said. "I want to do that, too."

"I don't want everybody staring at your crotch," Kyle said to him. "This belongs to me."

When he said that, Kyle cupped Tim's cock and balls through his shorts. I hadn't ever seen them do anything like that, and it surprised the hell out of me.

"I didn't think y'all did stuff like that in front of strangers," I said.

"We don't," Tim said, "but a brother ain't a stranger, now, is he?"

Kyle had turned him loose, and they were both just grinning at me.

"You guys really do think of me as your brother, don't you," I asked.

"Of course we do. You are our brother," Kyle said. "And we love you, too."

That just about stopped me cold. I was hoping they'd get to love me someday, but I just wasn't expecting them to say that so fast. I felt tears come up to my eyes.

"Come here, you stud," Kyle said. He grabbed me in a big hug, and Tim got a piece of me, too. We stood there for a few minutes, and I didn't know what to do. I shivered a little bit 'cause I was so excited. Not sex excited; excited with love.

We finally busted that up, and I finished getting dressed. They put some shit in my hair and ran their fingers through it to make it look like it wasn't combed. My hair was pretty short, but it stood up all over the place like theirs did.

We went out into the den where Kevin and Rick were, and they both said how good I looked. Kevin said a box of my stuff had come that day, and I got it to get my boots. Everybody said how nice they were, and I wore them that night.

I had fun on my date that night, and I really liked Jason. He was funny as hell, and he thought the stuff I said was funny, too. We ate a pretty good supper, and then we went to a movie. I let him hold my hand in the movie, but I noticed he kept our hands low so nobody would see us. After the movie we went to a pool place, and he taught me how to shoot pool. A couple of times he showed me how to stand and how to hold the cue stick, and he sort of spread his body over my back to do it. That was pretty powerful, and I started boning up a little. He did, too, though, so I knew it was okay if I did.

We sat in the car talking for a good while after we got to my house. Then we started kissing. I figured the next step would be to get naked and get in the back seat, but we didn't do that.

"I had a great time tonight," he said. "Did you?"

"I had the best time, Jason," I said.

"A lot of people just call me Jay, Jus."

"Okay, Jay," I said. I kissed him a little after I said that.

"Will you promise not to laugh at me if I tell you something," I asked.

"Sure. What?"

"This was the first date I ever had, and this afternoon was the first time I ever kissed somebody," I said.

His eyes got wide. "Really," he asked.

"Yep."

"Jus, that is so cool, man. I was the first. Did you ever do that stuff we did in the water before," he asked me.

"Nope. That was the first time, too," I said.

"Did you like it? Did I go too fast," he asked. It sounded like maybe he was having second

thoughts or something.

"Yeah, I liked it, and, no, you didn't go to fast," I said. "Can we do that again sometime? I'm hard right now."

"Yeah, we can do it again. I'm hard, too, but we can't do it out here. Besides, I'm already almost late."

I got a little disappointed, but I didn't say nothing.

He took my hand in his hand, and he just looked at me. He was kind of serious, and I was hoping he wasn't going to tell me to take a hike.

"Jus, I really like you a lot," he said.

"I like you a lot, too, Jay," I said.

"Can we be boyfriends," he asked.

I heard what he said, but I just wasn't ready for that. I wanted to be his boyfriend bad, but I didn't expect him just to come out and say it. I stuttered a little bit.

"What's wrong? Too fast," he asked. He sounded worried.

"No, man. Nothing's wrong. Everything's right. Better than right. Perfect. Yes, we can be boyfriends. Yes. Yes. Yes."

He sort of giggled a little bit.

"You're cute," he said.

"So are you," I said.

"I hate to do this, but I really do have to go. Gimme another kiss for the road, boyfriend," he said.

We kissed for a few minutes, and we did tongue stuff. Then I got out and went inside. There was a car in the driveway that I didn't recognize, so I figured somebody had company. Kevin came out headed for the kitchen, and he and I talked for a little while. He told me that he and Rick loved me, and he said he knew Tim and Kyle did, too.

So many happy things happened to me that day that I wished I could have made that day my birthday. It was like a new person had been born, and that new person was me.

My brothers gave me a birthday party on my birthday. It was the Fourth of July. It was a holiday for everybody, but us kids had to work at the motel. I got some great presents, and Tim and Kyle even gave me a computer. It was all guys at the party, and we swam naked in Kyle's pool. It was great.

The next weekend something bad happened, though. On Saturday night we had decided we were all going to go out on a date together. It was me and Jay, Kevin and Rick, and Tim and Kyle. Our friends Philip and Ryan were going to go, too, but some of Philip's cousins or somebody popped in at the last minute. They couldn't go.

We started out by going to a movie. It was pretty good, and each couple held hands. After the movie, we went to this place to eat that was like a restaurant and bar combination, and they had pool tables there, too. Jay had been teaching me how to shoot pool, and I was getting pretty good at it. I didn't win any games, yet, but at least I sunk some of the balls when it was my turn to shoot.

Kevin and Rick shot a few games with us, but then some friends of theirs came in so they quit. The four boys kept playing. It was really better to play with just four, anyway. Just before I took a shot, this drunk guy came up to the table and dropped a twenty on it right in front of me.

"Let's go," he said.

I was surprised as hell. I looked at him good, and I knew who it was. It was a guy I had sucked off five or six times back in Alabama.

"Pick up your money. I ain't going with you," I said.

"Since when don't you like to suck my cock, you little faggot," he said.

He was really drunk, and he smelled bad.

"I don't do that," I said. I felt the skin on my face burn, I was so embarrassed. Tim and Kyle and Jay were looking at what was going on. Tim and Kyle probably figured out what was going on, but Jay was totally puzzled.

"Bullshit you don't do that, cocksucker," he said. Then he looked at the other boys and said, "Do you boys know what a good cocksucker y'all got here?" Then he grabbed me by the arm and tried to pull me away with him. "Come on, boy. Don't waste my time," he said. I jerked my arm away from him.

Just then ole Kyle said, "Kevin, Rick. We need you." Then Kyle grabbed his cue stick like it was a baseball bat and said to the dude, "If you touch my brother again, I'll kill you."

"Yeah? You and what army, piss ant," the guy said.

All of a sudden Rick, Kevin, and their two friends were right there.

"We ain't an army, but we can handle your ass, cocksucker," Rick said. "Now get out of here," he said.

The guy started to grab his money off the table, but Rick said, "Leave it," and he did. Rick picked up the bill, folded it, and stuffed it into my shirt pocket. "Let's go, guys," he said to us.

I had ridden with Jay, so I got into his car. He was quiet till we got out of the parking lot, and I didn't say nothing, either. Then he said, in a quiet voice that I didn't like the sound of,

"What was that all about?"

"I don't know. Just some drunk," I said, trying to laugh a little to make him think it hadn't bothered me. "Ole Kyle was fixin' to whip some ass, though, wasn't he?"

"I think he knew you, man," Jay said.

"Naw. How would he know me," I asked. I really got nervous when he said that.

"How'd he know you were gay, then? Huh? None of us around that table did or said anything to make people think we're gay. How'd he know that about you?"

"How should I know? Man, I don't like the way you're acting, Jay," I said.

He didn't say anything for a few minutes. He lit up a cigarette, and just kept driving. I was nervous as hell, and I lit up, too.

"I told my grandma you were my best friend. She didn't know you by name, and she said she knows everybody around there. Then I told her what you looked like."

I didn't say nothing when he said that.

"Do you know what she said," he asked.

"No."

"She said, 'Be careful of him. I know who you're talking about, and just be careful.'"

I got so scared and nervous when he said that I could barely get my cigarette between my lips.

"Why would she say that about you, Jus?"

We turned into our driveway just then.

"You want to come in," I asked. It was only a little after ten, and he had plenty of time before he had to get home.

"Not tonight." He said it so cold I thought I was going to puke.

I leaned over to kiss him goodnight, and he turned his face away.

When I looked up, Kevin was standing on his side of the car.

"Jay, would you come in for a little while. I think we need to talk."

I could tell Jason really didn't want to go inside, but he started getting out of the car. He walked to the front of it, and I met him there. I put out my hand to take his, and he wouldn't let me touch him. I almost started to cry, but the front door opened and my two brothers were there, smiling at me.

We all went inside. Kevin and Rick were sitting on the couch, like always, and the four of us kids got on the floor, like we always did.

"What happened tonight should never have happened," Kevin said.

"What did happen tonight," Jay asked. He sounded like he was pissed off, like he had in the car.

"You saw as well as we did," Kyle said.

"Yeah, I did see, Kyle," Jay said. "And that guy knew Jus."

"Did you know him, Justin," Kevin asked. He said it real gentle, but I wished he wouldn't make me answer him.

I didn't say nothing. Then Jay said,

"Answer him. Did you know him?"

I nodded and held my head down.

"How the hell did you know him," Jay said, demanded like.

"I knew him from back there," I said. I said it real low cause I was so ashamed.

"Back there? Where? Alabama," Jay asked.

I nodded again.

"How'd you know that creep," Jay asked in that same demanding voice.

"Jason, have you and Jus talked about why he lives here with us," Rick asked. I was glad he was finally getting involved.

"No, sir. Not really. I've wondered about it, though. I tried to bring it up a few times, but Jus would always change the subject."

"Justin, would you come sit up here by me, please," Rick asked. He said it so nice.

I sat next to him, and he took my hand in his, not like a boyfriend but like Kyle and Tim had done that first Sunday when I had fucked up so bad.

"Son, you know we love you, right," Rick asked me.

I nodded.

"And you know none of us would ever do anything to hurt you, right?"

I nodded again.

"This might hurt a little bit, Jus, but I think your friend has a right to know. If what happened tonight had never happened, you wouldn't have had to tell him if you didn't want to. But he's involved now, too."

"I know," I whimpered out.

"Jay, Justin lives with us because he's our foster little brother," Rick said. "He's in foster care, and Kevin and I have custody of him."

Nobody said anything, but Jay got this real confused look on his face.

"Jay, our little brother was severely abused. We found him in a motel room. He had shackles around his feet so he couldn't walk, and he was naked. His mother's boyfriend had made a slave out of him after she died. A sex slave. He let men rape Justin, and he forced Justin to give oral sex to them, too, for money. That man will go to trial this fall for murdering a policeman in a drug deal, and, after that trial, he'll be tried again for aggravated child abuse."

It was dead still in that room. I leaned over and put my face in my hands. I was so totally ashamed and embarrassed I didn't want Jason to see me. Rick put his hand on my back and started rubbing it. I wanted to die, but feeling Rick do that made me know I was safe, at least.

"It started when Justin was thirteen, and it didn't stop until we found him. Justin likes you very, very much, Jay, and so do we. I don't know what you guys have done sexually, and I don't want to know, but all of us have tried to show Jus by our love for him that he's a good person, somebody who is loveable."

"He hasn't wanted to do as much sexually as I have," Jay said. "And I've respected that."

"Good for you, son," Rick said. "A kid has to have it all right now, but a man can wait, Jay, until his partner wants it as bad as he does. Congratulations on being a man."

"This is so confusing to me, Rick," Jason said. "I need to go home."

He stood up, and Kyle was right behind him. Kyle walked him to the door, and then he went outside with him. Jay liked Tim and Kyle a lot, and I knew my brother would do what he could to help Jay understand.

Nobody said nothing while Kyle was outside. Finally, we heard Jay's car start up, and Kyle came back inside. He walked over to Tim and reached out his hand to help him up off the floor.

"Whoa. Not so fast, mister," Rick said.

Kyle turned around with a huge grin on his face.

"You sit you ass right down there and tell us every word he said," Rick said. His voice was sharp, but I knew Rick wasn't pissed off at Kyle. Those two had something special between them, almost like they could read each other's minds.

"Were you going to just go to bed and leave us here," Kevin asked.

"He's playing a game with my head, Babe, and I knew it," Rick said.

"Jesus, you two," Kevin said.

Rick and Kyle both grinned like monkeys.

"Everything's going to be okay," Kyle said. "He cried. He cried a lot, and he cried hard. He likes you a lot, Bubba. He kept saying over and over again, 'Those bastards! Those bastards!'"

That made me feel so much better, that I started crying and laughing at the same time.

"He was overwhelmed tonight, Jus," Kyle said.

"I know. God, I hate that motherfucker," I said.

"We all hate him, Bubba," Tim said. "Did you guys see what Kyle was going to do to that guy tonight?" Tim had the biggest look of pride on his face.

"Shut up," Kyle said.

"No, don't shut up, Tim," Rick said. "Say what you want to say."

"It's just that Kyle was going to kill that guy if he messed with Jus, and I was going to help him," Tim said.

"Were you really going to kill him," Kevin asked.

"Naw. Just cripple him," Kyle said. "And then shove that cue stick up his ass. That's all."

Everybody laughed at the way he said that.

Then Rick got serious. "You boys are all well built, and you're going to get stronger if y'all keep working out everyday like y'all have been doing. We want you to avoid a fight if you possibly can because nobody ever really wins a fist fight. Both guys lose. Both guys get beat up, just one more than the other. But y'all have to stand up for each other, you hear me? Y'all get each other's backs, just like Kyle did tonight. And if Kevin and I are around, we'll get your backs, too."

Nobody said anything for a little while after Rick said that. Then Kyle said,

"Can we have ice cream?"

"Yeahhhhhh," Rick said. "Ice cream!"

We made big-ass bowls of ice cream, with fruit and nuts and cherries and coconut and whipped cream and all of that, and we ate 'em in the den. Nobody talked while we ate, but I felt so happy to be part of those guys. Then the phone rang, and Tim answered it.

"It's for you," he said, handing me the phone. "Jay," he mouthed. I took the phone and went into my room to talk.

"I'm sorry I acted the way I did tonight, Jus," he said, as soon as I said hello.

"That's okay. It was pretty scary for me, though," I said.

"I know it was, and it was scary for me, too. I can't stay on the phone 'cause I'm supposed to be in bed, and my mother has the sharpest ears of any human being there is, but I wanted you to know something before you went to bed."

I got a little nervous when he said that. "What," I asked.

"I love you."

It was like somebody had shot me with a stun gun.

"Are you there," he asked, when I didn't say nothing.

"Yeah. Just a little bit weak, you know?"

"Are you okay with that," he asked.

"Yeah. Oh, God, yeah. I love you, too. I hadn't loved anybody before I came here, but I love you."

"I wish I could kiss you right now. With lots of tongue and rubbing against you," he said.

"Me, too," I said. I knew I wasn't making good sense, but I was still kinda stunned.

"Tomorrow afternoon at your house, okay? Can we do that," he asked.

"Yeah. I'll get Tim and Kyle to make sure nobody but us is here. Oh, man, I can't wait."

"Me, either. I love you," he said again.

"I love you," I said.

"I love you more," he said, but I've got to go. Bye."

"I love you more. Bye." We hung up.

I took the phone back out to the den. Tim and Kyle were gone to bed, I guessed, but Kevin and Rick were still up.

"Well," Rick said when I went in there.

"He said he loves me," I said.

"What did you say," Kevin asked.

"I said I love him too."

The three of us hugged, and then we all went to bed.

Chapter 9

We celebrated Justin's birthday on the Fourth of July with a pool party at the Goodsons' house. The boys had to work that day, but that wasn't a problem because the party didn't start until six. We debated going downtown for the fireworks display, but we decided that we could probably see them just as well from Kyle's back yard.

Jason and Justin were still dating, and Jason gave him two very nice shirts for his birthday. Philip and Ryan gave him a baseball cap that he put on immediately. Mont and Terry, Sam and Fred, and Kyle's brother, Clay, and Clay's roommate, Jeff, didn't have gifts, as instructed, since they really didn't know Justin. We had thought about inviting Tyrone and his wife, but the boys nixed that idea when they realized they'd have to wear bathing suits to swim if a lady was going to be there. Rick and I gave Justin \$200 with strict instructions that he was to spend it on clothes or whatever else he wanted but that he was to buy something with it, not spend it as pocket money. He was pretty overwhelmed by that gesture, and he expressed his appreciation appropriately.

Justin's best gift came from his brothers, though. During the weekend after Justin started dating Jason, Tim and Kyle were fooling around with Tim's computer, which had remained at our house even after George had come home. They tried to interest Jus in learning some of the skills they had, but he didn't appear very interested.

Later, when Justin was out, Tim and Kyle talked to me about it.

"I can't believe he's never used a computer," Tim said. "How does he check his e-mail?"

"He doesn't get any e-mail, Babe," Kyle said. "You have to use a computer to even have an e-mail account."

"Oh, yeah. I didn't think of that," Tim said.

Kyle never put Tim down or teased him in a hurtful way, but every now and then he would do what

he did just then: roll his eyes. I had actually thought Tim was joking when he asked how Justin checked his e-mail, and I thought it was pretty funny. When I saw what Kyle did and realized that Tim had been perfectly serious with the question, I could barely keep from laughing out loud.

"He's going to need to know stuff for school," Kyle said.

"I know. Maybe we should get him a computer for his birthday," Tim said. "What do you think about that, Kev?"

"I think that's too much money for y'all to spend," I said.

"Why," Kyle asked. "We have lots of money. You haven't spent any of yours, have you," he asked Tim.

"Not really. Just for lunch and movies and stuff like that," Tim said.

"I haven't either. We have lots of money," Kyle reiterated.

"Exactly how much do y'all make, anyway," I asked.

"Most weeks we make \$600," Kyle said, "if we work the full sixty hours. We don't get that much, though, because we have to pay tax."

"Does Justin make that much, too," I asked. I knew Gene Goodson paid them well because of who they were, but I had no idea they made that much.

"Yes, sir," Kyle said.

"What does he do with it," I asked.

"He doesn't buy drugs, if that's what you're worried about," Tim said.

"Oh, no, sir," Kyle affirmed with great seriousness.

They were both quick to defend their brother, and I loved it.

"Well what does he do with it," I asked again.

The boys looked at one another, and I wondered if I had intruded into some fraternal pact of secrecy.

"He didn't say we couldn't tell," Tim said.

"Okay," Kyle said. "He's saving money to buy a car."

"How much does he have saved, do you know," I asked.

"He has about two thousand dollars," Kyle said.

"My God," I said. "That's a lot."

"I know he pays for Jason sometimes, but usually they just pay for themselves," Kyle said. "That's all he spends money on, though."

"So what do you think about buying him a computer for his birthday," Tim asked me again.

"I'm pretty sure my dad could get one cheap through the business. That's how he got mine. We only paid half price for it."

The rich get richer, I thought.

"Let's wait and see what Rick says," I replied.

"What I say about what?" Rick came into the room in time to hear my last remark.

"We want to buy Justin a computer for his birthday," Tim said.

"Have you got the money," Rick asked.

"Yes, sir," Kyle said.

"He's going to need one, don't you think," Rick asked me.

"Having a computer isn't the issue. I know he needs one. I'm just a little concerned about how much of their money it'll take to buy one," I said.

"If they're willing to, though, why not?"

"Good point," I said. "So I guess it's okay, guys."

"Cool," Kyle said. He wasted no time in getting his dad on the phone. From what we heard of the conversation, his father was more than willing to help out through the business.

"He'll order it tomorrow, and we'll have it by Tuesday," Kyle said.

"Did he say how much it would be," I asked.

"He said \$460, but he thought he could get them to throw in Microsoft Office for that amount. He buys a lot of computers, and they always give him extra stuff."

"Shit, I might get him to order one for me, at that price," Rick said.

"Oh? And what would you do with it," I asked.

Rick's computer skills were as good as, or better than, mine, but he practically had to be hogtied to even check his e-mail. We had good friends out west who wrote to us regularly. He often stood over my shoulder to read their letters, but he rarely checked his own account. I checked it occasionally, and one time he had 23 messages.

"Use it to not check my e-mail," he said with a straight face, and I laughed.

Justin was very excited when he opened their gift at his party. He got tears in his eyes, and he kissed each of his brothers fondly on the cheek. The assembled friends applauded.

Kyle and Tim grilled steaks for everybody, and they served both potato salad and green salad that they had bought at a deli. We did the traditional birthday cake and ice cream thing, too. The cake had red, white, and blue icing in honor of the holiday. Justin wanted us to sing the national anthem, which I thought was rather touching, so we did.

"I've never even been to a birthday party before, much less had one of my own," Justin said matter-of-factly while we were eating. "Thanks, boys. This is really great."

Tim and Kyle grinned. It was obvious they loved Justin, and it was also obvious they were proud as hell of themselves for putting the party together. Rick and I had both majored in hospitality administration in college, and Kyle had "hospitality major" written all over him. Unlike us, though, who had had to find jobs, his family already owned a chain of properties that he and his brother would no doubt inherit one day.

I reflected on how much we take for granted when we come from the kind of middle class background that Rick, Kyle, Tim, and I had come from. Justin had fit in nicely into our family, but the years of deprivation, the years of abuse, surfaced from time to time, and that statement about never having gone to a birthday party was one of those times.

Justin and Jason went out after the party. I was sure they wanted to do a little private celebrating of Justin's birthday, and that was fine with us. Jason was a really nice kid, and I knew, or at least I thought I knew, Jus wouldn't get into any trouble with him. Jason was supposed to spend the night with us that night, and that would be the first time Jus had had a friend sleep over. He kept his room immaculate, much better than Tim and Kyle kept theirs, but he made sure it was even more spotless than it usually was in preparation for his guy spending the night.

Tim and Kyle told Justin they would set up his computer for him that night. Clay and Jeff, Kyle's brother and his friend, offered to help. Clay was in the market for a new computer, and he wanted to see what his dad could score. Setting the thing up took them all of about twenty minutes, and all four guys joined us in the den.

"So what did you think of the computer, Clay," I asked.

"It's a nice box," he said. "I'm going to ask my dad to order me one."

"Boys, y'all did a great job with the party tonight," Rick said. "Your brother was obviously very, very happy."

I seconded Rick's sentiments.

Both boys craved our approval. It wouldn't have surprised me if getting it actually aroused them sexually, but, of course, I would never have asked about that.

"Your brother? I thought I was your brother," Clay said.

"You are, but so is Justin," Kyle said.

"I haven't been a very good brother to you, have I," Clay said.

Kyle didn't say anything, and his silence spoke volumes.

"None of us have been very good to you, have we," Clay asked.

We didn't know Clay well at all, and it surprised the hell out of me that he would have said something like that in front of us. It was almost as though the rest of us weren't in the room, and it was just him and Kyle.

"Y'all have been all right to me," Kyle said after a long pause in the conversation.

"I haven't been. I haven't been honest with you," Clay said. "You've always worshiped me, haven't you?"

Kyle shrugged, but it was pretty obvious from that action that he had always worshiped Clay. Kyle lit a cigarette, the first I had seen him light in days.

"See. Even that. You smoke because I smoke, don't you?"

Kyle didn't answer. Tim, Rick, and I were on pins and needles wondering where all of that was going.

"Kyle, I came home this weekend because I wanted to tell you and Mom and Dad something. Jeff and I wanted to tell you something. I'm gay, Kyle. Just like you, and Jeff is my Tim."

"I know," Kyle said in barely a whisper.

"You knew I was gay," Clay asked.

"Yes."

"How did you know that?"

"Jason told me," Kyle said. "He said it by accident. Tim and I were in a coffee shop downtown a few weeks ago, and he came up to me because he thought I was you. He said y'all had dated some last summer."

"I'm sorry you had to find out that way, Kyle."

"It really pissed me off. Not that you were gay, but that you hadn't told me. I told you about me. I trusted you, but you hadn't trusted me. You knew Mom and Dad would be okay with it. They were with me, and you knew that."

"I know, and I'm sorry. Will you forgive me," Clay asked.

"What's to forgive," Kyle asked. "You didn't do anything to me."

"Clay wants you to forgive him for not trusting you, buddy," Rick said. "Am I right, Clay?"

Clay nodded.

"Okay, I forgive him," Kyle said.

"Can't you do a little better than that," Rick asked.

"I don't know what I'm supposed to do, Rick. I thought he and I had a relationship, you know? I told him everything. I told him when I first decided that I was gay. I told him I had a crush on Tim the very night I first met him at a scout meeting. I sent him e-mail about the first time Tim and I made love as soon as I could after it happened. I thought he was straight, but I wanted to share everything about me with him. Even that. He had told me about the girls he had fucked, and I wanted to share what I did, too."

Clay colored a bit when Kyle said that.

"Don't you think he might have been afraid," Rick asked.

"Afraid of what? Afraid I would think less of him because he was gay?"

"Kyle, I wanted to tell you, Bubba. I wanted to tell you bad, man. But I was afraid," Clay said.

"Babe, I knew you were pissed off about Clay dating Jason and not telling you, but I didn't know you felt this strong about it," Tim said.

"I guess I didn't tell you because I really didn't know I cared that much until tonight," Kyle said. "I

really love you, Clay. I did worship you. I still do worship you, man. I don't care if you're gay. How could I possibly care, or think less of you, if you're gay? In fact, that was something we could have shared, and we didn't. You wouldn't."

"I know," Clay said.

"You probably felt like shit because you were gay, but don't you think I felt that way, too? It wasn't until I met Tim and these guys that I felt like I was worth anything. I told you I was gay when I was twelve years old. Tim and I became boyfriends seven months ago. For four years I felt totally worthless. That was a quarter of my life until I met these guys."

Clay started crying, and Jeff put his arm around him, as a boyfriend should under those circumstances.

Tim was the next to start, and he wrapped his arms around my legs for strength and support. I looked at Rick with pleading eyes. Kyle was stoic and unmoved.

"Let it go, son. You know you want to," Rick said.

Kyle let forth a blast of tears. He scooted over to Rick and hugged his legs like Tim was hugging mine.

"Not me. Him. Hug your brother," Rick said.

Kyle scooted over to Clay, and the brothers hugged. Jeff turned Clay loose, and Clay and Kyle had a good, long, reconciling cry.

"Jesus Christ," Rick said when we finally got into bed. "We're getting too old for this shit."

"Did you know anything about that before tonight," I asked.

"Do you think I wouldn't have told you, if I did," he asked.

"Good point," I said.

"It's kind of easy for us to forget Kyle because he doesn't really seem all that needy, you know," he said.

"Compared to Justin, especially," I said.

"Well, and Tim, too, with George being gone and all, and Tim's mom a basket case. But Kyle's parents are really not there for him, either, very much. It just about tore me up tonight when he said that about feeling worthless for four years."

"I know. He's said as much before, but I guess I didn't hear it as clearly as I did tonight," I said.

"I still think he's a pretty well adjusted kid. Now that I know what he went through, sort of, I have more respect for him than I did before."

"What did you think of Clay and Jeff," I asked.

"Well, they're both very good looking, especially Clay."

"Kyle looks just like him," I said.

"I know."

"But what did you think of them," I asked again.

A pause.

"I thought Clay was a lot like you had been."

"That's what I thought you thought," I said. "I knew my parents wouldn't have had a problem with me being gay, but I was so scared to admit it to anyone but my brother."

"How did Craig react when you told him," Rick asked.

"He was, like, 'so?' Then he said, 'I'm straight.' I said 'so?' Then he bought us another round of beers."

"How did you tell your parents," he asked. That was the fourth or fifth time we had been over that, but I knew he liked hearing about it, so I continued.

"I didn't. When they were driving home from my college graduation, my dad announced that he

knew I was gay, and if anybody in the car had a problem with that they would answer to him. The people in the car were Craig, my mom, and my grandmother. They didn't have a problem with it."

"I love that story," he said.

"No, you don't. You love me," I said.

"No argument there," he said.

"But I was scared and depressed about what I was for a long time," I said.

"But you got me now, right? And we're going to do this life thing together, right? Even if it kills us, right? Which it probably will in about seventy years."

"Absolutely," I said. "Absolutely." He wrapped his arms around me more tightly, and we went to sleep.

The next morning was a typical Sunday, but Jason had to leave right after breakfast, and Kyle and Tim had plans to play beach volleyball with some of their friends from school. By ten o'clock it was just Justin, Rick, and me in the house. We hung around the table.

"Can I talk to y'all about some things," Jus asked.

"Sure, buddy. What's on your mind," I asked.

"Well, first of all, I want to say thank you again for the birthday party. I know Kyle and Tim organized it, but I also know y'all paid for everything. I had a wonderful time, and I'm going to remember it the rest of my life," he said.

"It was our pleasure," I said. Rick dittoed my comment.

"I wanted to tell you that I really like Jason."

That wasn't surprising, but the way he said it made me think there was more he wanted to talk about in Jason's regard.

"I know you guys have kissed," I said.

"We've done more than that. That's what I want to talk about," he said.

"We'll try to answer any question you have, Jus," Rick said.

"I know. This is really personal, you know?"

"It's okay, Jus. Take your time, son," I said.

"All that stuff I did before," he said. "I don't want it to make Jason sick. We haven't been sucking or fucking yet, but he wants to. I told him I wasn't ready yet, and he's cool with that, but I really want to, too."

I was puzzled by what he was talking about, but I didn't want to be threatening by asking questions.

"When you were with those guys before, did they wear condoms," Rick asked gently.

"Most of the time," he said. "I got paid an extra twenty if they didn't have to wear one, though."

"Did you do that often," I asked.

"Not at all in the last six or eight months, and only now and then before that," he said.

"Do you want to get tested for HIV," Rick asked. "I think it would be a good idea, buddy."

"Yeah. Do you know how to do it," he asked.

"No, but I bet our doctor does," he said. "I'll call first thing in the morning."

"Thanks. If I have it, can I still stay here," he asked. His voice was weak, and I knew he was scared.

"This is your home, Justin. Where would you go," Rick asked.

Huge tears formed in Justin's eyes, but he fought them back. Then he broke into an enormous grin, and Rick and I grinned, too.

Justin let out a deep breath.

"Oh, man. That was hard," he said.

"Did you have anything else you wanted to talk about," I asked.

"Well, yeah. School."

Tim and Kyle had been bemoaning the fact that they had to go back to school on August 8th, and I had noticed Justin's anxiety when the S word came up.

"Do I have to go to school? I've never been to high school, and I'm kinda old to start."

I hadn't thought of that, but he was right. A seventeen-year-old freshman, especially one with the kind of experience Jus had under his belt, was a pretty scary thought. Even if he went through in four years, he'd be almost twenty-one when he graduated. I wasn't sure they would even let him do it.

"There's an adult school here," Rick said. "Some of the guys who work for me have talked about it."

"Do you know anything about it," he asked. "Like, could I go there? I know I need some education, but I just don't want to go with kids who are fourteen."

"That will be phone call number two tomorrow," Rick said.

"I'll take care of that one, Babe," I said. Then, "Anything else," I asked.

"Yeah, just one more thing. I'd like to buy a car," he said. "A pickup, really."

"Tim and Kyle told me about that," I said.

"I know. They said they did. They said you were surprised I have so much money saved," he said. He was obviously pretty proud of himself for saving that money.

"I think it's a good idea," Rick said. "What about you, Babe?"

"I do, too. And you'll need one if you go to adult school."

"Will y'all help me buy one," he asked.

"Of course," I said.

"He loves car shopping, Jus. He loves being a pain in the ass about it with the salesman, too," Rick said.

I just grinned, but Rick was right. I did love it, and I did tend to push a hard bargain.

"Will two thousand bucks be enough," he asked.

"You can probably get a used truck for that, but we can also co-sign a loan for you," Rick said.

"What does that mean," he asked.

"You put a down payment on a truck, and borrow the rest of the money. You have to pay so much on it every month," I explained.

"The co-sign part means that Kevin or I sign that we'll make the payments if you don't," Rick said.

"Oh, I'll make the payments," he said.

"Good. That way we won't have to kick your ass," Rick said.

Jus laughed and turned a little red.

"Have you looked at any trucks," I asked.

"Naw. Jay and I talked about doing that after I got off one day," he said.

"Where's Jay now," I asked. "I mean, I know he went home, but was there something going on?"

"He had to go to church with his parents and then out to eat with them. He'll probably come over later on, if that's all right."

"Sure, it's all right. You could probably do some looking this afternoon. Most lots are closed on Sunday, but you can go look around at what they have. The price will be posted," I said. "There's also the paper. There are a lot of car ads in the Sunday paper."

"I'll check those out, too," he said.

Chapter 10

(Justin's Perspective)

The next day was Sunday, so us boys laid low while Kevin and Rick took care of business in their

room. I had learned my lesson good about Sunday morning a few weeks before, so I was like this little angel. We got the papers in for them, and we made coffee. We drank up the first pot, so we got a second one ready to turn on as soon as they got up. We also made the breakfast, but we didn't cook none of it yet. It was mostly microwave stuff and some of those strange scrambled eggs they liked, so it would only take a few minutes.

"Thank y'all for what you did last night," I said.

"We didn't do nothing," Kyle said.

"You especially, Kyle. Jesus Christ, man," I said. "You defended me, you called the big guys over to help, and you talked to Jay when he left. You call that doing nothing?"

"Yeah. You want to make something of it, stuuuuud? With them things in your tits?" He was playing cute, and I loved it.

When I finished laughing at him, I asked, "Speaking of that, I thought you wanted to get some."

"We do. I do," he said.

"When are you going to get 'em? When they're free," I asked.

"Soon. Real soon," he said.

"He doesn't think he's ready for something like that for the rest of his life," Tim said.

"The rest of his life? They come out. I can take them out," I said.

"I knew that," Kyle said.

Tim slapped him playfully. "Don't lie. No, you didn't know that," he said.

Kyle rolled his eyes at Tim and said, "No, I didn't know that."

Tim hit him again, and Kyle laughed. Those two boys were so cute together. I knew they loved each other as much as Kevin and Rick loved each other, and it was just fun being around them.

I lit up a smoke, and Kyle did, too.

"Hey, I'm outnumbered here," Tim said.

"So," Kyle asked.

"So this," Tim said. He took one of Kyle's cigarettes out of the box and lit up. I had never seen Tim smoke before, but he sure knew how to do it.

In a few minutes, I said, "Boys, I think today might be the day for me and Jay."

"What do you mean," Tim asked.

"I talked to him on the phone after y'all went to bed last night. He told me he loves me, and I told him I love him, too."

"No, you did not," Kyle said, grinning from ear to ear.

"Yeah, we did," I said.

They both just started grinning and laughing. They were happy for me, and that made me happy, too.

"Can y'all help me out today," I asked.

"Of course," Kyle said. "What?"

"Well, he's coming over this afternoon. We'd kinda like to be alone, you know?"

They both grinned, and Kyle ran in and out the first finger of his right hand through the circle he made with his thumb and first finger of his left hand.

"I hope," I said, grinning just as much as they were.

"We have to get them out of here," Tim said.

"We can do that. There's a concert and art show at Sea Side this afternoon. We'll make 'em take us," Kyle said. "You don't worry, Bubba. We got your back."

Kevin and Rick came in just then, and we started playing and cooking and eating. Those four guys were so nice to me, and I loved them so much.

Just like Kyle said, they had them out of the house by noon. They had wanted me to go, but I told them Jay was coming over. They wanted to wait for him so we could all go, but I convinced them it was okay for them to go.

He got there about 12:30. He had gone to church with his parents, but he had somehow gotten out of eating lunch with them that day. They always had lunch on Sunday together, so I knew it was special to him to be there with me.

"Hey," I said, when I opened the door for him.

"Kiss me," he said, right away. I did, of course. I kissed him long and good, standing right there in the door.

"Thanks for calling last night," I said.

He didn't say anything. He just kissed me again.

I was so hard, and I wanted him so bad, I didn't know what to do. I had wanted him before but never that much.

"I love you," he said.

"I love you, too," I whispered. I couldn't talk louder because I didn't have much wind.

"Let's go to your room," he said.

I followed him into my room. He kissed me again when we got in there, and I felt his dick against mine through our shorts. He was a little bit damp from sweating because of how hot the day was, and I could smell it. It was so clean and so fresh and so masculine. It was all boy, and I wanted all of that boy right then and there.

"I got tested, and I passed," I said.

"What do you mean," he asked.

"HIV," I said. "I got tested, and I'm totally negative for that. I wanted us to be together so bad, man, but I couldn't do that until I knew I was negative."

He was speechless for a little while.

"Oh. Oh. Oh. You are so wonderful. I love you so much," he said.

"I love you, too. That's why I put you off. I didn't want to make you sick. But I think we should still use condoms for a while. We can stop using them in a few months, you know, but we've got to make sure, first."

"Does that mean you're ready," he asked.

"Yeah. I've been ready for weeks."

That Sunday afternoon in July, I gave myself to him, and he gave himself to me. It had always hurt me real bad before, but that afternoon it was just pure good. When it was my turn, I did it careful and slow and sweet and nice, and it made him happy, too. He liked it as much as I did, and that was his first time doing it that way.

My brothers wanted to hear all about it that night. They were so happy for me when I told them. I hadn't died yet, but I had damn sure gone to heaven.

(Kevin's Perspective)

Justin found a 1995 four-speed pickup for \$5,000. Rick co-signed the loan for him, and Justin had it paid off by Kyle's birthday in November. He started adult school when the regular school year started, and he made very good progress. After his pre-test scores showed he was within the reach of ready, his counselor made plans for him to take the GED in January, and Gene Goodson promised him a real job when he finished.

George Murphy went to work for Dr. Kelly after he passed his state licensure exam at the end of August, and Tim and Kyle once again roamed among the three houses. We didn't see quite as much of them once school started, but they spent at least a couple of nights at our house every week. Our

puppies were growing up fast.

Life was good at Foley-Mashburn Estates, and all of our kids were doing fine. But fall is hurricane season in northwest Florida, and Rick and I weren't quite expecting the winds of change in our lives that that fall would bring.