

Foley-Mashburn Saga #1

Tim

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Chapter 1

When I woke up that morning in late January, I felt for Rick beside me in bed. He wasn't there, and his place wasn't even warm. Then I remembered that it was Saturday and that he would be doing a long run. How anybody could take pleasure in running twenty miles when he could be home in bed was beyond me, but Rick was almost as devoted to running as he was to me. Saturday morning was a chance to get in long-run training for the marathon, and he looked forward to that as much as a kid looked forward to Christmas.

I dragged myself out of bed and into the bathroom. I showered, but I didn't bother to shave. Rick and I rarely shaved on Saturday mornings, and if we made love on Saturday afternoon, he would rub his bristly chin on my butt to tease me. Thinking about making love to Rick made Mr. Happy tingle, but I ignored it and got dressed.

I considered myself just about the luckiest man on earth that morning. Rick and I had made a solemn life commitment to one another about a month before, and the golden gleam of my wedding ring sort of symbolized that golden time for us. We had been together for a little more than three-and-a-half years when we took the plunge, and we both looked forward to spending the rest of our lives together. A child, a little boy of our own, we hoped would one day round out our family, but, at twenty-five, neither of us was ready to take on the responsibilities of fatherhood, and nobody was willing to let us, anyway.

I had set up the coffee maker the night before when we went to bed, and I turned it on. I got the newspaper from the holder under the mailbox out front, and the coffee was ready by the time I got back inside. I poured myself a cup, adding sweetener and fat-free half-and-half, and I sat at the table in the breakfast room part of the den to read the news. I scanned the front page and read part of an article about the war in Afghanistan, glad that it didn't touch us in any way. Then I turned to the sports page to read about the awful beating the University of Alabama football program had taken the day before at the hands of the NCAA. I wasn't an Alabama fan, but I certainly respected the University and its football program. I thought the punishment was a bit excessive, and an honest-to-God chill passed over me when I read that the next step would be the complete elimination of football at the school if they violated their five-year probation. No football at Alabama? That was unthinkable.

I looked up from the paper and caught sight of what was going on in the yard next door. George Murphy, our neighbor and good friend, and his son, Tim, were in what looked like a pretty serious conversation. George had a basketball cradled between his right arm and his body, and he had his left hand on Tim's shoulder. Tim looked distraught, and George kept gesturing toward our house. I wondered if they were talking about us.

George was of indeterminable age somewhere between thirty-five and forty-five, and he was in excellent shape. George was a Navy dentist, and they had lived in that house about a year, having bought it from the Navy dentist who lived there before them. There was no Mrs. Murphy on the premises, and there were no other children. George didn't date as far as we knew, and he and Rick and I had spent many hours talking over coffee, dinner, or drinks. George had seemed genuinely excited

when we got married, and he was one of only a handful of people to give us a wedding present.

Tim was a good looking kid of fourteen. He stood about five feet, six or seven inches tall, almost as tall as George. The fading remnants of his summer tan were faintly visible on his shirtless back. Just the week before, George and I had discussed the fact that the seventy-five-degree temperatures of north Florida in January were blowing his Massachusetts-bred mind, and Tim's acknowledgment of the temperature and his blatant disregard for the fact that it was mid-winter no doubt added to George's consternation at the weather. Tim's dark blond hair looked wet. It might have been wet from the sweat of a one-on-one with George, but it could just as easily have looked that way from the gel he used on it to keep it in its totally disheveled hairstyle. Tim had filled out noticeably since they moved in, and he was well on his way to developing into Rick's, and (to a lesser extent than Rick's) my own, athletic body form. Tim had played baseball for his middle school, and Rick and I had caught a few games the previous spring, especially when George couldn't be at them. Tim had gone out for freshman football, too, that fall, but he had quit the team over some kind of altercation with an older and much larger teammate. Tim felt completely at ease in our house, and he had been our guest five or six times when George had to be out of town on business for a few days.

I focused my attention back on the newspaper. In a few minutes, I poured another cup of coffee and returned to my reading. Just then the phone rang.

"Hello," I said.

"Can you believe that fucking shit?!"

It was my brother, Craig, the mild-mannered New Orleans attorney who just happened to be a rabid football fan, albeit a Tulane partisan. The bastard had actually wormed my mother out of her ticket to the Super Bowl the next day, so the phone calls from the Super Dome would be fewer than I would have otherwise expected had he been watching the game at home.

"Did you just read about it in the paper," I asked.

"Yeah. Did you?"

"Yeah, but I saw it on CNN last night, too," I replied.

"Why didn't you call me, asshole?! What good are you, anyway?"

"Oh, so it's 'asshole,' is it," I asked.

"Sorry. I meant to say 'Shithead.' You know that, baby brother." We both laughed. "Shithead" was his and my dad's term of endearment for me, and, frankly, I loved it when they called me that. They never said it in anger or with a mean twist; I was just Shithead.

Thus began a thirty-minute conversation about the University of Alabama and its tale of woe.

"So, are you and Rick watching the game tomorrow night," he asked.

"What game," I asked in return.

"Eat me!"

"What's the matter, bubba? Isn't Cherie taking care of your big stud cock?" Cherie was his wife, also a lawyer, and one of the nicest people I had ever met. If I hadn't been gay, I might have tried to win her away from him. "Besides, you know we promised Mom and Dad we wouldn't do that." We loved teasing one another, and it was often about our respective sexual orientations. Craig had always been my best friend, staunchest ally, and boldest defender, and he would have cheerfully tried to stand down a tank-load of gay-bashers if they were after me. He was so totally at home with my sexuality, and so accepting of it, that he could poke fun at me about it without a trace of rancor or ridicule. When Rick and I first got together, and Craig did the same thing with him, Rick was puzzled and a bit confused at first. When Rick figured out that it was all a game and as much an expression of love as anything, he joined the fray, giving Craig as good as he got from him.

"Fuck you," he said.

"Oh?" There was a ten-second pause, and we both burst into laughter.

"Hey, listen. I've got to go. Rick's just getting home from his run. Enjoy the game. Call me."

"Don't you dare hang up, motherfucker! Put my brother on this phone." Craig was very excited. Sometimes he called to talk to me, and sometimes he called to talk to Rick. We were both his brothers, in his mind, and he was our brother in our minds, too.

Rick opened the back door and walked in. He was dripping sweat, but his breathing was back to normal. He came over to me and kissed me good morning. I could feel the heat emanating from his body.

"Is that Craig," Rick asked.

I nodded and handed him the phone. I hit the speaker button so I could hear the opening exchange.

"Did you just kiss him," Craig demanded.

"Yeah. So what?"

"It's disgusting, that's so what," Craig said.

Rick was grinning.

"I kissed his asshole last night. And then I ran my tongue up into it as far as I could get it. Then, when I had him all opened up and dripping, I fucked his ass till he couldn't stand it, and he shot a load of cum that drowned a dozen bedbugs. One of these days it'll be your turn, Big Boy."

All three of us roared with laughter. When it died down, Craig said,

"Did you have a good run?"

"Yeah. Real good."

"How many?"

"About twenty, maybe twenty-one," Rick said.

"Damn. That's pretty good for a fag," Craig said. Rick grinned.

"Naw. Most fags do forty miles on a day like today. But I was trying to pass for straight."

Craig screamed with laughter, and Rick and I joined in.

When the laughter subsided, Craig said, "Turn the fucking speaker off, Kevin. My brother and I need to talk."

"Yes, sir, Mister Craig," I said. "Kiss my sister-in-law for me with plenty of tongue, you hear?"

"Shithead," he said, and we all laughed.

I turned off the speaker, and Craig and Rick launched into their conversation. I poured myself another cup of coffee, and I got Rick a cup, too. I tuned them out because I was sure Craig was telling Rick the same stuff about the Alabama fiasco he had told me. In fact, I was pretty sure he was also telling Rick stuff I had told him, without attribution, of course. They talked for a good thirty minutes before hanging up.

"Did you have a good one today," I asked Rick when he had finally hung up.

"It was okay. I've got to figure out how I can get more water, though. I'm going to suggest that the club set up hydration stations on that course on Saturday mornings. Running with a back pack sucks."

He was referring to the back pack he used to carry bottles of water when he's on a long run. The "club" was the North Florida Running Club, and many of their members did long runs on Saturday mornings. I was a non-running member, and I didn't really relish the thought of getting up at 5 o'clock on the weekend to man a hydration station. I'd do it, of course, for the man I loved, but I'd do it half asleep.

"What are you going to do today," I asked.

"I'm going to get the leaves up in the yard, for one thing. If those people next door ever move, I'm going to cut that damn sycamore tree down while the house is vacant." He was referring to a tree in the yard of the neighbors to the south, not the Murphys. The house the Murphys lived in had had a popcorn tree in the back yard that spewed seeds in Rick's flower beds every year. Those seeds germinated prolifically, and Rick cursed every one of the seedlings that popped up. After the previous dentist moved

out and before George and Tim moved in, Rick had taken his chain saw over there and had cut the popcorn tree down. The sycamore tree in question was much larger than the popcorn tree had been, and the leaves were as big as hats. He loved the big pines and oaks we had in our yard, but he hated sycamores and sweetgums for the messes they made. "What are you going to do?"

"The usual errands," I replied. We had divided the labor. On Saturday morning, I went to the cleaners, went to the bank, went to the grocery store, and got the cars washed. If the cars needed an oil change or tire rotation or some other service, I took care of that, too. He took care of the yard. That was something I hated and he loved. We had a maid service that came on Fridays to clean the house, so we didn't have that to worry about. We could have had a lawn service, too, but Rick insisted he do that himself.

Rick and I had a good life. We were both managers for an international hotel/resort corporation, and together we earned over \$100,000.00. Our house was paid for, thanks to some generous grandparents of mine who believed every kid should have a trust fund from birth. That year for Christmas my parents had given each of us \$10,000.00, which was the maximum they could give without having to pay gift tax, and Rick had used his money to buy himself a car. It was a used car, but it was a real honey of a four-wheel-drive SUV. My car was a lease, and the lease was paid for. We had no debts except for our monthly utility bills and such, so we had lots of money to dispose of, if we wanted to.

We weren't at the table for more than five minutes when the phone rang.

"I'll bet that's Craig again," Rick said. "Let me get it."

"What?!" And then, "Oh, jeez, George, I'm sorry. We thought you were Kevin's brother calling back with more of his bullshit."

Pause.

"Of course, man. Come on over." Rick hung up the phone. "Yikes! That was George, not Craig."

I laughed. Just about everything Rick did and said amused and delighted me. It must have been the "honeymoon effect" at work.

"Did George say what he wanted," I asked.

"No. Just that he wanted to talk to us. I hope I didn't do something to piss him off," Rick said.

"I saw him and Tim in their driveway earlier. They were having what looked like a pretty serious talk, and George kept pointing to our house," I said.

"Hmmmm," was Rick's only reply.

George tapped on the back door and opened it as he was tapping.

"Hi, George," Rick and I said in unison.

"Hi, guys. Are you guys looking forward to the big game tomorrow night," he asked, jovially.

"Yeah," Rick said. "We're having some guys over to watch it. You want to join us?"

"I'd love to, but I doubt I'll even see the game, where I'm going," he said. I suddenly realized that George's joviality had disappeared, and he wore a look of concern on his face.

"Where are you going," I asked.

George took a seat at the breakfast room table, and Rick got him a cup of coffee. He refilled our cups, as well.

"My unit has been called up. I'll be on my way to a hospital ship in the Indian Ocean by tomorrow night."

"What? When did you find out," Rick asked.

"Late yesterday afternoon. We leave from the air base tomorrow at two."

"Shit," Rick said. "They sure didn't give you much warning."

"They rarely do, especially in war time," George said. "When the war first started, I did some investigating, and I was led to believe we wouldn't be needed over there. It's gotten bigger than they anticipated, though, and there are all the POW's they're catching."

"But you're a dentist," I said.

"An oral surgeon, actually, and I'm sure that's why I'm on the list. People get dental wounds in war, too. Professionally, it's a great opportunity for me, but personally it couldn't have come at a worse time," George said.

"Why? What's up?" That was a personal question, and I never would have asked it if I thought George didn't want to talk about it.

"It's Tim."

"Jeez, George, I didn't even think about my buddy," Rick said.

"What's going to happen," I asked. "Will he have to go live with his mom?"

"That's out of the question, Kevin," George replied. "Ordinarily, my parents would come, or at least my mom would, to look after him, but my grandmother had a stroke during the holidays, so Mom and Dad have to be on hand to look after her. My dad's just about an invalid because of his rheumatoid arthritis, so he can't come. Guys, I'm going to cut to the chase. I'm here to ask for your help."

"Well, you know you've got it," I said.

"Of course, you do, George. What can we do?" I wasn't surprised that Rick would feel that way, too.

"I need to ask you guys if Tim can live here with you." The look on George's face let me know we truly were his only hope.

Rick and I both grinned broadly.

"Oh, man. That'll be great," Rick said. "Now I'll have two playmates!"

I laughed out loud at what Rick said, but George had a much more serious look on his face. Rick read his expression and panicked.

"Oh, George, I didn't mean anything sexual by that comment * at all! * I just meant another person to hang out with and have fun with, like with sports and all. Kevin and I would never, ever do anything sexual with Tim."

"Calm down, Rick. If I didn't know that to the very core of my being, do you think I would be here right now? I'm ready to trust you two with my son. I don't take that lightly at all. And I trust you guys in every way. Totally."

"Phew! I'm glad you feel that way, George," Rick said.

"Rick. Kevin. Tim's going through a very difficult time right now. For the last week, ever since his scout camp out, he and I have spent time talking about sex and sexual orientation, and Wednesday night Tim acknowledged that he's gay."

"And...." I said.

"And...I don't think he's very comfortable with that, yet," George said.

"What about you," Rick asked.

"Me? He's my son. I've always loved him, and I always will. Nothing's changed, Rick. I would have hoped you already knew that about me."

"I did, George. I just wanted to hear you say it, is all. Kevin and I have never doubted where you stand, man. You've been a good friend, and we appreciate that."

"Tim's going to need a lot of guidance and support in the next few months, guys, and I wish to God I could be here to give it to him. But that's going to be your job, if you're still willing to do it."

"George, if Rick and I know anything, we know what it's like being a gay teenager. He won't find any stronger support than he'll get from us, that's for sure. No offense to you, but we've been there, and you haven't."

"I know that, Kevin, and don't think you guys would have gotten off the hook of being big brothers to him, even if I were going to be here. I was already counting on you guys to help us get through the adjustment. It didn't come as a surprise to me, by the way. Did it to your parents?"

We both shook our heads 'no.'

"What you guys don't realize is, you have already made it a lot easier for Tim," George said. "And for me, too, frankly."

"What do you mean, George," Rick asked.

"Well, look at yourselves, guys. You're young, good looking, virile men, well educated, successful in your jobs, obviously very much in love with one another, and obviously very happy. And you, Rick. You're an athlete's athlete. For a gay fourteen-year-old to have you guys living next door is pretty compelling, you know? Hell, I'd be proud to be gay if I could be like you guys."

"Jeez, George...," Rick said, "I don't know what to say."

"Don't say anything. I wasn't flattering you. I was just telling it like I see it," George replied.

"But, George, you have flattered us and honored us beyond words, man. And if I don't shut up right now, you're going to see just how virile this young man is when I start crying my eyes out," I said.

George stood up. "Come here. Both of you."

Rick and I moved over to him, and he grabbed us into a hug. Rick and I responded in kind, and the three of us stood there embracing. George kissed each of us on the cheek, and we broke our hug.

"I took a chance and made an appointment with the base legal office for two o'clock. I sure hope that won't spoil any plans you have," George said.

"No, of course not," I said, "but what's up?"

"It's a standard kind of thing, really. We'll meet with a lawyer or a paralegal to get stuff like guardianship papers filled out and signed. I'll also execute a full power of attorney so you can have access to my bank account. I'm set up on direct deposit for my paycheck, and all my regular bills are paid automatically by charging them to my credit card. I'll be able to handle that, I think, but you'll need money for Tim and for emergencies with him, if any come up."

"We've got money, George..."

"Rick, don't even go there. I don't want to hear it. I'll probably be able to monitor my bank account on line from the ship, and if I don't see money taken out of it on a regular basis by you guys, you'll both have hell to pay when I get back. And I mean it. Okay?" George had used his most authoritative Navy officer voice on that one.

"SIR, YES, SIR," Rick said. George grinned and punched Rick lightly and affectionately on the arm.

"Well, listen, guys, I need to get cleaned up before our appointment, and I do have a little packing to do. Why don't you come over at 1:30, and we'll take my car. Is that okay?"

"You betcha," I said. "See you later."

After George had left, I said, "Can you believe this? Are you okay with this?"

"Okay with it? I'm so damn excited about it I'm about to wet my pants." On that line, Rick left the room for the bathroom.

Upon his return, Rick started talking a mile a minute.

"Man, Kevin, we're going to be daddies. We're going to have our own kid, and he's gay and everything. Did it surprise you that Tim is gay? He sure doesn't act gay."

"Oh, Jesus, here we go again," I said. Rick was unquestionably 100% gay, and he and I were fully out to everyone, but every once in a while he allowed the old stereotype about "acting gay" to surface.

"Damn, that was a dumbass thing to say, wasn't it," he asked sheepishly. "Are you mad at me?" He gave me one of his puppy dog looks that never fail to melt my heart. I grabbed him around the waist and kissed him hard on the lips.

"Is that a 'yes' or a 'no?'"

"Get your cute little ass in that bathroom and take a shower so the lawyer won't think you're a

derelict," I said, grabbing his cute little ass.

"Come with me," he said.

He knew that was an offer I couldn't refuse.

We played with each other in the shower, kissing, rubbing, and bringing one another to the height of arousal. We dried each other off and adjourned to our bed. Rick was an inspired cocksman that day, and he filled me with his love and made me explode.

After we had come down from the height of passion, we held one another, occasionally kissing, occasionally petting one another, constantly enjoying the closeness and tenderness we felt for one another. We communicated our love nonverbally for a long while. Finally, Rick spoke.

"I wonder if Tim has a boyfriend."

"Did you have a boyfriend when you were fourteen," I asked, knowing the answer ahead of time.

"You know about Jason," he replied.

"You told me yu guys had never fooled around," I said.

"We still haven't, and we never will, as long as you're alive."

"I thought Jason was straight," I said.

"He is. He was my boyfriend, but I wasn't his."

I chuckled.

"Did he know you had a crush on him," I asked.

"Not then. I told him I loved him when I came out to him when we were seventeen. It was right after we graduated from high school. Kevin, I've told you all of this stuff before."

"I know you have, but I still like hearing it. But back to Tim. Would it bother you if Tim had a boyfriend?"

"No, why would it," he asked. "If he has questions about sex, though, you're going to have to answer them."

"No, we'll answer them together, and we'll be totally honest with him, too. Okay?"

He hesitated for a moment. "What if he asks about anal?"

"We'll tell him about it. And if he asks if we do it, we'll tell him we do. But we'll also tell him that we waited until we were absolutely sure we wanted to spend the rest of our lives together before we started having anal sex, and we'll encourage him to save it for someone very special. We'll teach him about safe sex, too."

"What if he asks if we use condoms," Rick asked.

"We'll tell him the truth. What we do is safe. Neither of us has ever had sex with anyone other than each other where there was the transfer of semen, right?"

"Kevin, if you're asking me if I've cheated on you, you know I haven't. What's up with you, man." I had, in no way, intended to challenge Rick about his fidelity, but what I had said came out wrong. He was pissed off at me at that moment, and he had every right to be. I continued holding him, but he had tensed up.

"Babe, calm down. That was not what I meant to imply. I was just confirming the point that what we do is safe. Please forgive me, Rick. I know you're all mine, and I've never even had a hint of a doubt about that." He relaxed in my arms. "Besides, if I had any doubt, do you think I would have let you shove this thing up my ass just now?" I took hold of his penis as I said that, and it immediately began coming to life. That was a sure sign his anger had passed.

"What time is it," he asked.

"Shit! It's ten after one. We don't have time right now. But this bad boy belongs to me later, you hear?"

"I'm sorry I got annoyed at you a few minutes ago, Babe," he said. "If I had been paying better attention, I would have known what you were doing. Forgive me?"

"Come here, you little sex monkey. There's nothing for me to forgive unless you don't forgive me."
"Little sex monkey" was a pet name we used for one another, and it delighted both of us.

"There's nothing for me to forgive, either," he said, smiling sweetly at me.

"So why am I holding your dick," I asked.

He laughed, and his laughter made me laugh, as well.

Chapter 2

Rick and I wondered whether we should wear a tie to our legal meeting, but we both opted for something more casual. I half expected George to have on his uniform, but when we got to his house at the stroke of 1:30, we saw that he was dressed as we were. Tim came out from his bedroom to join us in their den.

Tim's grin when he saw us lit up his whole face. I tried to picture him in bed with another guy, but the image wouldn't come.

"Hi, guys," Tim said.

"Hey, buddy," Rick said.

"Hi, Tim," I chimed in. "We're really excited about you living with us. We know you'll miss your dad, but we'll try to fill in for him."

"Miss who," Tim asked coyly.

"Very funny, mister," George said. He hugged Tim around the shoulders, and Tim grabbed him around the waist.

"I will miss you, Dad. A lot." Tim's voice was close to breaking.

"I know, son, and I'll miss you, too. But we've always known this could happen, haven't we? And you couldn't be in a finer household than Kevin and Rick's, that's for sure."

"You and your dad can e-mail each other every day," Rick said.

"Hell, for that matter, we can set up a cam, and you guys can get on NetMeeting or something like that and see one another to chat," I piped in.

"The e-mail might work, but computer security is pretty tight in the military, especially in a combat situation, so I doubt if any of that other stuff would fly. But I'll check it out, just as soon as I can." George certainly knew more about that than we did. "Well, we better get going. We don't want to be late. They might not let me go, if we are."

We all chuckled.

"By the way, guys, feel free to smoke if you want to," George said. George winked at Tim, and Tim blushed a bit.

"I quit about eight months ago," Rick said.

"I still smoke a few every day, but I can wait," I said. "Do you smoke, Tim?" Yikes, I thought, as the words were coming out of my mouth. What a dumbass question to ask a kid in front of his father.

"No," Tim said.

"One of his friends smokes," George said. Tim cringed. I figured it had come up between them.

"This talk about smoking brings up the issue of rules for Tim. We can talk about this more later, if you like, but I want it fully understood by you and Tim that you guys make the rules. I have complete confidence in the two of you as a team and in each one of you individually, and what you guys say goes. And, Tim, there will be none of this 'but my dad lets me do it' stuff, either, you hear?"

"Yes, sir," Tim said. He turned around to us in the back seat and grinned. What a cute kid, I thought.

"Oh, and I've put together a packet of stuff you might conceivably need at some point, guys. It's stuff like insurance cards, his birth certificate, phone numbers of my parents, how to get in touch with me

in a real emergency. Stuff like that. I'll give it to you when we get back from the base. Oh, and you will have shopping privileges on base. You can save a lot of money there, and Tim can show you the ropes. Base security is much tighter now than it was, but we'll get you the right ID to get in. You can even use the recreation facilities."

"Wow, that seems awfully generous, George," I said.

"Not really. You guys are doing the Navy and our country a huge favor. The least Uncle Sam can do is try to help with the hardship," George said.

"This little...monkey will be a pleasure to have, George. Not a hardship," I said.

Rick immediately burst out laughing. I had trouble keeping from laughing, too, and I squeezed his thigh as hard as I could to make him shut up.

"What's so funny," George asked.

"I'll tell you later, George, but you really probably don't want to know," I said.

We spent close to two hours filling out forms, signing forms, getting our ID cards made, and the like. At one point George pulled us away from Tim for a private conversation.

"I should have brought this up earlier at your house, guys, so I apologize in advance for what I'm about to ask you," George said. "It's a formality, really, and it slipped my mind until just now."

"What is it," Rick asked.

"Well, it's kind of a tough one, and I'll understand if you say no. I've got to have a will before I go. Since Tim is totally dependent on me, I have to name a guardian for him, in case I don't make it home. Now, given what I'll be doing, the likelihood of that happening is practically zero, but it's in the regs, and I can't not do it. I'd like to ask the two of you to have joint custody of Tim as his legal guardians in the event of my death."

Rick and I were stunned. We looked at each other for the other's reaction, and I'm sure he saw the same confusion and disbelief on my face that I saw on his.

"Do you need some privacy to talk about this," George asked.

"Yeah, if you don't mind, George," I said.

"Sure, I'll be down there with Tim when you're ready," he said.

Tim was sitting in a chair about twenty feet away. He looked so alone and forlorn that my heart almost broke.

"What do you think," Rick asked me.

"Well, we've talked about having a kid. Plus, you heard what he said. This is going to be a formality. He'll be back. We'd be great parents, though, Babe."

"I wonder what's up with Tim's mom," Rick said. "We're not exactly lifelong friends of George. Of course, it's not like he's leaving an orphan on our doorstep, either."

We were both silent for a few minutes, each of us thinking about Tim and about us as a couple. It was all terribly sudden, but the thought of a gay kid cast into the world of foster homes at his age just about made me wretch. George looked up at us, and I waved him over.

"George, what's the story on Tim's mother," I asked.

"We're divorced," he said.

"I assumed as much, but isn't she the likely one to get Tim if you died," I asked.

He hesitated a few moments. "Okay, you guys have the right to know, but please don't think I'm looking for sympathy, okay?"

"No, not at all," I said.

"Right after Tim was born, she had a very bad and very long episode of post partum depression. She got good treatment for it, of course, and she was even hospitalized for it for a short time. Eventually, though, she got better. It was a close call, and I honestly thought I had lost her for a while. Together we

decided there would be no more children. We were both only children, and we wanted at least two, but we made the sacrifice when it became clear that her health would be in jeopardy. Unfortunately, the inevitable happened, and she got pregnant again. We're Catholic, and, while I might have considered an abortion, she wouldn't even allow the word to be spoken in her presence."

"We're Catholic, too," Rick said. "We understand."

"Oh, really," George replied. "That's a plus I hadn't expected. Anyway, back to my wife. She carried our daughter to term, but the depression returned with a vengeance about halfway through the pregnancy. She had the baby, but she was in depression so deep at that point that she couldn't take care of her. Then, to make matters worse, Ann, our daughter, died of SIDS when she was four months old."

"SIDS," I asked, not really sure what that was.

"Sudden Infant Death Syndrome," George replied. "It doesn't happen as often now as it used to, but it's still there. Ann's death triggered a psychotic break in my wife, and she's been in a residential psychiatric facility ever since. There's really no hope that she'll ever be able to function outside of the place. I take the vow 'in sickness or in health' very seriously, and the only reason I divorced her was so she could get Social Security disability and Medicaid. As a military dependent, she wasn't eligible for those. Her parents are both dead, and my parents can barely care for themselves. And now they have my grandmother, too. It's not a very rosy picture, I'm afraid."

When George finished talking, Rick put his hand on my forearm. I looked at him, and he gave one quick nod that was probably imperceptible to anyone but me.

"We'll do it, George," I said.

He grabbed both of us by the arm and closed his eyes. "Thank you, God, for these men." Then, opening his eyes, he looked into our faces and said, "This won't go unrewarded in heaven, boys. Thank you from the bottom of my heart."

"Well, hell, we haven't done anything yet, and I hope to God we won't have to," Rick said.

"But you have done something, Rick. You've opened your hearts and your home to my son. Do you have any idea what that means to me? Can you even begin to imagine the debt of gratitude I owe you? I could never repay you."

"Yes, you can. I've got this loose filling back here, and..."

George laughed hard, the relief he was probably feeling at that moment making the comment a lot funnier than it really was.

"Get it taken care of soon, but that will be the last dental bill you'll ever pay, my friend," George said. "Let's go finish up so I can take you guys out to dinner."

That night, Rick and I stripped down to our briefs, as we often did. I got into my usual position on the sofa, and he joined me there, his back against my chest. I folded my legs over his, and I let my arms lie on his chest. Sitting that way was a kind of a pre-foreplay for us, and it was one of our most intimate encounters short of out-and-out sex. I stroked Rick's chest very gently, occasionally grazing one of his nipples. His nipples seemed to be a lot more sensitive than mine, and more than once I had brought him to orgasm just by stimulating them as I was doing then. I watched his erection grow in his underwear, and that caused my own to assert itself.

"We're not going to be able to do this after tonight, are we," he asked.

"Why the hell not," I asked in reply.

"Well, with Tim here, and all," he said.

"Ohhhh. I see what you mean. I hadn't thought of that."

"We can do it in bed, though, can't we," he asked.

"Yeah. I'm never giving this up, Babe. We can also do it right here when he's not around or already in bed."

"I want us to talk about Tim and sex and all, okay," Rick said.

"Like what," I asked.

"Well, just some guidelines, I guess. For him and for us. I don't want him to ever get embarrassed by what we do, but, at the same time, I want him to learn how two men who are in love express their feelings for one another. I think that's really important for a gay kid to learn."

"Where is this coming from. You're not smart enough to think this up on your own."

"Very funny, you little...monkey," he said.

He made me howl with laughter with that line.

"You almost called him a little sex monkey in the car today, didn't you," he asked.

"Yes, I did, and I could have strangled you when you started laughing your ass off. Thank God George didn't press the issue of what was so funny. Evidently, he forgot about it, too, because he never brought it back up."

"That's some of what I'm talking about. That would have embarrassed Tim to death, even if you had been talking to me instead of to him."

"I know," I said. "And can you believe I asked Tim if he smokes right there in front of George? I really need to start thinking about what I'm about to say before I just blurt out the first thing that comes into my head."

"Yes, you do, and Tim does smoke, at least occasionally. I saw him the other day with his friend, the smoker, out by their pool. I think the smoker's gay, too."

"How do you know? Have you seen them doing something," I asked.

"I've only seen the kid once, but it's just a hunch," he said.

"Well, unless you've had a sudden infusion of gaydar, the kid is probably totally straight."

"True," he said.

"I wonder if the smoker has a name," I asked facetiously. I was playing with his mind and his body at the same time, and I loved it.

"No, he doesn't. Everyone just calls him the smoker. Even his parents."

That made us both laugh hard.

"You are too cute for your own good, do you know that, boy," I asked him.

"So, what are we going to do about smoking," he asked.

"What are you talking about?"

"Tim. He smokes sometimes. Do we make a rule against smoking?"

"Did you sneak a smoke occasionally when you were fourteen-and-a-half? I did," I said.

"Well, yeah, but this is different. We're in charge, now."

"So how is it different," I asked. "If he lights up after dinner when I do, then we address it. Otherwise, I say it's his own business, just like you wanted it to be your own business and I wanted it to be my own business when we were his age. That's pretty much a no-brainer, Babe, as far as I'm concerned."

"Good. I feel the same way. What about nudity? That's going to come up, I think."

"Yeah, you're right. Let's think about it. What was it like at home when you were a kid?"

"Duh! It was just me and my mom, remember? There was no way I was going to parade around the house naked when she was home. Especially after I started pubing out. What was it like at your house?"

"Well, Craig and I had absolutely no modesty with just the two of us. We saw each other hard just about every morning in our bathroom, and we took a shower together whenever we were running late for school," I said.

"Did y'all ever go downstairs nude? Or be nude around your mom?"

"Not really. She had to come in a few times when we were nude to break up a fight or to settle down some horseplay, but I guess that was when we were younger than Tim is. Do you think Tim would

feel comfortable nude around us?"

"He might, Kevin. It's just been him and George for as long as Tim can remember, and it wouldn't surprise me if they saw each other nude all the time," Rick said.

"Are you worried about him seeing you or you seeing him? I've seen you nude holding conversations with other nude guys in the locker room at the gym a whole bunch of times. Hell, you've even taken measurements of nude guys, and let other guys take your measurements when you were nude. And you have damn sure never been shy around me."

"I know," he said. "I'm not shy of Tim. I just don't want to embarrass him. I guess we could just let him call the shots on that one. Let him do whatever he's comfortable doing."

"That's probably the best idea."

"And what about masturbation," he asked.

"Jesus Christ, Rick, we can't make a rule that says no masturbation. Get serious, dude."

"I * know * that, Kevin. Sheesh, give me a little credit, please. I meant, what if he asks us if we masturbate. What do we tell him?"

"We tell him the truth. In fact, what is the truth? Do you jerk off?" We had never really discussed masturbation before.

"Sometimes, but not very often. I did when I was home at Christmas, but I haven't since then. Does it bother you that I do it sometimes?"

For some reason, I had never thought about Rick masturbating since we'd been together. I did it occasionally, especially when he was gone for a few days, but he basically met my sexual needs. If he was out training and I was reading erotic fiction, occasionally I would spank the monkey. Usually, though, I tried to wait for him to get home.

"Why would it bother me, Babe? What do you think about when you're doing it," I asked.

"I think about fucking my girlfriend." He said that without a trace of irony in his voice, and for a second it didn't quite register. When it did, I roared with laughter. "I think about you. What do you think about?"

"Who says I even do it," I asked in jest.

"You do, though, don't you?"

"I do now and then. Especially when you're gone. And I think about you, too, when I'm doing it."

"Before we got together, I used to do it at least once a day, sometimes twice or three times. But it's been so good with you, I would rather wait for stuff like what you're doing to me right now than do it by myself. It still feels good, though." He grinned when he said that.

Rick didn't say anything further. My erection had my briefs soaked through, and his were in the same, or worse, condition. I increased my attack on his chest, and he started moving rhythmically against me. He knew what I was going for, and he wanted me right there with him. After ten minutes of that, the job was done. Rick got up to get a warm, moist towel for us, and he came back with fresh underwear, too. We stayed up long enough for me to have a cigarette, and then we went to bed.

Sunday morning was one of the best times of the week for us. Rick didn't run on Sundays, and that was a time for slow, gentle lovemaking. We made love when he returned from his run three or four mornings a week, but time was always an issue on work days. Sundays were different, though, and we often lounged in bed for several hours, talking, drinking coffee, reading the paper, and dozing after we made love.

"I think you're getting better at it, Kevin," Rick said when we were finished. "Sunday morning won't change when Tim's here, will it," he asked.

"Not on your life. We'll just let the smoker spend every Saturday night over here, and they can have their own fun," I said.

"What about that? Any rules for the bedroom?"

"Yeah. Make your bed every day, just like we do; don't play music too loud; put your dirty clothes in the hamper in the bathroom, not on the floor in your room; and if you have company, close and lock the door. That should do it, don't you think? Oh, and if you don't want anybody to know what you and the company are doing, keep it quiet."

"I agree totally. Why don't we want him to leave his clothes on the floor? I thought every kid did that."

"You might have, but I didn't. Well, I guess I did, actually, but the maid picked them up every day. She also made the bed. But, we don't have a maid every day, and you and I don't leave our clothes all over the place. He can do that," I said. "That's not a major imposition, and it won't scar him for life. And, knowing George, I'll bet he makes him keep his room neat, anyway. He'll just think it's business as usual."

"You're right," he said. Then, "You know what? I've got a lot to do today. We've got company for dinner and the game tonight, remember?"

"Damn, I forgot all about that. I'm glad you remembered. What can I do to help?"

"Nothing, really. The house is clean. I just need to buy groceries and start the dinner. How are we fixed for liquor?"

"I think we're in good shape. I'll check, though. Will you buy some beer, please, at the grocery store?"

"Sure. What kind do you want?"

"Get two twelve-packs, Miller and Corona. That should be plenty. Oh, and Rick?"

"Yeah?"

"I love you."

"I love you, too. Now let's get busy," he said, and he gave me a quick kiss on the lips.

"Don't forget. We're supposed to take George out to the air base. He has to be there at one o'clock, and it'll take a good thirty to forty minutes to get there. Is that going to give you enough time," I asked.

"Oh, yeah, I think so. I'll need about an hour and a half to shop and another two hours or so to cook, but we'll have time. It's ten o'clock now. Let me haul ass. Bye."

With that, Rick was out the door. I heard his car pull out. I wished there was something I could do to help get ready for the party, but I guessed there wasn't. I decided to check out the bed Tim would be using to make sure it was made. I was glad I did check it, too, because it wasn't. I made the bed and straightened up the room a little, and it was quite presentable. It looked masculine enough. It was our guest bedroom, and any odd guests we had could either evict him temporarily or sleep in "Rick's Room," the bedroom where he kept his stuff. We had always slept together in the master bedroom, but there was his childhood bed in his room, his desk, a couple of loaded bookcases, and his sports equipment.

When I finished in the bedroom, I called my parents to wish them a good game and to tell them about Tim. They confirmed that my mother had, indeed, given her ticket to the game to my brother. They had a million questions about Tim, but they were really proud of Rick and me for taking him in. They offered any support we might need, which I already knew they'd give if we needed it.

We had a good time on the phone, as we usually did. When that conversation was over, Rick pulled into the garage from the store. I helped him unload the car, and he and I put the stuff away. He got started working on dinner right away.

"What are we having," I asked.

"Pork tenderloin, the macaroni and cheese dish that you like, roasted vegetables, and salad. For dessert we're having chocolate orange cake."

"Oh, man. What a meal! Do you want me to set the table," I asked. That was usually my job, and I actually enjoyed doing it.

"No. I thought we'd do this buffet style. That way we can eat while we watch the game. Does that suit you?"

"Whatever you want to do. You're in charge, but, yeah, that sounds real good," I said. I did set up the buffet line, though, setting out plates, napkins, silverware, and the like. We had a nice set of silver that had belonged to one of my grandmothers, so I got that out for us to use. It wasn't tarnished or anything, so I didn't even have to polish silver.

Rick's years as a restaurant chef in college paid off once again. In an hour, he had everything set up and ready to go into the oven. Our stove had two conventional ovens, one at the top and one under the burner space, so we tended to serve food at parties like that one that could all be cooked in the oven. He would have to make the sauce for the meat right before he served it, but he got all the ingredients ready and in the pot. He rinsed and dried the salad greens, made some dressing from scratch, and boiled a couple of eggs to chop up for the salad. He made the cake in no time and set it aside. It was a bowl cake, so to speak, and it had a liquid center. He'd serve it with a spoon, rather than in slices, and he'd put some canned whipping cream on top to dress it up. Orange and chocolate together are a taste combination that is hard to beat in my books, and I loved the cake he was making. The macaroni and cheese had cheddar cheese and blue cheese, cream of mushroom soup, sliced mushrooms, onions, green pepper, pimentos, mayonnaise, and it was topped with crushed saltine crackers. One serving had the daily fat allowance for three people, but it was incredibly good. We only had that on special occasions, like when he wanted to impress new friends.

Rick was sweating lightly by the time he finished. We both checked our watches, and it 11:45, almost time to leave for the air base. Rick dropped down in the leather club chair he had given me for Christmas, and I could tell he was tired.

"Do you want to stay here and let me and Tim take George," I asked. I wished I had thought of that earlier. He could have cooked at a more relaxed pace if I had.

"Hell, no. I want to go. I might lie down for a nap when we get back, if there's time."

"I figured that's what you'd say, but I wanted to offer. It's going to be an awesome meal, man. Thanks for cooking it for us," I said.

He looked at me and smiled. "I'm sorry I didn't buy more zucchini. I thought it would be enough, but it's lost among the carrots. Oh, well."

"Don't worry about it. It'll be great."

"I hope so," he said. Then, "Is Mike coming?"

"Yeah. It'll be Mont and Terry, Mike, and Mont's brother, Fred. And Tim, of course."

"So, do we know anything more about Fred?"

Mont and Terry were a gay couple that we had just gotten to know the previous weekend at the Mardi Gras parade Rick and I rode in. They were both twenty-eight, both engineers, and they had been together since they were nineteen. Like us, they wore wedding rings as a sign of their commitment to one another. We had clicked with them instantly. They had had us over the previous Sunday to watch the New England-Philadelphia playoff game, and that's when we had met Mont's younger brother, Fred. He was our age, single, and a hell of a nice guy, too. Mike was one of the guys I hung out with at lunch every day. He, too, was in his mid-twenties and single. He didn't date, but he had never indicated he was gay. My other two work friends, Bruce and James, couldn't come because of previous commitments. They were both married, although that wouldn't have stopped Bruce. The fact was that he was coming in that day from having spent a week surfing in the Pacific Ocean off the coast of Mexico. I didn't know what James had going on.

"Nope," I said. "Nothing. If I have a chance, I'll pull Mont aside tonight and ask him if Fred is gay." Pause. "Do you think we ought to see if Tim wants to invite the smoker so he'll have a friend here, too? All of us older guys might be kind of overwhelming to the poor kid."

"Good idea," Rick said. "God, there's enough food to feed a small army."

I reached for the phone and dialed the Murphys' number. Tim answered. I explained to him what would be going on at our house that night and told him he could invite a friend if he liked. He sounded pretty enthusiastic about the idea.

"Tell him they'll all be getting here around 4:30. The game starts at five o'clock."

"Cool. Thanks a lot, Kevin. I'll call him right now," Tim said. "I'll see you guys in a few minutes. Bye."

"Bye, buddy," I said, and hung up.

"What did he say," Rick asked when I hung up the phone.

"He seemed to really like the idea. I'm glad we thought of that."

"I'm glad you thought of it," he said.

Rick flicked on the TV and channel surfed for a while. By the time he made it through all eighty or so channels, it was time for us to go. We took Rick's SUV because it had more leg room than my Mazda. George had relatively little luggage. I guessed there really wasn't a whole lot of room to store stuff on a ship, and it wasn't like he was going on vacation.

"George," I said, turning to the back seat from the passenger's side front seat to look at him, "how long do you think you'll be gone?"

"That's the first question I asked, Kevin, but all I got was 'as long as it takes' out of anybody who might actually know something. I wish I could tell you that."

"It's not a problem, of course, but I was sort of curious," I said.

"Well, I don't blame you. Hey, listen, guys, I was serious yesterday when I said you guys are doing the Navy and the country a great service with this thing."

"It's our pleasure, George," Rick said, and George smiled.

"So, Tim, did you call your friend about tonight," I asked.

"Yeah, and he's coming over. His name is Kyle. He's my best friend," Tim said.

"He's the one who smokes," George said.

"Daaaaaddddddd," Tim said.

George ruffled Tim's hair and pulled back a handful of gel. He wiped his hand on a handkerchief.

Nobody said much for the rest of the trip. The air base was a good thirty miles from our house, but it was a straight shot down a four-lane federal highway, and the traffic was almost non-existent at that time on a Sunday afternoon. We got to the base at about quarter to one, and it took us the extra fifteen minutes to go through security and to find the plane on the flight line. We unloaded George's stuff from the car. Rick and I both hugged him hard, and he and Tim walked off together toward the plane. Rick and I hung back to give them the last few minutes together.

"So, the smoker does have a name," Rick said.

We both burst out laughing.

"I thought for sure you were going to say those exact words in the car back there," I said.

"I sure thought them," he said. "I guess George cleared up any issue we might have with Tim smoking."

"Yeah, but I don't want you encouraging him, okay?"

"Me?????!!!!!! I'm the one who fucking quit, remember? I'm not the one who smokes anymore. You are!"

"Why are we arguing about this? Do you want me to quit smoking?"

"We're not arguing, and, no, I don't want you to quit smoking unless you want to. I quit because I was embarrassed about finishing a triathlon or a marathon and wanting a cigarette so bad I was just about crazy. Now, that's dumb. Besides, you don't smoke enough for it to matter."

"How do you know how much I smoke," I said. I knew I was being contentious, but I enjoyed

teasing him like that.

"How do I know? I live with you, Kevin. I've lived with you for three years, remember? How many have you had today? Any?"

"Not yet," I said.

"Do you see what I mean? It's one o'clock on a Sunday afternoon, and you haven't yet had a cigarette. I refuse to continue this discussion. Shut up."

I started laughing, softly at first but it gradually built to a much louder and much stronger laugh. He looked at me with disgust, and he knew that, once again, I had gotten him. He was so cute when he looked at me that way I could have eaten him alive on the spot.

The time was up in a few minutes, and they made George board the plane. There were a lot of people there to see their men off, but none looked as forlorn and miserable as our little boy.

"Let's go get him," Rick said, and the two of us jogged toward Tim. Rick got there first and grabbed him up into a hug. He literally picked Tim up off the ground, and, when I saw Tim's face, it was wet with tears.

Rick was patting his back, softly saying, "It's okay to cry, buddy, but he'll be back soon. We've got you now. You're going to be safe with us and well loved by us. We can't replace your dad, man, but we're going to be the best big brothers you ever even dreamed of having. Kevin and I love you, man, and we're going to make it all right."

Tim didn't say anything, but his tears abated before we got to Rick's car. Rick told me to drive, and he got into the back seat with Tim. He held him in his arms until we got off the air base, petting him and nurturing him the whole way. Eventually, Tim sat up straight in his seat and put on his seatbelt.

"I'm okay now, Rick. Thanks," he said. "And thank you, too, Kevin, for letting me stay with you. I really don't have any place else to go."

God, when he said those words it was like someone had grabbed a long, pointed shard of glass and rammed it into my heart. I knew it had the same effect on Rick, but he recovered quickly.

"So, who do you like in the game today, Tim," Rick asked.

"Who's playing?"

"Rams and Patriots. Do you follow pro football?"

"Not really. Who's favored?"

"The Rams are, but the Patriots have been a Cinderella team all season. I believe they can take it, but it's going to be close. It should be a hell of a game."

"Cool," Tim said.

"Tell us about your friend Kyle," I said.

"He's so cool, Kevin. You guys are really going to like him, I think. He's really smart and really good looking, and he's really built, too, just like you, Rick."

"Sounds like he's a football player, Tim. Is he?"

"Well, he's built like one, but he's a hell of, er, heck of an actor."

"Hey, Tim, if he's a hell of an actor, then he's a hell of an actor. Not a heck of an actor. If somebody is a bastard or a bitch or a son of a bitch, then call him that around us. If he's a fucker, a shithead, an asshole, a dick, a prick, a cocksucker, whatever, then call him that. Just don't call us that, okay? At least not to our faces."

Tim was giggling at all the bad words Rick was saying, and it sounded delightful. His sad mood was definitely over.

"Do you guys mean that for real," he asked.

"Fuckin' aye, we mean that, Tim," I said. "We're guys, and guys tend to talk like guys, at least around other guys. Your dad can't let you talk like that around him because he's your dad, and that would be disrespectful. He also doesn't want you thinking that kind of language is okay in just any

circumstances, because it isn't. We'd both get fired if we used that kind of language with a customer or a big boss. But we think you already know that. We're your big brothers, and brothers say stuff to one another that you and Rick wouldn't believe. Trust me. I have a brother."

Tim laughed some more, and I could tell he was feeling pretty at-home with us.

"But tell us some more about Kyle," Rick said.

"Okay. Kyle is totally awesome. He's very smart and funny, just like you guys, and everybody who knows him likes him. He's a sophomore, but he should be a junior. He got held back in kindergarten because his teacher thought he wasn't mature enough to go to first grade. He has his license and a car, and his parents give him a nice allowance so he can concentrate on his school work instead of having a job. He ran cross country last year and this year, and he likes to work out. What else do you guys want to know?"

"Is he gay," Rick asked.

It was as though I had slammed on brakes and come to a instant dead stop when Rick asked that question. I looked back at Tim through the rear view mirror, and his face suddenly turned bright red. He stared down at the floorboard of the car. In a few seconds he was ready to talk again.

"Did my dad tell you I'm gay? I asked him to tell you that."

"Yeah, he did. And what is this being embarrassed and turning red shit all about," Rick asked.

"This is really hard for me, you know," Tim said.

"Yeah, we do know, as a matter of fact. We've done it, Tim. We know. But it shouldn't be hard for you with us, man. We're just as gay as you are, buddy. We know what you're going through better than you do, man. And we know that one day it's going to be just fine for you, just like it is for us. If you can't trust us, Tim, you can't trust anybody. Ever. And that's a hell of a way to lead you life, man."

The tears were streaming down Tim's face again, and Rick pulled him to himself once again. God, I was proud of my boy at that moment! If any man was ever made for fatherhood, it had to be Rick. He seemed to know just what to do and say instinctively.

After a few minutes of crying, Rick said, "Er, Tim, this was a fresh shirt a little while ago. It might dry out and I'll be able to wear it tonight if you don't get every booger in your head on it, man. Can we, like, lighten this up a little bit?"

Tim started laughing, and it sounded so good that Rick and I started laughing, too. We drove down the highway through town laughing our asses off. Jesus, what an emotional roller coaster this day has been, I thought, and the Super Bowl hasn't even started yet.

When Tim calmed down, he said, "Yes. I'm gay. And Kyle doesn't know if he's gay or not. He thinks he is, but he's not really sure."

"Hell, I'm not really sure Kevin is gay, Tim."

I reached back and tried my best to slap Rick for comic effect, but he was too far away from me.

"Do you see what I mean," Rick asked. "He can't even bitch-slap somebody. What gay guy can't do that?"

I totally lost it at that point, and we would have all ended up in the hospital if we hadn't had to stop for a red light. I was laughing so hard I could hardly breathe, and Tim and Rick were laughing almost as hard as I was.

"Rick, shut the fuck up so I can drive," I said between gasps. He must have made a face or done something else to ridicule me because Tim was laughing hysterically once again.

We got home around 2:30. By that time, George's plane was well on its way to where ever it was going. Rick and I showed Tim his bedroom, which he seemed to like, and then we went next door and started moving his stuff over to our house. His desk and computer were his biggest concerns, and we got those moved over in no time. Then we started on his clothes. I was pleased to see that the floor of his room was devoid of dirty clothes, but I knew that might have been just because he was moving. He had

quite a few things in his closet, and we moved those over in several trips. The books were next. He had two six-foot-high bookcases, and we decided that those could remain where they were. He culled two grocery bags full of books he wanted with him from the shelves, and we moved an empty bookshelf from their spare bedroom over to our house to accommodate them. I noted that the Harry Potter books were in that lot, and I was also interested to see that he took a Bible, several books about baseball, and some books about scouting with him. What a neat kid, I thought.

"Hey, Tim, you ain't selling the house, man. You can get your stuff anytime you want to. I've got some major grub to get on the table tonight, and them boys is going to be here any time."

"So, when did you turn into a redneck," Tim asked.

"The day I was circumcised," Rick said. "How'd you know I have a red dick?" Once again, Tim and I laughed our asses off at his humor.

Rick got busy in the kitchen, and Tim and I settled in the den.

"Who's coming over tonight," he asked me. "Anybody I might know?"

"I sort of doubt it," I said, but I gave him a run-down of the names.

"The guy's name is Mount? What is he, a top or something," Tim asked with a straight face.

I laughed. "No. It's Mont. M-O-N-T. Short for Monte. And what do you know about being a top, anyway," I asked.

He just grinned.

"So, what's going to happen about school tomorrow," I asked.

We spent the next fifteen minutes or so talking about his morning schedule. He told me about when he got up, when he left to catch the bus for school, and everything else I needed to know about his morning routine.

Chapter 3

I met Kyle right after we moved to the beach. He was in my scout troop, and I liked him right away. He was really good looking and very well built, but the most important thing was how much fun it was to be with him. He was always smiling, and he had a million wise cracks that broke me up. We used to have fun together, along with some other boys who became my friends when I joined the scout troop, but I really got to know Kyle on a camping trip about two weeks before my dad left when we were assigned to the same tent. I later found out that that particular troop always assigned an older boy to look out for a new scout on his first few camping trips. I had been a scout since I was eleven, and I was close to being an Eagle Scout, but I was new to them. They accepted my rank because I could prove it, but they still considered me a new guy.

They had a rule about no talking after taps, same as my old troop, but pretty much nobody obeyed it (same as my old troop). As long as you stayed in your tent and kept the noise and lights down, you could stay up as late as you wanted to. That's when Kyle and I really got to be friends.

"How do you like it here," Kyle asked, once we were alone in our tent.

"It's okay. I missed my old friends at first, but I've made some new ones," I said.

"Cool. Do you play any sports," he asked.

I told him that I played baseball. From there the conversation was all over the place, touching on just about every subject kids talk about.

In that conversation, I learned that Kyle was sixteen and that he had been kept back in kindergarten. He was a sophomore in high school, and he was on the cross country team. I didn't really know what that was, so he explained about running long distances on the street and through fields and woods, instead of on a track. It sounded cool to me. He said he had an older brother who was away from home in college, and his parents owned some motels and stores on the beach. He told me he really liked

acting, and he had been in two plays since he started high school. He was going to be in another one in the spring. He had his license and a car, and his parents were pretty cool about letting him come and go as he felt like doing.

Eventually, the conversation got around to sex. We were both in our briefs lying on top of our sleeping bags, and I could see the outline of his penis and balls through his underwear. We had a tiny flashlight turned on, so it wasn't totally dark in the tent. I tried not to look at him in a way that was obvious, but he had a beautiful body. I wanted to touch him, but I knew he'd beat the shit out of me if I did.

"Have you ever seen a girl naked," he asked.

"Pictures, but not the real thing," I said. "Have you?"

"I saw my cousin once. It wasn't much, but I saw her completely naked when I passed the room she was in to change into her bathing suit."

"Wow. Was she fine," I asked.

"Yeah. And she had hair down there, just like I do. Do you have any hair yet," he asked.

"Yeah," I said.

"Cool," he said.

"Did you get a boner when you saw your cousin," I asked.

"Naw. Did you get a boner looking at those pictures of naked girls?"

"Not really," I said. "Do guys always get boners when they see pictures of naked girls?"

"I guess not. I don't, and you didn't. You're not gay, are you?"

My heart skipped a few beats, and I suddenly became nervous as hell. I had been wondering about that about myself for a couple of years, but I was pretty sure I knew I was gay. I hadn't talked to anybody about it before, even my dad, and I had read a bunch of Web sites that had stories about gay guys coming out and stuff. I knew it was okay to be gay, or at least they thought it was okay to be gay. I knew that I got a boner when I looked at pictures of naked guys on the Web, especially if they were hard or were with another naked guy. I also knew that I wouldn't say no if Kyle wanted to kiss me at that moment.

My lack of a quick denial must have made him more curious.

"It would be okay with me if you are gay, Tim." He said that very gently, and his tone of voice implied complete acceptance.

"Maybe," I whispered.

"Maybe what? Maybe you're gay?"

"Yeah," I said, again in a whisper.

"Maybe I'm gay, too," he said.

I felt a sudden surge of excitement at those words.

"Does seeing guys naked make you hard," I asked.

"Yeah. You?"

"Yeah," I said.

"What else about a guy makes you hard," he asked.

"Well, sometimes just looking at a good looking guy, especially if he doesn't have a shirt on, makes me hard." I didn't say, "And lying next to you in just our underwear makes me hard," but I was thinking it. In fact, I was well on my way to a full boner.

Kyle propped himself up on the elbow closest to me, and he looked at me.

"You're hard right now, aren't you," he asked.

I nodded shyly. Nobody but my dad had ever seen me hard before, and he only had a couple of times when he came into the bathroom when I was peeing in the morning. He had just ignored it, and I hadn't really given it much thought. Having Kyle that close to me, looking at me and knowing I was hard,

was a tremendous turn-on, and I could feel the front of my briefs getting wet.

I don't know what would have happened next because right at that moment there was a whisper outside the front of our tent.

"Kyle," the voice said.

Kyle jumped a little.

"What," he whispered back.

"It's me. Philip. You got any smokes?"

"Shit," Kyle said to me. "Wait up," he whispered to Philip.

I hurried up and got inside my sleeping bag. Kyle stood up, and I saw him in profile. His dick was pushing out against his underwear, and it looked huge. He reached his hand inside his briefs to adjust himself to point straight up, and he got into his jeans. Once his jeans were zipped up, I could only see the faintest outline of his erection. He put his shoes on without tying them, and he left the tent. I heard another voice whisper, "All right, man," and then the three of them moved away from our tent. Kyle was gone for about twenty minutes, I guessed, and, when he came back in, he smelled like he had been smoking and maybe drinking, too. I pretended I was asleep when he got back, and that was it for that night.

The next day, Kyle and I didn't talk about our mutual revelation about ourselves the night before. We had a great time playing football, cooking on the camp fire, and doing all the things you do on scout outings.

When I got home late that afternoon, my dad asked how the camp out went. I told him I had a great time and had made a new friend. He asked me who, and I told him about Kyle. I didn't tell him everything, of course, but I did tell him I liked him enough for him to be my best friend.

That night we were in the den watching TV, and the show *Queer As Folk* came on. Dad was reading, and he didn't notice what it was, at first. He glanced up, though, and saw two guys kissing.

"What are we watching, son," he asked me.

"It's *Queer as Folk*. It's on Showtime," I said.

"Did it bother you that those two guys were kissing," he asked.

I shrugged.

"You know what 'gay' means, don't you?"

"Dad, I'm fourteen, not four. Of course I know what 'gay' means."

"I didn't mean to offend you, Tim, but I just wanted to make sure. And I didn't care much for your tone of voice."

"Sorry, Dad."

He closed his book and paid attention to the show. He didn't say anything during the show, and I didn't, either. I wished I had gone to my room to watch it, but I was afraid to leave, for some reason.

"I heard something about this show on the radio the other day. Apparently many gay men are offended by it."

I didn't answer for a few seconds. Then, "Why?"

"They say it trivializes homosexuality and makes it seem that the only things gay men want is sex, drugs, and booze."

I didn't say anything.

"I wonder if Kevin and Rick watch it," he said.

Kevin and Rick were our next door neighbors, and all four of us had gotten to be pretty good friends. Rick was a great athlete, and he told us he had run in the Ironman Triathlon and finished it. If he saw me outside shooting baskets, he would usually come over and shoot with me. He was fun to hang out with, and, while I knew he and Kevin were gay, I never really thought of them that way.

"They sure aren't like those guys on that show," I said.

"I think that's the point the critic was making. Those boys next door are a loving, committed couple. They're not out picking up guys and partying all night long."

There was a short pause.

"Well, sport, it's time for bed. Good night, Tim. I love you."

I got up when he did. "I love you, too, Dad. See you in the morning."

I thought about Kyle that night in bed, and I tried to picture what his penis looked like. I had measured mine, so I knew how big it was. I wondered how big his was. I also wondered if he had a foreskin like I did. I hated not looking like the other guys when I was little, but by then I was pretty much used to being stared at in locker rooms and public showers.

I thought about Kyle's chest and his beefy legs. I even thought about the shadow of beard I had noticed that morning when we got up. I wondered what it would be like to touch his face and feel the prickle of his whiskers.

In bed that night, when the pressure down below got to be too much to bear, I used my left hand and pretended it was Kyle. I grunted when the time came, but I was sure my dad hadn't heard.

I didn't see Kyle at school on Monday or Tuesday. That wasn't unusual, though. I rarely saw him, except occasionally at lunch, and he would always be at a table with two or three people, usually girls. We ate lunch at the restaurant that was part of a hotel a block from school. They had a big buffet, and it was good.

Wednesday of that week was the monthly School Improvement Day. That basically meant we had our four class periods, but they were only fifty minutes instead of the usual ninety. They turned us loose for the day at 11:15. I stopped that day at my biology classroom to pick up some forms for the science fair, and I ended up missing my bus. That had happened before, and it was no big deal. I lived about three miles from school, and I could walk it easily. It was a beautiful day, and I took my tee shirt off to get some sun on the way home. The warm winter weather in Florida freaked my dad out, but I loved it.

I was about six blocks from home when this car came up behind me. I was on the sidewalk, so I didn't even look over at it. Then I heard a whistle, the kind some guys make to flirt with pretty girls. I turned to see who it was. To my surprise, it was Kyle. He was leaning partly out the window. He stopped, and I stopped walking.

"Come on. Get in, and I'll take you home," he said.

"That's all right," I said. "I've only got a few more blocks. I'll walk."

"Aw, Tim. Come on, man. Let me drive you home." There was a pleading quality to his voice, and he looked so cute I couldn't resist.

I got in the car, and Kyle extended his hand for me to shake. I did, and he seemed to hold it just a little longer than you might ordinarily do.

"What's up, dude," he asked.

"Not much. What's up with you," I replied, like I always did.

"Not much. Where do you live?"

"On this street. Three more blocks," I said.

"No, shit! This is the street I live on, too. In fact, that's my house right there." He pointed to a really nice house on the water side of the street. The street ran down a lagoon, and the houses that were on waterfront property were much nicer than the ones on my side of the street.

"Cool. We're neighbors," I said.

There was a pause in our talking.

"How do you get to school in the morning," he asked.

"Cheese wagon," I said. That was our name for the yellow school buses I rode.

"Bummer. Want to ride with me?"

"Hey, this is my house," I said. He turned into the driveway. "Yeah, that would be cool. I won't

have to leave the house as early. It's only three miles to school, but they pick us up at seven o'clock."

"Fuck, man. Do you have time to eat breakfast," he asked.

"Yeah. Cereal or a couple of pop tarts," I said.

"Me, too. But at least I can get up a little later. Or spend a little time with my friend in the shower." He grinned a wicked grin. At first I didn't know what he was talking about. Then he glanced down to his lap, and I caught it. I'm sure I blushed. He laughed.

"Thanks for the ride," I said as I started to get out of the car. "Do you want me to walk down to your house tomorrow morning? What time do you leave?"

"I leave at 7:20, but I'll pick you up. Walking's okay on nice days, but it would suck on rainy days. I'll pick you up at 7:20 Be ready."

"Right," I said. Try standing in the rain to catch a bus, I thought.

"What are you going to do this afternoon," he asked.

I shrugged. "Hang out, I guess. Watch TV. I don't know."

"Can I hang out with you?"

I couldn't believe I hadn't thought to ask him. I had thought about almost nothing but him since the camping trip, and I hadn't recognized the opportunity of a whole afternoon with nothing to do but hang out with him.

"Sure. Come on in."

Kyle followed me into my bedroom when we got inside. It was a wreck, as usual, but not as bad as it sometimes was. My dad believed everybody should have privacy in their bedroom, so he never went into mine. He made me keep the door closed at all times, though, because he didn't want to see my mess. The door had a lock, but I rarely used it because I knew he'd never barge in on me.

"Nice room," Kyle said. I couldn't tell if he was being sarcastic or not, so I just said "thanks."

He walked over to my side of the bed and bent down. He picked up the sock I had been using to clean up with for the last week or so, held it up to his nose, and took a deep smell. He looked at me and gave me a wicked grin.

I was embarrassed almost to death, and I know I turned bright red because I saw myself in the mirror.

He laughed at my embarrassment, and that only embarrassed me more.

"Why are you turning red? All guys do it, man, and this is better than a big old wet spot that you have to sleep in." His logic was impeccable, but I had had enough of it.

"Let's go," I said and turned to leave my room.

He caught up with me.

"Hey, you're not mad at me, are you? I was just teasing you, Tim. I don't want you to be mad at me."

He put his hand on my shoulder, and I stopped. I turned to face him, and he had the cutest sad look on his face I had ever seen. I grinned, and he beamed back at me.

"I'm not mad at you, Kyle. I was just caught off guard a little. Of course it's my own damn fault for leaving it out in the middle of the room."

"Did you think about me while you were doing it? `Cause lately I've been thinking about you when I do it."

Oh, my God, I thought. I'm going to faint. I couldn't believe what I had just heard. For one thing, I couldn't believe he had asked me that, and for another thing I couldn't believe he had said he'd been thinking about me lately when he masturbated. My dick got hard as a rock in an instant. I liked Kyle more than I had ever liked anybody before, and for him to think about me when he masturbated was more than I could have hoped for.

"Well, do you," he asked. "Don't be shy, man. I told you, didn't I?"

"Yes," I said softly.

"Yes you think about me when you jerk off, or yes I told you?"

"Both," I whispered.

He grinned at me in a way that let me know I had said what he was hoping to hear. Neither of us knew what to do after that revelation. In a few seconds, though, I came back to planet earth.

"Let's make some lunch," I said.

"Good idea," he replied, and we went to the kitchen.

We each made ourselves two ham and cheese sandwiches, and I put them on paper plates. I piled on a generous serving of chips, and I got us each a couple of medium-size pickles. I pulled two drinks from the fridge, and started moving over to the table.

"Let's eat outside," he said.

Without responding, I picked up my plate and drink, and headed toward the back door. Kyle was right behind me. We set our food on the table, and I sat down. I was still without a shirt, and Kyle took his off before he sat down across from me. We didn't say much while we ate, but we kept looking at each other.

After he finished eating, Kyle got out his cigarettes.

"Do you want one," he asked me.

I had smoked a few times with my friends in the past, and every time I had gotten a light-headed feeling. I didn't especially like the taste of cigarettes, but I did like the way they made me feel. Since I had already done and said things that day that were way out of character for me, I figured, what the hell.

I took a cigarette, and Kyle held his lighter to it for me. I inhaled too deeply, and I coughed a little. After another drag, though, I was fine.

My neighbor Rick chose that very moment to show up in his back yard. He was looking around like he was looking for something.

"Jesus Christ! Who is that piece of eye candy," Kyle asked.

"Shhhh. Not so loud. He'll hear you. That's Rick, and he's married."

Kyle didn't react to that last statement.

"To a guy," I said. My dramatic pause before that last line had the effect I had hoped it would.

"No fucking way!" Kyle said.

Kyle said that pretty loud, and Rick must have heard him because he looked over toward us. He waved. Without thinking, Kyle and I both waved back with the same hand we were holding our cigarettes in. Rick would have had to have been blind not to see them. He laughed a little.

"Are you guys skipping school, Tim," Rick asked.

"No, half day today," I said in reply.

"Enjoy the afternoon, guys," he said.

"Thanks. You, too, Rick," I said.

He answered by making a gesture like he was digging with a shovel and throwing the dirt over his shoulder to mean he'd be working. I laughed, but it wasn't really funny. He went over and looked at a sprinkler head, and then he counted other sprinkler heads. He gave me the okay sign and left.

"He's married to a guy," Kyle asked incredulously. "Is he gay?"

"Have you ever had your IQ tested," I asked.

Kyle saw the stupidity of his question and laughed.

"Damn, man. You have a gay couple living right next door. Do your parents know about them?"

"It's just my dad, and, yeah, he knows. They're good friends of ours. I've even stayed with them a few times when my dad had to be out of town."

"He's let you stay with two gay guys," Kyle asked, not believing it once again.

"Yeah. Why the hell not? They're great guys. They're both real smart, and they both have awesome jobs. That guy you just saw, Rick, is a big-time endurance athlete."

"What does that mean," he asked.

"Triathlon and marathon," I said.

"No shit! That's awesome. Did he run the Ironman they had here a couple of months ago?"

"Not this year. He ran it last year, though. He had a bike accident right before New Years, and he told me his triathlon days are over, for now at least. He's gonna concentrate on marathon for now."

"Awesome."

We finished our smokes in silence. Then Kyle spoke up.

"Have you ever talked to them about sex?"

"No. Why should I have," I asked.

"Aren't you curious about what they do together," he asked.

"I know what gay guys do for sex," I said.

"Well, yeah, I know you do, but, damn, I'd love to talk to them," he said.

We relaxed for a while in the sun, but I got kind of bored.

"You feel like playing some video games," I asked.

We played video games the rest of the afternoon. We went back outside for a little while for Kyle to smoke, and I had another one, too. After a few hours, we heard my dad pull up.

"I guess it's time for me to go home," Kyle said.

"Wait and meet my dad. I'd invite you to stay for dinner, but we just sort of snack on our own. This has been a great day for me, man."

"Me, too, Tim. I feel like there's some kind of link between us, you know?"

"You think it's that we're maybe both gay," I asked, as much to see his reaction, as anything.

"That's part of it, for sure, but I just like you. I feel like I've always known you, you know?"

"Yeah, I do. I feel the same way."

Kyle and I both had our shirts on by then, and Kyle had put his cigarettes in his shirt pocket. I didn't think anything about it, and I was sure that was what he usually did. When I introduced him to my dad, I could tell Hawkeye George spotted them first thing. He didn't say anything to Kyle, though, and that was a relief. He waited until Kyle was out the driveway before he started.

"Tell me about your friend," he said.

"What do you want to know," I asked.

"Well, just general stuff. You know."

"He's an Eagle," I said.

"An Eagle Scout?"

"Yeah. He's a sophomore. He is on the cross country team at school."

"How old is he," he asked.

"Sixteen."

"And he's a sophomore?"

"He had to repeat kindergarten," I said.

I hated it when I got the third degree from my dad. I always felt like I had done something wrong and was being interrogated by the police or something.

"Was that his car?"

"Yes." I knew I must have sounded defensive, but I felt like he didn't like him even though they had just met.

"Nice car," he said. "And he smokes."

It was just a statement, but I knew he wanted some kind of response from me. My dad was the coolest guy in the world about 98 per cent of the time, but times like that, when I was under interrogation,

were terrible.

"Yeah," I said.

"A lot of boys his age, and your age, too, experiment with cigarettes, Tim. I know that. If you decide to smoke, I won't be able to do anything about that. My parents couldn't, and I know I can't either. Starting smoking was the dumbest thing I've ever done, and quitting was the hardest. But I want you to know the health risks involved."

He went into a thirty minute sermon about smoking and health. I had heard it five or six times before, and besides boring the piss out of me, it made me feel guilty as hell because I had smoked those two cigarettes that afternoon. By the time he finished, I was in a foul mood.

"What's the matter, son?"

"Well, it's just that every time you talk about stuff like that I feel like you're yelling at me."

"Tim, it was never my intention to make you feel bad," he said.

"I know."

"Does Kyle have a girlfriend," he asked, no doubt to change the subject.

"No. Not that I know of," I said.

"I would think a boy as good looking as he is, and with a car, would have lots of girls chasing him," he said.

I just shrugged without any expression on my face, but inside I was a nervous wreck. Please don't say the G word, I thought. Then I decided, hell, why not?

"Do you think he might be gay," I asked.

"It wouldn't make any difference to me if he were gay, Tim. Surely you know that."

"I guess."

"Is he gay, Tim?"

"Would it make any difference to you if I was gay," I asked. I didn't look at him. I was scared.

"Are you gay, son," he asked. Whatever hostility he might have shown earlier toward cigarettes was totally gone from his voice. He was gentleness itself when he asked that question.

"Yes," I said in barely more than a whisper.

"Are you sure?"

"I think so," I whispered again.

He hugged me hard. I felt the warmth from his body, and I knew my being gay would never be an issue between us.

"I love you, Tim. And thank you for trusting me," he said.

"I love you, too," I said. I squirmed a little, and he broke the hug. It was great, but it was getting uncomfortable.

"Will you tell Kevin and Rick for me," I asked.

"You don't want to tell them yourself," he asked.

"No. I'd be too embarrassed," I said.

"Those boys are our friends, Tim. We're lucky to have them. In my mind, at least, they're what Gay Pride is all about. But, yes, I'll tell them." Then, after a pause, "Have you read anything about being gay?"

I told him about some of the Web sites of gay teens I had read.

"Did any of those boys say anything about being picked on for being gay," he asked.

"A few, but not many. I know some gay kids get picked on, Dad, and some even get beaten up, but I don't think that happens to everyone. But I'll be super careful, if that's what you're worried about."

"It is, Tim, and I know you will be. Do you think any of your friends are gay," he asked.

"You mean besides Kyle? I don't know. Probably. There is a club at school called the Gay-Straight Alliance. I'm sure some of those people are gay or lesbian."

"Are you a member," he asked.

"No. Should I be?"

"Well, you have to be the judge of that. On one hand, it might give you a chance to get to know other gay kids. There's strength in numbers, you know. On the other hand, though, it might make people suspicious of you. As I said, you have to judge that for yourself."

"Okay."

"Would it offend you if I asked whether you've had sex?"

"No, it wouldn't offend me, but, no, I haven't. I've never even kissed anyone."

"I didn't think so. Well, son, I'm sure when the time comes you'll handle it well. I'm sure you'll have questions about sex that I can't answer, though. Never be afraid to ask me, but I'm not promising I'll know the answer. But I bet Rick and Kevin will."

I nodded.

"Do you know about safe sex," he asked.

"Well, a little. I've read stuff on the Web about it," I said.

"Before you have sex, anal sex, anyway, please find out all you can about how to be safe."

"I will, Dad, but I don't see that happening," I said.

"Well, you'll know, if it ever comes to that," he said.

I couldn't imagine ever having butt sex. I wanted to touch Kyle and kiss him and jerk him off, even, but anything else was a little more than I wanted to think about.

"How do you feel right now?"

"I feel good. Why?"

"Do you feel like going out to eat?"

"Sure." And we did.

That night in bed I thought about everything that had happened that day. I thought about what it would be like to kiss Kyle and to see him naked. I thought about what he had said about thinking about me while he jerked off, and it thrilled me that he did that. I wanted Kyle badly. I didn't understand exactly why I wanted to touch him and kiss him and cuddle with him, but I wanted to. I used the left-hand technique again that night, and Kyle was in my mind's eye the whole time.

The next morning when we were talking on the way to school, I brought up the idea of joining the GSA. He said he had thought about it, too, but then he said he had all the gay friends he needed.

"Like who," I asked.

"You, dumbass. Who do you think I meant?"

I laughed, and I felt warm and wonderful.

Thursday and Friday were just ordinary days. Kyle and I hung out after school, and we talked to one another on the phone at night. I liked him more and more every day, and I wanted to touch him and kiss him and rub my naked body on his more and more every day.

My dad and I didn't have any more heart-to-heart talks Thursday night or Friday morning, and everything was just like it always was. Friday night was another story.

I had planned on asking if Kyle could spend the night, but the look on my dad's face when he came home from work told me that probably wasn't a good idea. He said 'hi' when he came in, but he went directly into his office and closed the door. It made me a little nervous for him to do that, but I figured he had had a hard day or something. In a little while he called me to come to his office.

"Hi. What's up," I asked.

"It's something at work. I've been assigned to a hospital ship to help take care of our soldiers and marines. I have to leave Sunday."

"Shit!" I said. It had slipped out, but he didn't comment. I had said that word a few times before around him, and he always corrected me. That time, though, he didn't even flinch.

"Shit is right, son. I just got off the phone with your grandparents, and they're not able to help."

"Dad, I really don't want to move up there."

"I know, and I don't want you to. They couldn't handle you, anyway."

"Because of Gramgram," I asked. She was my great-grandmother, and I knew she was sick.

"That, and grandpa's in a wheelchair full time now because of his arthritis. I've known for a couple of months about him, but I didn't want to worry you."

"Why can't I just stay here?"

"You can't stay here by yourself. That's out of the question."

"Rick and Kevin would check on me, and I could go to them if I needed help with anything I couldn't handle," I said.

His facial expression changed suddenly, and I could tell he was thinking. He picked up the phone and dialed a number. He put it down without saying anything.

"I'll talk to them about maybe letting you stay with them," he said. "They're not home yet, though."

"Dad, you've always said this could happen on a moment's notice. This is something bad, but at least you won't be fighting."

"Good point. Well, I've got a lot to do in the next couple of days. I need to get started. Call for a pizza, why don't you?"

"Okay. Is there anything I can do to help," I asked.

"Yeah, actually, there is. Will you wash my clothes for me?"

"Oh, sure." I had washed my own clothes since I was ten, and I knew just what to do. I called for pizza, and then I got busy on the clothes.

After we had eaten, Dad went back into his office. I did something I hadn't done in a long time. I went into my room, got on my knees and prayed. I prayed that my dad would be safe, and I prayed that Kevin and Rick would say yes. In twelve hours my second prayer was answered.

Chapter 4

Mont and Terry were the first to arrive, along with Fred. We shook hands all around and then introduced them to Tim. By the time everyone had something to drink and had taken their places to watch the game, Mike showed up. I introduced him to everyone, and he took a place next to Fred. I watched as the two of them checked one another out. It wasn't overt or inappropriate by a long shot, but it fueled my curiosity about the two of them.

Kyle was the last to arrive, and Tim introduced Rick and me to him as his foster big brothers. I definitely liked the sound of that, and I know Rick positively loved it. Kyle was a hottie, by anybody's definition. He was my height, five feet, ten inches, and he weighed about as much as Rick, 175 pounds. Like Rick, he had a powerful upper body, and I wondered if he also had Rick's rock-hard leg muscles. Tim had said he was a runner, so my guess was that he did. He had dark hair and brown eyes, and I noticed the tell-tale shadow of a full beard on his face. I suddenly wondered if Tim had to shave, and when I looked closely at his face, I could trace the beginnings of a beard that probably required no more than weekly attention, if that. Kyle had a deep, manly voice, and I was sure it projected well on stage. He wore his hair in the same random, uncombed gelled style that Tim wore, and it actually made him look rather rugged. His handshake was that of a confident man, not a boy, and he could easily have passed for twenty-one or twenty-two in the right light.

Mont and Ter, as we had observed the weekend before, were right at home in new company. They immediately engaged the boys in conversation, and it wasn't long before Rick had all of us in stitches with his wisecracks. Everybody seemed at ease with everyone else, and it didn't take me long to know that that was going to be a good party. Ter had made a delicious cheese ball, and Rick had put out

some mixed nuts and a bowl of olives for us to munch on before dinner. Tim took Kyle back to see his new room, but they were back in the den in less than five minutes.

Rick excused himself to take care of chores in the kitchen. After fifteen minutes he started putting dishes of food on the counter that separated the kitchen from the part of the den we referred to as the breakfast room. I got up to help him, but he shooed me out of the way.

"See if anybody needs a beer or something," he said.

I did as told. In five minutes Rick made the announcement:

"Come and get it, guys."

There was the usual reticence of nobody wanting to be first in line. Kyle stepped up, saying, "Hell, I ain't shy," and started the line moving. Tim was right behind him. Rick and I brought up the rear.

The game started, and everyone ate. There wasn't a whole lot of conversation at first, but, once everyone had finished eating, conversation started up. One of the great things about watching a game with friends is that you can watch it and still talk. We all quieted down for the legendary commercials, of course, and some of them were pretty good. As usual, the beer commercials were some of the best. I saw Kyle and Tim slip out the kitchen door into the garage, and Rick saw it, too. He mouthed "the smoker" to me, and I grinned. They came back inside in about ten minutes.

I had often found Super Bowl games less than exciting. When the two best teams in the NFL go at it, the offense has trouble against the defense of both teams. There is the occasional spectacular play, as there was that night, but the Patriots made everyone gasp with their forty-eight-yard field goal in the last seconds of the game.

At one point Mont went into the kitchen for a beer, and I followed him.

"Having fun," I asked.

"The best, man. I wish Terry could cook like Rick. That meal was fantastic," he said.

"Yeah, I thought it was good, too, but that cheese ball was damn fine, too," I said.

"It looks like my brother may have made a new friend. That Mike guy seems really nice."

"He is, Mont. I've known him for three years, and he's a great guy." Pause. "Is Fred gay?"

"Isn't it obvious, Kevin?"

"No. That's why I asked you," I said.

"Yes, he is. He was in a relationship since he was as old as those two boys in there, and his partner was killed in a diving accident last April. He was pretty well devastated, and he hasn't dated anyone since then. I sure hope he and Mike can get together."

"I probably need to turn in my rainbow flag. I've had lunch every day for three years with Mike, and I was never sure about him. So much for gaydar, I guess."

Mont laughed. "Some have it, and some don't. You * do * know that Tim and Kyle are gay, don't you?"

"Yeah. But I had to be told," I said.

"Well, at least you know. That Kyle is a hottie, for sure, and Tim is as cute as he can be."

Just then there was a cheer from the crowd in the next room.

"Shit, we probably missed the best play of the night," Mont said. He put his hand on my shoulder, and the two of us went back to the game.

When the game was over, everybody hung around for a while. It wasn't long, though, before the reality of the work week and school week intruded itself into our gathering, and everyone was gone by 9:30. Everyone, that is, but Kyle. He and Tim helped Rick and me get the kitchen cleaned up. When we were finished cleaning, I took Rick by the waist and kissed him on the lips. It was a chaste kiss, and it was something I had done a million times. The difference that night was that Tim and Kyle froze and watched as I did it. The potential for embarrassment was enormous, I then realized, until Rick destroyed the awkwardness.

"Okay, who's next," he said.

Kyle looked at Tim, and Tim just shrugged. Then Kyle grabbed Tim as I had grabbed Rick, and he planted a healthy kiss on his lips. It was no more passionate than our kiss had been, but it lasted several seconds longer. Tim broke it by pulling back.

"What are you doing, Kyle," Tim demanded.

"I've wanted to do that ever since the camping trip, Tim, and I know you've wanted it, too." Then, turning to us, Kyle said, "Mr. Rick and Mr. Kevin, can we talk to you guys?"

"Only if you lose the `mister,' Kyle," Rick said. "I'm Rick, and he's Kevin."

"Okay, Rick. It's a deal. I felt pretty dumb saying `mister,' but I wasn't sure, you know what I mean?"

"Yeah, we do, Kyle," I said, "and that's a credit to you and your parents. How old are you, anyway? You look like a man, man."

Rick laughed at my "man, man" sentence structure, but the boys didn't react.

"I'm sixteen. My birthday was in November."

Kyle smiled a perfect smile. God, he's gorgeous, I thought.

Back in the den, we all took seats. I lit up a smoke, my second of the day, and Kyle got the most needy look on his face.

"Do your parents know you smoke, Kyle," I asked.

"Oh, yeah. They're cool with it. They both smoke."

"Well, light up, buddy, if you want to," I said.

It took him about five seconds to retrieve his crumpled box of smokes from the pocket of his jeans and to fire one up. I halfway expected Tim to light up as well, but he didn't.

"I want to thank y'all for inviting me tonight," Kyle said. "I'm probably going to remember this night the rest of my life."

"Yeah, that mac and cheese was awesome, wasn't it," Rick said.

I knew he said that to make us laugh, and, ordinarily, I would have, but I sensed Kyle was talking about something much more important than macaroni and cheese, so I kept quiet.

"Yeah, it was, Rick, but that's not why this night was so special to me," Kyle said.

I marveled at that kid's poise.

"Tonight was special to me because it was the first time I've ever been with a group of gay men." He turned to Tim. "I know I told you I wasn't sure I was gay, but that was a lie. I've been sure I'm gay since I was twelve years old. But I didn't want to be gay, Tim, and I've spent a lot of time worrying about it since then. A lot changed for me on the camping trip last week, but tonight made me realize I don't have anything to be ashamed of because I like guys."

"Why did tonight make you realize that, Kyle," Rick asked.

"Cause everybody was just so normal, Rick. And so friendly, and so at ease. Everybody here tonight was gay, right?"

"Yeah, as it turned out, but we didn't know it when we invited them," I said.

"You didn't? I thought gay guys could spot other gay guys," Tim said.

"Apparently, some can, Tim, but Rick and I couldn't. We've known you for a year, and we didn't know you were gay until yesterday, when your dad told us," I said.

"Your own dad outed you, Tim?" Kyle was obviously horrified at the idea.

"I asked him to. I wanted to stay with Rick and Kevin while he's gone, and I wanted them to know," he said. "I would have been too embarrassed to tell them."

When Tim said that, Rick jumped to his feet.

"Whoa!!!!!"

The boys looked like they were afraid of him, all of a sudden.

"Both of you have said tonight that you were ashamed or embarrassed about being gay. You can't ever be ashamed of being who you are. Are you ashamed of being white? Are you ashamed of having a dick? Are you ashamed of being an American? Sure, I've been ashamed of some things that white people have done to people of other colors, and I've been ashamed of what some guys have done with their dicks, and I've been ashamed of what Americans have done to other people. But I've never been ashamed of being white, of being male, or of being an American."

"Have you not ever been ashamed of being gay, Rick," Kyle asked.

Rick sat down and calmed down. "No, I haven't, Kyle, but I might be a special case. My father is gay. In college, my mother got pregnant with me, and my father married her. That was what was expected in the 1970's, and I'm sure he was ashamed of being gay, too, and so he was glad to have a kid on the way. But they divorced right after I was born, and he was never a part of my life. My mom raised me by herself, with the help of my dad's parents, and all my life she let me know, somehow, that it was okay to be gay, if that's how it turned out for me. Well, that's exactly how it turned out for me, and I never was ashamed of it."

"When did you first realize you were gay," Tim asked.

"I was probably twelve. Maybe eleven. Maybe thirteen. I don't really remember a specific instant when I had a revelation or anything, Tim. I probably always knew at some level that I was different from most," Rick said.

"What about you, Kevin? How old were you," Kyle asked.

"I was a good bit older," I said. "Probably twenty. No, not probably. I was twenty. But I want to get back to something Kyle said earlier. Kyle, why did tonight make you realize you didn't have to be ashamed of being gay?"

"Because everybody was so normal, Kevin. Everybody was, like, 'I'm a guy watching the game.' That doesn't make much sense, I know, but it was just so ordinary, so normal. Hell, y'all were no different than my dad and his friends. See, that's what bothered me about being gay. I just want to be normal, ordinary, just a guy."

"That's what we are, Kyle. Just guys," Rick said. "And I'm just a guy who is dragging ass right now. This has been a whole lot of fun, but I've got to get my tired ass in bed, guys."

"Yeah, and I need to go home. Damn, I only have fifteen minutes to get home," Kyle said. "Thanks, again, for everything, Rick and Kevin. Tonight has been one of those milestones you hear about. Good night."

Kyle shook hands with Rick and me. When Tim offered his hand, he took hold of it, but he didn't shake it.

"Walk out with me," he said to Tim.

Tim looked at us for permission, or something, and Rick said, "Go."

We left a lamp on for Tim to find his way to his room, and Rick and I went to our room silently. It was almost eleven o'clock, and I was sure Rick was exhausted. We brushed out teeth, took off our clothes, and got into bed.

"This was quite a day, wasn't it, Babe. Quite a weekend, really," Rick said.

"Don't run tomorrow morning, okay? Sleep till seven. Will you do that for me," I asked.

"I'm ahead of you there, Babe. I already reset my clock. It was a good party tonight, don't you think?"

"Yeah. The food was wonderful. I think everybody had a good time," I said.

"I think they did, too. There's a lot I want to talk about, but not right now, okay?"

"Okay, Baby. I love you," I said.

"I love you, too." He kissed me goodnight and was asleep thirty seconds later.

I woke up to go to the bathroom around two o'clock, and I discovered the house was cold. I had

opened a couple of windows during the party to let some fresh air in, and I forgot to close them before we went to bed. The temperature had evidently taken the plunge the weatherman had predicted, as a cold front made its way through.

When I finished in the bathroom, I slipped on my briefs and went into the den to close the windows. Then I went down the hall to the thermostat to turn some heat on. I noticed light coming from under Tim's door. He must have fallen asleep reading, I thought. I used to do that routinely when I was a kid, and I still did it occasionally. As I adjusted the thermostat, I heard noise coming from Tim's room. I listened intently to it, and I thought I heard someone crying.

I tapped on Tim's door, and I heard a startled grunt.

"It's me. Kevin. Can I come in."

"Yes."

He was lying face down on the spread. He was wearing only briefs, and I was sure he must be cold. He had obviously been under the covers at one point, though. He didn't look at me, but he was sniffing in the final stage of what must have been an intense cry.

"What's the matter, buddy," I asked. "Why aren't you under the covers? It turned cold, but I just put the heater on."

I moved toward the bed and sat down on the corner near his head. He looked at me, and his face was wet with tears.

"Are you okay," I asked.

He didn't reply.

"Are you missing your dad," I asked. Tim was a pretty macho kid, but he seemed very fragile and vulnerable right at that moment. I tried to be gentle.

He nodded.

"Come on. Get under the covers and get warm," I said. I felt his hand, and it was icy.

"I wet the bed," he said. He blushed and looked away from me. I didn't know if he was a chronic bed wetter, but I had heard or read about kids sometimes reverting to more infantile behaviors when they suffer a significant emotional jolt. It certainly isn't beyond a kid Tim's age to have that kind of reaction to having his dad jerked away from him suddenly, I thought.

"It's okay, Tim. It's no big deal. Accidents happen all the time, man. Here, let's see what the damage is."

He turned over to get out of bed, and I could see that the front of his briefs was wet. It wasn't very much, though. I pulled back the spread and top sheet, and there was a small wet spot about eight inches in diameter. It didn't look like urine, though, and, when I touch it, I realized what it was.

"You didn't wet the bed, Tim. You had a wet dream, man. It happens all the time. No biggie, for sure."

"I know," he said.

"Let me get something," I said. I went into the bathroom next to his room and got a towel to cover the wet spot and a wet washcloth for him to use to clean himself up. Back in the room, I spread the towel on the sheet and handed him the washcloth. "Here. Clean yourself up and put on some fresh underwear."

He got some briefs from the dresser and pulled the soiled ones down. He was facing the bed, apparently unconcerned that he was in my line of vision. I averted my eyes, but not until I noticed he still had a partial erection. No shame between his legs, I thought, and then I immediately felt guilty for thinking that.

"Were you crying because you had a wet dream, buddy," I asked. If he had any conflicts about that, I wanted to clear them up on the spot, but I certainly didn't want to embarrass him any further.

"No. It woke me up, though, and I started thinking about my dad. That's why I was crying."

"Come on and get back in bed."

I checked the vent in his room, and the damn thing was closed. I stood on a chair and opened it, and the warm air from the heater started flowing in.

"Kevin, I'm sorry to cause you so much trouble," he said.

"I don't even want to hear that, Tim. I got up to pee and noticed it was cold. I closed the windows we left open last night, and then I walked down the hall to turn on the heater. When I heard you crying, I thought you might need me, is all."

"I do need you, Kevin. Can you stay for a minute, please?"

God, how could I possibly say no to that request?

"Sure, but lie down so you'll go back to sleep," I said.

He lay down. I was chilly, so I got under the covers with him.

"I was crying because I was thinking about my dad getting killed in the war. If he does get killed, what would happen to me? I'd have to go to a homeless shelter or an orphanage," he said.

His concerns certainly weren't amusing, but his choice of words was. I stifled a chuckle, though.

"No, you wouldn't. You'd stay right here. You'd be our son."

"What?"

"Your dad didn't tell you what we did?"

"No. What did you do?"

"First of all, Tim, he's not going to die. He's a couple of thousands of miles away from combat, and he's in no more danger there than he would be driving down the highway or skiing behind a boat. Probably less."

He was listening intently, but he didn't say anything.

"But before he left, he changed his will. He named Rick and me your guardians, just in case something bad does happen. He didn't think it was going to happen, but it's Navy regulations. He had to do it."

"So I'll be taken care of by you guys, if something happens?"

"Absolutely, dude. We'll be here for you. Don't worry about that."

That seemed to satisfy him, and he was quiet. I hoped he'd fall asleep soon so I could get back to sleep. A few minutes later, he started again.

"Kevin?"

"Hmmm?" Jesus, I thought, this isn't a sleepover, Tim. We both have full days tomorrow.

"Did you like Kyle? He really, really liked you and Rick."

"Yeah. I liked him a lot. And I know Rick did, too."

"When we went outside as he was leaving, we kissed for a long time. With tongue. He showed me how. I had never done that before."

I knew he had been through a lot in the last two days, and I wanted more than anything to help him work through his sexuality, too. But I wanted to do it at two o'clock in the afternoon, not two o'clock in the morning.

"Did you like it," I asked.

"I liked it a lot. A whole lot, in fact. We both got hard."

"Umm hmmm," I said.

"Do you and Rick get hard when you kiss?"

"Yes, we do, Tim. That's a perfectly natural reaction."

"You sound like you're real sleepy," he said.

"I am. Let's be quiet now, okay. We'll talk tomorrow, okay?"

"Okay. I love having you and Rick as my big brothers. Thank you for taking care of me."

"We love having you as our little brother, too, Tim. Good night."

"Good night, Kevin."

I went to sleep in his bed. He had his alarm set for 6:30, and he bounded out of bed when it went off. While he was in the bathroom, I went back to our bed. Rick was just waking up, but I knew we had another thirty minutes before our clocks went off.

"Where have you been," he asked me.

"Tim needed me last night, and I fell asleep in his bed. I'll tell you about it later."

"Okay, babe," he said.

As badly as I wanted to go back to sleep for a few minutes, I knew I was awake for the day. Rick was propped up on his elbow, looking at me. When I opened my eyes, I got one of those "you're my whole world" smiles. I smiled in return.

"Was Tim scared last night," he asked.

"Yeah, but scared over losing George. He had a wet dream and it woke him up. He started thinking about what would happen to him if George died, and it made him cry. I thought he would never stop talking, but I had to reassure him that we'd take care of him. Apparently George didn't say anything to him about his will. I guess he didn't want to worry him or make him think he might not come back."

"Was he okay with us being his permanent guardians if something happens," he asked.

"He was thrilled. Right before I went to sleep he said he loves having us as his big brothers."

"What did you say?"

"I said we love having him as our little brother. Oh, and apparently Kyle is a smoker in more ways than one," I said.

"Oh, yeah? What happened?"

"Nothing, really. They kissed outside when Tim walked him out, and they both got hard."

Rick giggled.

"He asked me if we both get hard when we kiss."

"What did you tell him," Rick asked.

"I said that I get hard but that you don't because you're impotent."

In an instant, a pillow crashed into my face. I started laughing, and he did, too.

"Do you want me to prove to you right now just how wrong that statement is," he asked.

"Of course I do, but we don't have time," I said.

"I know. Let's get up."

"Okay." We got up, made the bed, and started our day.

Rick could shower, shave, and dress faster than any man I'd ever even heard of. He wore a uniform that consisted of a casual shirt and Dockers slacks, and he could get into (and out of) it in an instant. He was already dressed and in the kitchen making breakfast by the time the alarm clocks went off at seven. Tim was sitting at the breakfast table with a glass of juice when I came out.

"Wow, Kevin, man, you look goooooood," Tim said.

"Thanks, Tim. You look good, too," I replied. I wondered if he had ever seen me before in a business suit and tie.

"What about me? Do I look good," Rick asked as he put a huge platter of scrambled egg whites on the table.

Tim looked at Rick appraisingly and said, "Doesn't Kevin look good, Rick?"

I laughed.

"You little ape," Rick said, good naturedly.

"What is this stuff, Rick," Tim asked, referring to the eggs.

"It's scrambled eggs. What does it look like?"

"Why is it so pale?"

"It's a special product that's made only from egg whites, no yellows. The pale yellow must be food

coloring or something. It's good. Try it."

Tim put a serving on his plate. Next, I helped myself, and Rick took most of what was left. I saw Tim eye his portion, and I smiled.

"He eats a lot, Tim," I said in a stage whisper. Then, "Are you all set for school?"

"Pretty much. I didn't get all of my English read this weekend, but I'll be able to finish the chapters during first period."

"What time does school start," Rick asked. I knew because Tim had told me the afternoon before, but I hadn't mentioned it to Rick.

"It starts at 7:30, and it's over at 2:30," he said.

"What time do you catch the bus," I asked.

"I'm going to start riding in with Kyle, if that's okay," he said.

"Sure. I don't have a problem with it," I replied.

"Neither do I," Rick said. "I'll show you how to get your own breakfast, in case we're running late some mornings. We're off to an earlier start than usual today because I didn't run. I don't cook every day, either. A lot of days we just have cereal. Or I do. Kevin eats at work, most days."

"What time do you run," Tim asked.

"I'm usually out of the house around five minutes after five," Rick replied.

"When do you get back from your run?"

"Usually, right at six," he said.

"So what do you guys do until you leave for work?" Then his eyes got big, and he blushed. He smiled a knowing smile, and Rick winked at him. He looked at me for confirmation, and I smiled and nodded slowly. All three of us burst out laughing.

"Every day," he asked eagerly.

Rick and I looked at one another. At that moment I was really glad he and I had talked about Tim and sex.

"No, not every day," I said. But almost every day, I thought.

"Do you guys take showers together," he asked.

"Umm hmm," Rick said around the eggs in his mouth.

"Cool. That sounds like fun," he said.

"It is," I said.

"Kevin, you saw my penis last night, right?" Then, when I didn't respond, "Right?"

"Yes, I saw it, Tim. I wasn't trying to, though."

"Oh, I know. So, what did you think?"

Rick started laughing at my obvious discomfort at that moment. "Yeah, Kevin, what did you think? Is it as big as mine? Is it as big as yours?" Rick moved his hands apart to suggest something well beyond human proportions. He winked at Tim, and the little rascal winked back at him. I suddenly realized Rick now had an ally in teasing me, and I knew the fun had only begun.

"What I thought was...[long pause to build suspense] you said school starts at 7:30, Tim."

Just then a horn sounded, and Tim jumped up and grabbed his backpack.

"We'll get you next time, Kevin. Bye. I love you guys," Tim said as he was leaving the house.

"Bye. We love you, too," we said in one voice. By then he was probably already in Kyle's car.

"So what does his dick look like," Rick asked.

"It's big. I'd say he's got a good seven or seven-and-a-half inches. Maybe more. It's also not cut."

"Was it hard," he asked.

"Half hard," I said. "Why are you so interested in what his dick looks like? Hmmm, pervert?"

"You know better. It's just that I'm curious, like every other guy on earth. Besides, I like dicks."

"I've noticed."

We both laughed, and then we started picking up the breakfast table.

"I think we've got a major cutie on our hands here, Babe," Rick said, as he was loading the dishwasher.

"I know we do, Babe. He was really cute last night when he was telling me about kissing Kyle. He blushed when he told me they both got hard."

"I can't believe how open he is," he said.

"I know, but I think we should encourage that, don't you? It might get a little uncomfortable for us sometimes, but I thought we handled it well this morning, don't you?"

"Yeah, I agree we handled it well, and I agree we should encourage his openness. And, Babe, I won't let the teasing get out of hand."

"I know that, and I suspect you'll be in for your share, too. Oh, by the way, do you think we should go to the school and show them our guardianship papers?"

"That might be a good idea. I can't do it today, though. Probably not this week, either. What about you?"

"I could go over there this morning. Let me call and see if that's something they even want us to do."

I looked up the number for the school and placed the call. They would, indeed, like to have photocopies of the guardianship papers for Tim's permanent record. I told the lady on the phone that I could be there at nine, and she patched me through to the principal's secretary. It turned out the principal was free at nine, too, so I had an appointment. I hadn't been in a principal's office since the seventh grade, but that time I was actually looking forward to it. I would be committing my first act as a parent, and it was a little exciting.

Chapter 5

I got to my office a few minutes before eight. After saying hello to the secretary I shared with the four other salespeople, I checked my phone messages and scanned the contents of my e-mail in-box. There was nothing that couldn't wait until I got back from the school.

At 8:45 I told the secretary where I was going and that I'd probably be back in about an hour. He asked me why I was going to a high school, and I told him I had become a father over the weekend. He and his wife were expecting their first child in a few months, and he was very interested in kids.

"You guys have been married a little over a month, and already you have a high school kid," he asked.

I chuckled. "I'll explain when I get back. I don't want to keep the principal waiting."

The school was huge, and it looked brand new. They were still working on the fine arts auditorium, and I saw a crew of builders around what appeared to be a newly-constructed stadium. The lobby and reception areas were big, and they didn't look anything like the high school I had gone to. I told the receptionist who I was and why I was there, and she called someone while I had a seat in one of the leather chairs in the reception area.

About a minute later a very attractive middle-aged woman walked up to me.

"Mr. Foley," she asked.

"That's right. I'm Kevin Foley."

She extended her hand for a handshake.

"I'm Sally Ortega, the principal. Welcome to Beachside High School. Let's go to my office."

I followed her to her office. I entertained the fantasy that that place had once been a bank and we were in what used to be the bank president's office. Ms. Ortega asked me to sit, and she moved behind her desk.

"I hope you won't be offended, but you seem rather young to be a foster parent," she said. She had a kind of permanent half smile that made her seem like an extremely warm person. I liked her already.

I briefly explained everything that had led up to that moment.

"You said you have joint guardianship. You and your wife?" She had no doubt noticed my wedding ring and had drawn the obvious conclusion.

"No. Me and my partner. My male partner."

"Did you bring his papers, too?" She was totally matter-of-fact about my male partner, and I wondered if it was just professionalism or if she was personally comfortable with the concept.

"Yes," I said.

"If you'll let me have those, I'll get them copied," she said.

She glanced at the top paper and must have seen Tim's name.

"Oh, for heaven's sake. I know Tim. What a neat kid!"

"Thanks, we think so, too."

"What do you do for a living, Mr. Foley?"

"I'm a sales manager for the hotel that's part of the Surfside Resort. Rick, my partner, manages the golf courses there. Here's my card, and here's Rick's card. They have our work numbers, our home number, and our cell numbers. We're both pretty easy to get in touch with."

"Thank you. I'll make sure these get into his permanent folder."

She picked up the phone and pressed a button.

"Gail, I need for you to make some copies for me and pull a student's folder."

In an instant, the door opened and a woman I assumed was Gail came in. She took the papers and glanced at them.

"Do you need Tim's folder, Sally?"

"Yes, please."

Gail left.

"Mr. Foley..."

"Please call me Kevin."

"And please call me Sally. Kevin, we don't have many parents who are gay."

"I'm not surprised," I said. I wondered where that conversation was going. It was making me a little nervous, and I cursed myself for feeling that way.

"And there are even fewer attractive, young, gay professionals associated with Beachside."

I nodded. What the hell is going on here, I wondered.

"We have a few gay and lesbian students, including a couple of athletes, who would truly benefit from having a mentor like you and, er, Rick, is it?"

"Yes. Rick."

"I wonder if the two of you could see your way clear to volunteer an hour or two of your time every week to work with one or two of them?"

"Whew. I was wondering where you were going with that," I said. I immediately relaxed.

"I'm sorry if I made you uncomfortable. My son is gay, and I tend to forget that not every gay man knows where I stand."

"No problem. I'm flattered that you would ask me to be a mentor, and I know Rick will be flattered, too. But I think he and I are both going to have our hands full learning how to be parents, if last night was any indication."

"Did something happen to Tim last night?"

"He woke up in the middle of the night and got very scared that his father won't come back from the Indian Ocean. It took me about an hour to get him relaxed enough to go back to sleep."

"Oh, poor baby! Thank God you were there for him. Kevin, what you just told me lets me know that you'd be a perfect mentor. Not that you'd be called on in the middle of the night, of course."

We both laughed politely.

"Well, I'll definitely think about it."

"Good. Please do. And if you can't spare the time to be a mentor, perhaps you and Rick would be willing to speak to our GSA or attend some of their events."

"I'm sorry. GSA?"

"Forgive the jargon. It's a bad habit. It's the Gay-Straight Alliance. It's a student organization of straight and queer kids. Their goal is to help develop tolerance for diversity on campus and in the community. We have right at a hundred members."

I whistled softly, and I could tell she was proud of that statistic.

"Well, sure. I'm kinda surprised. I've never heard of that organization."

"Really? Where did you go to college, if I may ask?"

"Florida State."

"Oh, my. FSU has a huge GSA in Tallahassee and a fair-sized one on the campus here. I'm surprised you didn't cross paths."

Gail came back with a folder and copies of my documents. Sally copied the phone numbers on our cards onto the folder. Then she made a couple of brief notes on the cards themselves and put them in her phone file. She handed the documents back to me, and I put them in the pocket of my suit coat.

"It's been a pleasure meeting you, Kevin. I look forward to meeting Rick soon, too. From the little you've told me, you fellows remind me of my son and his partner. Perhaps you'll meet them some day."

"Do they live here," I asked.

"Oh, yes. They own the White Cap Restaurant. Do you know it?"

"Yeah. Very well. Is your son Paul?"

"No. He's Benny. Paul is his partner. So you do know at least one of my sons. Small world."

"Small town," I said.

"You've got that right," she said with a chuckle. "Goodbye, and please think about what we discussed." She extended her hand.

"I will, and it was a pleasure to meet you."

"Same here," she said.

I had lunch later that day with Bruce, James, and Mike, as usual. We spent the first five minutes talking about the Super Bowl, which everyone had watched, then Bruce said he wanted to tell us about his surfing trip. We all wanted to hear what he had to say, of course, but I had some of the biggest news of my life to share with my three best friends, and I wanted time to talk, too. Mike said he had some news, too. We decided to let each guy talk for ten minutes, uninterrupted except for relevant questions.

Bruce had had fun on his vacation, but the waves weren't as good as he had hoped they would be. The boat was small, and it rolled constantly. The food was excellent, and the other guys were fun.

When it was my turn, I told them all about Tim. James was expecting his first child, and Bruce and Mike were childless.

"Leave it to the fag to get the first kid," Bruce said. We all laughed.

After I finished, it was Mike's turn. We could tell by the way he was acting that the laughter and crude jokes that usually characterized every conversation we had weren't going to happen while he spoke.

"You guys are my best friends. Bruce, I've known you the longest, and I think you and I spend more time together than you and Christy do. I should have done this a long time ago, but I want to do it now. Guys, I'm gay."

Bruce said, "So?"

"And I've met a guy that I like very much and who likes me," Mike said.

"Fred," I asked. He smiled and nodded.

There was general celebrating of Mike's news. Mike was the quiet one of the group, but we all genuinely liked him. Mike worked as a programmer for a huge insurance company, and he telecommuted from home. He joined us almost every day for lunch, and he and Bruce shot pool almost every day after work. As far as I knew, that was the sum total of his social life. I was really happy he and Fred had taken a liking to one another, and I was glad I had played a part in getting the two of them together.

"I guess it's them against us now, Mike," I said.

Bruce and James both said, "No way."

The rest of the day at work went by as usual. Mike called, and we chatted for a while, but mostly I looked forward to going home to be with my two guys.

Rick was in the den watching the local news when I got home. I kissed him hello.

"You didn't want to work out tonight," I asked.

"Naw. I wanted to come home," he said.

"Are you feeling okay," I asked. The pine pollen had started to fall, dusting the cars and everything else in yellow. Rick seemed to have an allergy to it, and the year before he had developed a painful cough from it. I hadn't heard him coughing recently, but I wondered if the pollen was bothering him.

"Yeah. I'm fine. Do I look sick," he asked.

"No, but it's pine pollen season. You remember what happened last year, don't you?"

Without warning, he sneezed three times in rapid succession.

"Maybe I spoke too soon," he said, and grinned.

"Take an antihistamine. Do you still have some," I asked.

"I'll take one before I go to bed. That stuff makes me so sleepy I'll be out in no time. Do you feel like eating leftovers from last night?"

"Sure, but don't go to any trouble. We can just forage like we usually do."

"What about Tim? Shouldn't he have a regular family meal," he asked.

I thought about that for a minute. Rick and I had developed the habit of eating our main meals of the day at breakfast and lunch. Dinner was usually only a snack, and we didn't even sit at the table to eat it. I had no idea how the Murphys had done their eating, so I didn't know if Tim was used to a large evening meal or not.

"Let's ask him what his preference is," I said. "Maybe we can work out some kind of compromise."

I called Tim into the den, and he came down the hall grinning from ear to ear. He seemed genuinely happy to see us.

"Hi, guys," he said. "What's up?"

"Sit down and talk to us, man," I said.

"How was school today," Rick asked.

"It was good. Real good, in fact. I had lunch with Kyle today."

"Oh, yeah? What did you guys eat," Rick asked. I knew he was on a fact-finding mission about Tim's eating habits.

"We ate at the Starfish. They have a great lunch buffet, all you can eat for \$4.50, and that includes your drink. I've been eating there all year with my friends, but today it was just Kyle."

I wasn't certain, but I thought I detected a slight blush.

"So you had a pretty big lunch," Rick asked.

"Oh, yeah. That's why I started doing that. My dad hates to cook, and I don't know my way around the kitchen very well, so he wanted me to eat a good lunch. It's only a dollar more than the school cafeteria, but you can get three times as much, and the food is ten times better. I'm used to just having something like a bowl of cereal and maybe some fruit at night. But whatever you guys do is fine with me."

Rick and I grinned at each other.

"What's going on? Did I say the wrong thing," he asked.

"No. You said exactly the right thing," I said. "We were just talking about dinner and if we should change because you're here now. We do exactly the same as you. Rick usually works out right after work, so he doesn't get home till around seven. I join him a couple or three times a week. We basically just snack at night, too."

"Cool," he said. "You asked me about school. How was work?"

I told them about my meeting with Principal Ortega.

"You just came out and told her you're gay," Tim asked. There was wonder and disbelief in his voice.

"Not in so many words, but it would have been obvious to her, anyway."

"How could it have been obvious? Nobody can tell you're gay," Tim said.

"Think about it, Tim. I have joint guardianship of you with another man. I'm wearing a wedding ring, so I couldn't very well claim Rick was just my roommate. And I wouldn't have tried to fake it even if I hadn't been wearing my ring."

"Do you guys tell everybody you're gay," he asked, still in disbelief.

"No, buddy, we don't," Rick said. "When it's just one of us by ourselves, nobody would think to ask if we are. When we're together, we don't do things like hold hands walking across the mall parking lot or steal a kiss while we're waiting in line for a movie. Most straight couples our age aren't all over each other in public, and we aren't either. But if someone asks, or if we find ourselves in a situation like Kevin did this morning, we tell."

"Tim, we don't flaunt our relationship, but we also don't go out of our way to 'be careful,' either. You and Kyle and other gay teens do need to be careful, though. The beach is a pretty liberal community, but there are neighborhoods across the bridge in town where having a gay couple on the block would start a holy war," I said.

"What about my friends? Won't they find out," Tim asked.

"Probably," I said, "but not necessarily." I told them about Mike's big announcement at lunch and that I had known him for three years without knowing for sure he was gay. "He called me this afternoon, and we talked for a while. Apparently, Fred went to his townhouse to shoot pool after the party last night, and they're going out to dinner and a movie together tonight."

"I like Mike," Rick said, "and I like Fred, too. I hope it works out for them, if it's in the cards."

"I know what you mean," I said.

"I love talking to you guys about this stuff," Tim said. "My dad couldn't have been better about it when I told him about me, but I can't imagine talking to him like this. He just doesn't know what it's like to be gay, does he?"

Rick and I chuckled.

"No, but we damn sure do," Rick said. "And there's no question you might have that we won't try to answer, about sex, about being gay, or about anything else. Don't ever be embarrassed to ask, okay? There are a million gay guys your age who would give anything to live with two gay guys like us, so take advantage of your opportunity."

"Kyle and I were talking about that at lunch today. Would it bother you if he did stuff with us sometimes? He feels really comfortable with you two and with your friends."

"Kyle seems like a good guy, Tim, and he's always welcome here," I said.

"Well, sometimes I won't want to share you," Tim said.

How cute is that, I thought.

We quickly fell into a routine. The next morning, Rick got up at five o'clock for his run, and we

made love when he got home, just like we usually did. Rick and I met at the gym after work on Wednesday night that week, and on Thursday night he went to a meeting of his running club. Tim belonged to a couple of clubs at school, and Kyle brought him home on days when he had meetings. Actually, Kyle was pretty much Tim's chauffeur, which worked out really well, given our work schedules. Kyle was at the house when I got home from work Thursday night, and he seemed just a little nervous when he and Tim came out to the den from Tim's room. I noticed a little bulge in both boy's pants, but, of course, I didn't comment.

"Hi, Kevin," Tim said when he entered the room.

"Hi, Tim. Hi, Kyle." Tim and I hugged briefly, and Kyle wanted to shake my hand. That was cool. A bit unusual, I thought, but cool. We all sat down, and we made small talk about our day.

Rick came home in about ten minutes and kissed me hello. Then he greeted the boys. He went into our room and changed into jeans and a casual shirt, and then he rejoined us in the den.

"Kyle, you've been burning a lot of gas giving Tim rides, man. We need to help out with that," Rick said.

"No, you don't. I live in the next block. It's not out of my way," he said.

"I didn't realize you're a neighbor," I said. I made a mental note to talk to Tim about an allowance. He was spending \$4.50 a day, plus a tip, I hoped, on lunch, in addition to other expenses a guy his age was bound to have. I also wanted to make sure he had a few bucks in his jeans to treat Kyle and his other friends, now and then.

In a few minutes, Kyle said he had to leave. Tim walked outside with him, and he was gone about ten minutes. Tim went straight to his room when he came inside, and Rick and I looked at each other and smiled knowingly.

"Have you ever seen anything cuter than those two," Rick asked.

"I don't think so. Well, besides you, anyway." He grinned.

He got up and got something to eat. When he finished, he left for his meeting. I changed my clothes and ate a snack. Then I checked my e-mail. I had nine messages, including a few from some dear friends in Washington state. I wrote back to them and told them all about Tim, my experiences at the school, and all the rest that was going on in our lives. Then my brother called.

"I expected you to call during the game the other night," I said.

"I couldn't. They took my damn cell phone away from me. All this security bullshit is really getting on my nerves," he said. "At least you and I don't have to fight the fucking war."

"Did Mom and Dad tell you about Tim," I asked.

"Yeah. When do we get to meet him?"

"I don't know yet. But soon."

"Well, he's a lucky little fucker. That's all I've got to say about it. I won't ride you and Rick about being gay in front of him, so don't worry."

"Don't change a damn thing, Craig. Rick made the point that this is a chance for him to learn how a normal gay relationship works, and your teasing is a part of it. Just be your usual obnoxious self."

"Do you think you'll get any flack from anybody there about having him," he asked.

"I hope not." I told him about my encounter with the school principal.

"Well, it's all perfectly legal, and all. Y'all couldn't adopt him, though."

"I know, but it won't come to that."

"Well, let's hope not."

I asked Craig a few legal questions about guardianship. I pretty much already knew what he told me, but it was good to hear it from him. After some more small talk, we said goodbye.

Rick got home around nine, right after I got off the phone.

"You're early," I said.

"It wasn't very interesting tonight. They were watching video of a tri in California. Besides, I didn't want to miss anything here."

We both took our shirts off and got into our usual position on the sofa. I turned on the TV, and we relaxed in each other's arms. We had decided that we could still do our cuddling in the den if we kept our pants on while Tim was still awake and we didn't do anything overtly sexual. It wasn't as good as it was in briefs or nude, but that was a tiny sacrifice compared to the joy Tim was giving us.

Around ten o'clock, Tim came out in just his briefs to tell us goodnight. Neither of us had seen him nude since I had seen him his first night with us, but he wasn't shy about being around us in just underwear. Rick moved off me when Tim came out, and we both sat up on the sofa. Tim sat in the leather chair, and I put the TV on mute. I figured he had something on his mind, and I wanted to address the money issue, too.

"Ready for bed, buddy," Rick asked.

"Yeah, just about. Can I ask y'all something?" I noticed the "y'all" for the first time.

"You know you can, Tim. What," Rick asked.

"Would it be all right if Kyle spent the night tomorrow night?"

"Of course," I said.

"Oh, hell, yeah," Rick interjected.

"Thanks. I already asked him if he wanted to, and he said he does. Is that all right that I did that?"

"Yeah, it's okay this time, but from now on ask us first, okay," I said.

"Do we need to call his parents," Rick asked.

"No, but he said his mom might want to call you guys, er, y'all."

"That's fine. Sure," I said.

"Do y'all have phones at work? I mean, I don't know how to get in touch with you during the day if I needed to."

"Jesus Christ," Rick said, "how dumb can we be?"

We both whipped out our wallets and gave him one of our business cards. We explained about all the numbers on them.

"I'm sorry, buddy, but it's actually Kevin's fault. I wanted to do this last weekend, but he said no."

From the look on his face, I knew that comment pushed Tim's "let's tease Kevin" button.

"Don't y'all ever get tired of picking on me," I asked.

"No," they said in unison.

"Well, let's cool it for right now because I have some other things I want to talk about," I said.

"I do, too," Tim said.

"You go first," I said.

"Okay. Would it be okay if I use your computer sometimes? I've been checking my e-mail at school, but I really don't have time to write very long letters to my dad."

"You can use it any time you want to, Tim. Except when one of us is on it. But I have a better idea. What if we get you an Internet connection of your own in your room? It's not all that expensive, and you might need some privacy now and then."

His eyes got big.

"I have a cable modem on my machine," I said, "so we can probably even get a discount by having two connections. Either way, I'll call tomorrow. It'll probably be hooked up by tomorrow night. Is there any way I can get in touch with you to let you know if they can come tomorrow afternoon?"

He thought for a second. Then, "Yeah. Yeah. You can call Kyle on his cell phone and tell him. He'll tell me. Oh, man. This is great."

"You got anything else," I asked Tim.

"No, that's all," he replied.

"Here's what I want to talk about." Rick didn't know what was coming, and he looked at me quizzically. "Money. How much money did your dad give you every week for an allowance, Tim?"

"You beat me to it," Rick said. "That's what I was going to bring up next."

"Great minds, Babe. Great minds," I said.

"I really didn't get an allowance. We kept a jar of cash in one of the kitchen cabinets, and I would just take what I needed."

"Did that work out okay," I asked.

"Not really. Half the time he would forget to put money in it, and I'd have to borrow from a friend for lunch," Tim said. "I hate doing that."

"I don't blame you," Rick said. "That sucks. I like the idea of an allowance."

"Yeah, I do, too, but with a twist," I said. "We're just as likely as George was to forget to get cash. Have you ever used an ATM machine?"

"No. Do you use one, Rick," he asked.

"All the time. I couldn't get by without them," Rick said.

I saw the twinkle in Tim's eye that I had observed just before he descended on me with a put-down or a tease, and I couldn't wait.

"If he can use one, Kevin, I know I damn sure can," Tim said.

Tim and I laughed.

"Hey, what is this? Are you guys ganging up on me," Rick asked.

"Yep," Tim and I said at the same time.

"No fair," Rick said.

"Excuse me," I asked.

Then all three of us laughed.

"Okay, back to the ATM. I figure sixty bucks a week is about right for you, Tim."

"You think that's enough, Babe," Rick asked. Tim didn't react.

"I figure, six-fifty a day for lunch, tax and tip included. You do leave a tip, I hope. If you don't, start tomorrow. That's about thirty-five dollars a week, just for lunch. A movie is, what, fifteen? That's fifty bucks right there. Cokes are sixty cents, maybe seventy-five. Arcade money, money to rent a movie if he feels like it, money for tickets to games and plays and shit at school. You won't be rich, Tim, but we don't want you to not be able to do stuff all the other kids are doing. Are you okay with this, Babe? I know we haven't talked about it, and I know we should have."

"I'm definitely okay with the concept, Kevin, but seventy-five a week is what I had come up with when I thought about it. He needs to be able to have a little extra to take care of his friends when they need a buck, you know? And to save up for something he wants."

"Good points. Can I talk to you in our room for a minute?"

"Sure."

In our bedroom, I said, "Babe, I am soooooo sorry I didn't talk to you about this before I brought it up."

"Kevin, it's okay. But it kind of pissed me off a little bit, you know?"

"Yes, I do know. I could tell. I spoke before I thought it through. I should have talked to you first about this."

He put his hands on my shoulders and looked at me.

"Are you about to cry over a fourteen-year-old's allowance?"

"No, but I'm about to cry over the fact that I hurt your feelings."

"Jesus Christ! You annoyed me, Kevin. You didn't hurt my feelings. Many things you do annoy me, but you never, ever hurt me. You'd never do that, and I think you know it. I know it, if you don't. Now let's go back out there and get this over with so I can drag your ass back in here and show you just

exactly how I feel about you."

"Okay. It's seventy-five a week. Right?"

"Right," he said.

When we went back out to the den, Tim had a face on him that was a mile long. We both noticed it instantly.

"What's the matter, man," Rick asked.

"I made you guys fight, didn't I?"

It looked like he was pretty close to tears, too.

"We didn't have a fight, Tim. Kevin pissed me off a little, and he read it in my body language or on my face or whatever. That kind of thing happens all the time when two people are as close as we are, man. The important thing is that Kevin noticed it and did something about it. Kevin didn't do anything wrong. He just maybe didn't think it through all the way. Sometimes I'm the one who pisses him off, but we work it out, okay, buddy? And it had nothing to do with you, Tim."

We spent a little more time talking about allowances and ATM's and all of that, but I was eager to get to bed. We wrapped it up quickly.

Rick made good on his promise to show me just exactly how he felt about me that night. I hoped we didn't keep Tim awake.

Chapter 6

(Tim's Perspective)

When I got in bed after the Super Bowl party, I was tired, but I didn't go right to sleep. I had too much on my mind.

I thought about taking my dad to catch his plane. I had wanted to be strong and not cry because I didn't want to embarrass him in front of all the people. I couldn't help it, though, and I was sure everybody had thought I was a baby. Rick and Kevin were wonderful to me, though. I really loved those guys, and I was looking forward to living with them.

The party that night had been fun. That Mont guy was really good looking and nice, but Terry was downright handsome. I liked it that they both talked to Kyle and me like we were grownups, and both of them said some really funny stuff. Fred and Mike were really nice, too, and I had the feeling something was going on between them. Something good.

I was really glad Kevin told me I could invite a friend. I would have had an okay time without Kyle, but having him there made it much better. He really liked everybody, especially Rick and Kevin, and I hoped they'd let me invite him to do some stuff with us sometimes.

I almost freaked out when Kyle kissed me in the kitchen. I wished Kyle and I had kissed longer, but he made that up to me when I walked him to his car.

"Walk out with me," Kyle said.

I looked at Kevin and Rick, and Rick just said, "Go."

"This has been so great tonight, man," Kyle said. "Thanks for asking me."

"You're welcome. I had a really good time, too," I replied.

"Did I embarrass you when I kissed you in the kitchen," he asked.

"More surprised me than embarrassed me. When Rick said 'Who's next,' I thought he was joking about who wanted to kiss him next, not about which two people would kiss next," I said.

"He did mean it that way, but I saw a chance I had been waiting for, and I took it. Did you like it?"

"Yeah. I liked it a lot. How about you," I asked.

"I liked it a whole lot," he said.

"I just wish it had been longer, that's all."

"Do you want to do it again? Out here," he asked.

"Yeah, but let's go into the garage. I promised my dad I'd be careful."

"Okay."

The garage door was closed, but the side door was unlocked. We went inside. It was real dark, but we didn't trip over anything. Kyle started off by putting his hands on my shoulders. He drew me into him and found my lips with his. He didn't do it rough or hard at all, and it felt really good to hold him. In a few seconds, I felt his tongue on my lips. I had read about tongue kissing, but I hadn't ever done it. I parted my lips, and he put his tongue into my mouth.

I rubbed my tongue on his, and the feeling was incredible. In about ten seconds, my dick was hard. I hadn't really expected that to happen, and I hoped Kyle wouldn't notice it. In another few seconds he pulled me closer to him, and my dick was rubbing against him. He moved slightly, and, all of a sudden, I felt his dick against me, and it was just as hard as mine. We rubbed against one another as we kissed.

I pulled back, and I was breathing hard. Kyle was, too.

"What's the matter," he asked.

"I'm about to shoot," I said.

He stepped back a little.

"Me, too. We better stop, but, oh, it feels so good," he said.

"I know. You're a good kisser. Have you kissed many people before?"

"A couple of girls," he said.

"Did you get hard when you kissed them," I asked.

"No. Only with you," he said. "I wonder if straight guys get hard when they kiss girls. They must."

"I don't know. I wasn't expecting it, though."

"Tim, I want to ask you something," he said.

"What's that?"

"I like you a lot, man. I really like you a lot. Can we be boyfriends?"

I didn't have to think that one through. "Yes," I said immediately. "I want us to be boyfriends." I leaned in and kissed him again. We got some tongue into it again, but not like we had been doing before.

"I could do this all night, but I need to go home. I'm probably going to dream about you and about kissing you," he said.

I was flattered.

"Me, too," I said.

We walked to his car. After he got in, I leaned in to kiss him again, but it was quick and without tongue. He smiled and drove off.

Rick and Kevin were already in bed when I went inside. I wondered what they were doing, but I didn't dare listen. Instead, I brushed my teeth and took my clothes off. My dick was still rock hard. I took care of that pretty quick, thinking of Kyle as I did it. I said some prayers for my dad, and I even said one for Kevin, Rick, and Kyle. I went to sleep quickly.

I had a dream that night. I was in bed with Kyle, and we were naked. We were both hard, and we were kissing like we had done that night. Kyle was pretty aggressive, and he crawled on top of me. Our hard-ons were touching, and Kyle started moving back and forth on me as we kissed. I knew I was getting closer and closer to shooting, but I didn't care. I wrapped my arms around his body and pulled him tighter. Then, I felt it start deep down inside of me. I shot a load of juice.

I woke up startled. I was on my stomach, and I could feel the wetness turning cold. The whole room was cold, in fact. I lay there for a few minutes thinking about my dream. I was still very hard. I pulled my briefs down below my balls and ground myself into the bed, pretending the bed was Kyle. It didn't take me long to flood it again. In a minute, the wet spot on the bed started getting cold again, and I

was suddenly embarrassed by what I had done. It was my first night in my new home, and I had messed up the bed on purpose. I turned on the bedside lamp to see what I had done. I knew Kevin and Rick would be mad at me, and I loved them too much for that to happen. Then I wondered if they would make me leave. Where would I go? I panicked and started crying. It wasn't loud, but it was intense.

I decided to cover up the evidence, in case one of them came in to wake me up the next morning. I got out of bed and pulled my underwear back into place. I lay down on my back to avoid messing up the comforter. It was cold in the room, but I didn't care. I continued crying. Then I heard a tap on my door. I let out a little noise because it startled me. Then Kevin said it was him and asked if he could come in. I rolled over onto my stomach so he wouldn't see my wet underwear.

Kevin was so cool when he figured out what had happened. He didn't make me feel bad or anything. In fact, he was as gentle and understanding as my dad had been the first time I had had one of those dreams and had gotten scared by it.

I told Kevin I was crying because I had been thinking about my dad dying in the war. I felt bad about lying to him about why I was crying, and I made up my mind that I would never lie to him again. But I was too embarrassed to take it back.

We talked for a while, and he told me it was natural for Kyle and me to get hard when we were kissing. He said he and Rick did, too. We talked for a few more minutes. I was glad I would be their kid if my dad died in the war, but Kevin said that wouldn't happen. I pretty much already knew that. After a few minutes, he fell asleep in bed with me. He turned the heat on, but having him in bed with me made me warm, too. I wished Rick was there with us, with me in the middle. Then I went to sleep.

The next morning on the way to school, I told Kyle about my dream about him. He thought it was really cool.

"Would you like to do that with me sometime," he asked.

"Would you," I asked in return.

"Yeah. I would. But let's don't talk about it right now, okay? Hearing about it made me really hard, and I don't want to shoot in my jeans before school. What a mess that would be!"

I laughed, and we changed the subject to how nice the guys had been to us at the party.

That afternoon, on the ride home, he said, "I did something in school today that I've never done before. I started thinking about that dream you had while I was in geometry, and I shot a load in class. I didn't touch myself or anything."

I laughed, and he laughed, too.

"Damn, man. What did you do," I asked.

"I went to the restroom to see if I could dry out my underwear. I didn't even ask permission to leave the room. I just ran out of there. I pretended to heave like I was going to puke, though, so I wouldn't get in trouble. I went into one of the stalls. My briefs were soggy, so I took them off and flushed them down the toilet."

"No shit? Wow!"

"No shit. About a minute later this guy came looking for me from my class. Mrs. Sawyer had sent him. Why she sent that character, I'll never know. She probably just wanted him out of class. He didn't ask if I was sick or anything. All he did was ask to bum a smoke. I gave him one, and I had one myself. Then we went back to class. She asked me if I needed to check out, and I said I was fine. The guy sitting next to me smelled the smoke on me. He grinned and gave me a thumbs up."

"Damn, Kyle. You're going to get in trouble doing that," I said.

"I know. I never smoke at school. That's way too sleazy."

We were quiet for a minute. I was mentally seeing Kyle flushing his underwear down the toilet.

"Have you ever done that," he asked.

"Smoke at school? Hell, no."

"No, I meant just shoot like that, without doing anything."

I debated answering his question. Then I said, "Yeah. A couple of times. Once in church."

"No, you didn't," he said.

"Yes, I did. My dad was sitting right next to me."

"What the hell did you do," he asked.

"Pretty much the same thing you did in class today. Only I didn't flush mine. I threw them away in the trash can."

"Oh, my God! That's too much," he said through his laughter.

We got to my house, and he pulled into the drive way.

"You want to come in," I asked.

"Yeah, I want to. But I can't. I've got a dentist appointment. I've got to get my teeth cleaned. Tomorrow, though, okay? Call me tonight, if you can."

"I will. Thanks for the ride."

Kyle spent every afternoon after school with me at my new house. Wednesday afternoon I had a meeting of the Key Club. I was one of only ten freshmen who had been asked to join, and I felt really honored. Kyle waited for me and drove me home. I could have walked home, but I was glad he waited.

Kyle had to be home every day by 5:30, and we made the most of the time we spent together. We always had a good snack as soon as we got home. Then we'd move some stuff from my house to my new house.

We usually spent some time shooting hoops in the driveway of my old house. We'd play one-on-one, and Kyle would let me win. I knew what he was doing, but I didn't say anything. When I won, he'd brag on me like I was the best athlete in the world.

The afternoon would always end in my room, on the bed. We'd kiss up a storm. We always got hard, too. On Thursday, time slipped up on us, and Kevin came home before Kyle left. We were really hard when we went out into the den. I know Kevin noticed, but he didn't say a word about it, or even show that he saw. Nobody could be cooler than Kevin and Rick. Nobody.

That night I asked them if Kyle could spend the night on Friday night. They said he could. They also said they were getting me a cable modem for my room. That was a big excitement for me.

Then something bad happened. We were talking about my allowance. Kevin seemed to have it all worked out, but I could tell Rick didn't like what he was hearing. They went into their room, and my stomach turned to jell-o. They were having a fight, and it was over me. I knew I hadn't done anything wrong, so I wasn't worried about that, but all I could think of was my two guys busting up over it. When they came out, they seemed okay.

I was going to get seventy-five bucks a week, which seemed like a lot of money to me. Kevin had figured it out, though, and I probably needed that much. I decided I would be really careful so I'd have some money to buy Kyle and them nice Valentine's gifts.

We all went to our rooms after we finished talking. I brushed my teeth, and got ready for bed. Then I decided I wanted a glass of milk and a few cookies, so I headed back to the kitchen. When I passed their room, I heard Rick say, "Come here to me, you little sex monkey." Kevin giggled. Then I heard them kissing. One of them, Kevin, I think, moaned pretty loud. I got hard listening to them, but I felt guilty eavesdropping. I ate my snack and got into bed. I wished I could hear what was going on, but their room was clear on the other side of the house and I couldn't hear a thing. It made me feel really good about how much they loved one another, and I was glad the business about my allowance hadn't made them mad at each other.

The next morning I was really excited when I woke up. Kyle would be spending the night with me, and I couldn't wait. I told him they had said yes to his spending the night, and he grinned from ear to ear.

"Are we just going to sleep in the same bed," he asked, "or are we really going to sleep together," he asked.

I didn't know what he meant, so I asked.

"You know. Sleep together. Like have sex."

I'm sure I blushed when he said that. "Well, I was thinking about maybe doing that stuff in my dream and all, you know."

"Goddamn, Tim. I've been thinking about that fucking dream of yours all week, hoping we could do that some time. I'm all for that, man."

We rode the rest of the way to school in silence. I thought about what it would be like to hold him and see him naked and feel him against me. When we got out of his car, I saw that he was just as hard as I was. We both adjusted ourselves so we could walk into the school unnoticed.

That was one of the weirdest days of the school year for me. I thought about Kyle and what we were going to do that night all day long. I stayed hard pretty much all day, but I didn't want to shoot in my pants during class like he had done. When I knew I was getting close, I would focus on what the teacher was saying or on the work I was supposed to be doing, so I never popped off. My underwear was moist all day, though, from the pre-cum I was oozing. I told Kyle about it at lunch, and he said he was doing the same thing. I wished we could have kissed right there.

Kyle and I each had only one period after lunch, from one to two-thirty. When I got to class, a friend of mine that I had played baseball with the year before wanted to talk to me before the period started.

"What's up with you eating lunch with that sophomore every day," David said.

"What do you mean?"

"You know what I mean. That Kyle guy. Why don't you eat with us anymore?"

I knew who "us" was. It was David and two other guys I had become good friends with the year before. David had introduced us to the Starfish. He had an older brother named Les, short for Leslie (figure that!), and Les had told David about the buffet. David said his name Lez, instead of Les, and that just about cracked me up every time I heard it.

"He's a new friend, man. I'm just trying to get to know him. He's my neighbor, and he gives me rides to and from school every day."

"Well, he's got me kind of jealous, you know? You were my friend first."

"Jesus, David! I'm still your friend," I said.

"I know you are. But just don't get too friendly with him, okay?"

I didn't know what to think.

"Dave, what's this about, man," I asked.

"Figure it out, Murph," he said, and then he walked off.

Before he left, I happened to glance down at David's crotch, and he was obviously hard. I assumed he was having one of those random boners I got all day long, but something about the way he said "Figure it out" made me feel uneasy. I really didn't know what he had been talking about. I really liked David, and he and I had clicked as the third base-shortstop combination the year before. I planned to go out for freshman baseball the next week, and I hoped he would, too.

The last period of the day dragged unbelievably. It was English. The teacher was real good, but, short of staging Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead, no teacher could keep a class of freshmen interested during the last period of the day on Friday. We had been studying Romeo and Juliet by Shakespeare. Every day we'd read some of the play out loud, discuss some questions she gave us, watch part of the video of it, and then have silent reading time to read whatever book we wanted. That day, I paid attention to the reading and the video because I thought Romeo was really hot. We skipped the discussion questions that day, and I, like just about everybody else, fell asleep during the silent

reading period. The announcements at the end of the day woke me up, and I was glad that period, and the whole school day, had ended.

When I got to Kyle's car, he was already there waiting for me.

"Kevin called me on my cell and left a message that the cable man will be at your house at four. What's that all about?"

"I'm getting a cable modem installed in my room, man. How about that?"

"Wow! That's cool. That's what we have, too. Have you ever used one," he asked.

"Yeah. On Kevin's computer. It's really fast, isn't it," I said.

We continued to talk about the cable modem all the way home.

The cable guy came and installed the new modem. Kyle and I fooled around with it a little while. He downloaded a program called Free Agent, and he showed me how to use it to get pictures and movies from the newsgroups.

"Wow, you get so many pictures so fast," I said.

"Yeah. A dial-up connection times out before you can get those big movies, too. This modem puts the Internet on a whole new level," he said.

We looked at some of the pictures we downloaded, and we made jokes about the guys. The pictures made us hard. I had my right leg crossed over my left knee, and Kyle put his hand on the inside of my left thigh. He started rubbing it a little. His doing that made my dick jump inside my jeans. I looked him in the face, and he smiled. Then he leaned over and kissed me.

"That feels so good," I said.

"Do it to me," he replied.

From there it didn't take long for us to do the things I had dreamed about. Kyle and I had sex that afternoon for the first time. We made a mess of the bed, but that was definitely something I could live with.

Rick was the first one home that afternoon, and we heard him doing something in the kitchen.

"Somebody's home," Kyle said. We were both naked in bed. We had pulled the comforter and top sheet all the way down, and we were just lying there looking at each other. We were both soft by then, but it was still fun to watch Kyle's dick. It moved around a little, sometimes getting a little bigger, other times getting smaller.

"It sounded like Rick's car," I said.

Neither of us made a move to get up.

"Do you feel different," Kyle asked.

"Yeah, kind of. It's sort of like you and I are more special to one another now, you know?"

"Yeah. You're the first person besides me to ever touch it. That's kind of special. It's sort of like we have a secret," Kyle said.

"I know. You're the first person to ever touch mine, too. Except maybe a doctor or somebody like that."

"Well, yeah, but that doesn't count. You're definitely the first one to ever touch it when it was hard. No question about that."

"Did you like it," I asked.

"Of course I liked it. Didn't you?"

"Yeah, I liked it. Can we do it again?"

"Right now," he asked.

"No. Later."

"Sure."

Rick tapped on the door.

"Hi, guys," he said. "Can I come in?"

Before I could answer, he opened the door and started in. He took one look at us on the bed and immediately slammed the door shut.

"Jesus, I'm sorry, guys," he said. "Oh, man. What a dumb-fuck thing to do."

"It's okay, Rick," I said. "I should have locked the door like you and Kevin told me to do. I just forgot. We're getting up."

Kyle giggled as we got out of bed.

Once dressed, we pulled the bed back together and went out to the den.

"Tim. Kyle. I am so sorry, guys. I'll never do that again. I promise." Rick seemed really upset by what had happened.

"It's okay, buddy," I said. I felt terrible that he felt so bad.

"So now you know," Kyle said.

"Yeah. True. `Course I did suspect it before," Rick said. "I guess that means you two are a couple."

"We're boyfriends," I said.

"Is Tim your first boyfriend, Kyle," Rick asked.

Kyle nodded.

"And I know Kyle's your first one, Tim," he said.

I nodded too.

"Well, guys, y'all are just as cute as you can be. Can I ask when your first time was?"

"It was today," Kyle said.

"Really!? Oh, wow. Man, I feel like we ought to have a celebration or something. Had y'all been talking about it, or did it just happen? Do you wish I'd mind my own business?" He grinned. I could tell he was genuinely happy for me.

"We talked about it some. You know that wet dream I had the first night I was here?"

"Yeah. Kevin told me about it."

"It was about him and me having sex. I told him about it, and we wanted to do it just like in the dream."

"Did it hurt," Rick asked. "I can tell you what to do so it doesn't hurt, if you want me to."

"Why would it hurt," I asked.

"We didn't do that, Rick. We just kissed and rubbed against each other. No oral, either," Kyle said. "I guess it wasn't really having sex."

It finally dawned on me what they were talking about.

"Hey, of course it was, man," Rick said. "Kevin and I started real slow, and even now we don't fuck or do oral every time we make love. A lot of our love-making is just kissing and touching and doing what you guys did. Every couple does what they feel comfortable doing. What they both feel comfortable doing."

"So you don't have to put your dick into the other guy for it to be real sex," I asked.

"Like I said, Tim, Kevin and I waited a long time before we did that. For us, it was giving ourselves to the other one totally and completely. We both knew we were in love and that the other one was the only person we ever wanted to be with. A lot of people don't wait that long, that's true. But for us it made it really, really special. And it still is really, really special."

"Does, er, you know, er, fucking feel better than what we did," Kyle asked.

"Jeez, I wish Kevin was here," Rick said.

"Why? Does he know more about sex than you do," I asked.

"No, but this is pretty special stuff we're talking about. I'd like for him to share it with me. With us."

"We can wait," Kyle said. "I'd like to hear what both of you have to say, anyway."

"If y'all don't mind, guys, I really would prefer to wait. There's a lot we can tell you about sex and love and caring for one another, but there's also a lot you can find out on your own. You guys are pretty special to us, and we want to help you feel good about yourselves and each other."

"Y'all have already made me feel good about myself," Kyle said.

"Me, too. No question," I said.

"Guys, one thing I noticed. It looked like y'all got your semen all over the bed. Tim, keep a couple of towels in your room, okay? It only takes a second to pull one out, but that sure saves time and effort changing the bed," Rick said.

"Do you want us to change the bed," Kyle asked.

"Well, that's kind of up to you, but I would," Rick said. "Do you know how to use the washing machine, guys?"

"I do," I said.

"Why don't you just wash the sheets, too."

"Okay," I said. "Rick, thanks for talking to us."

"No problem, buddy. None at all."

Chapter 7

Rick was by himself in the den when I got home, and he didn't even have the TV on. I kissed him hello.

"Hi, Babe," I said. "How was your day?"

"Hi. It was good. How was yours," he asked.

"Good."

"Do you want some coffee," he asked.

"Yeah. Please. Will you get it for me while I change?"

"Of course. Don't I always?" He gave me one of those heart-melting grins that I loved so much.

I went into our room to change, and Rick had cups of coffee for each of us when I returned. Drinking coffee together after work was a ritual we practiced whenever our schedules permitted, and we both took great pleasure in it.

"Where are the boys," I asked. I knew Kyle was there because I had seen his car. Then I remembered he was spending the night with us, so naturally he would be there.

"There in Tim's room. Changing the bed," he said.

"Changing the bed? Didn't the maid come today? The check is gone."

"Oh, yeah, the maid came," he said.

"So what happened? Did one of them get sick or something?"

"No. Our little boy became a man today, Daddy, and he and his boyfriend are taking care of the evidence." Rick was obviously delighted by what he was saying, and I felt a surge of...what? Pride?

"All right. I've got to have all the details," I said.

"Okay. I knew you would. I got home a few minutes after five. I changed my clothes and made coffee, as usual. I wondered if the cable guy had been here today, so I walked back to Tim's room to see.

"I tapped on the door, but I didn't wait for an answer. I opened it and got quite an eyeful."

"You just barged right in," I asked. That was totally out of character for Rick, who had been adamant about protecting Tim from embarrassment.

"Yeah. I wasn't thinking. I apologized to them, and they seemed okay with it."

"So, what did you see," I asked.

"They were both buck naked, and Tim was rubbing Kyle's chest. There was cum all over the bed

and all over them. I'm telling you, Kevin, if there are two cuter ones than them out there, I don't want to meet them," he said.

"Were they hard," I asked.

"No, they were soft, so I figured they had each shot a half dozen loads."

We both chuckled.

"So, er, is Kyle worthy," I asked.

"Oh, yeah. They're a matched set, only Kyle is cut."

"So, one of each, just like us," I joked.

"Yeah. They got up, got dressed, and came out here. We talked."

"What did you talk about? What did they say?" I was dying with curiosity.

"We talked about sex, of course. I find them a little naïve about sex," he said.

"Oh, yeah? Why's that?"

"Well, Kyle thought they hadn't had sex because they hadn't done oral or anal. I set them right on that score, and I told them about us and that we took it slow at first. They seemed willing to accept that."

"Well, that's good."

"I made a point of saying that different couples did different things but that it was important for both members to want to do something before they tried it. They got the message."

"It sounds like you did good," I said. "Daddy."

He chuckled.

"Rick, I'm not necessarily sure they're so naïve as they are inexperienced. I'm sure they've both been to gay porn Web sites, and most of what you see there is guys sucking and fucking. They need the kind of guidance they got this afternoon from you, and that's just a fact."

"Maybe you're right. Kyle asked a question that sort of ended our discussion. He said, 'Does fucking feel better than what we did.'"

"Why did that end the discussion," I asked.

"I told them that I wished you were here for that discussion. Tim asked if you know more about sex than I do."

I laughed out loud.

"And what did you tell them," I asked.

"I said no but that that was a very special conversation we were having and I wanted to share it with you. They were cool with that."

Just then I heard laughing in the hall, and then the shower went on.

"Shower fun," I said.

Rick and I both chuckled.

Rick clicked on the TV, and we watched the tail end of the national news.

"Oh, I almost forgot," I said. "Mont called today. He and Terry are going to a sports bar to eat and watch the opening ceremony of the Olympics. He asked if we wanted to join them."

"Jeez, I forgot the Olympics start tonight. That sounds like fun, but let's get the boys squared away first, okay?"

"Oh, absolutely. They're job one."

It took them about twenty minutes to finish their shower and to join us in the den. After our greeting, I said,

"Well, I hear two boys became men today."

They both beamed.

"Do you guys feel any different," I asked.

"Yeah, kinda," Kyle said. "We kinda feel like we've got a secret between us, a special bond that we don't have with anybody else."

"Yeah, we feel like we're joined a little bit, you know," Tim said. Kyle took Tim's hand in his and held it. How cute, I thought. Then I got up and sat on the arm of the chair that Rick was in. I took his hand.

"I know just what you mean," I said. The boys both smiled. "Have y'all got any questions for us?"

"I was wondering about, er, ...fucking," Kyle said. I was sure that word tumbled off his lips easily enough in other circumstances, but it was rather charming that he was reluctant to say it in front of us.

"You can call it `anal' or `anal sex' if you don't like to use the word `fucking,'" I said.

"Yeah. Anal. Does that feel better than what Tim and I did? Why do guys do it?"

"Do you guys know what your prostate gland is," I asked.

If they knew, they didn't respond.

"It's the gland in your body that produces most of what you shoot when you have an orgasm," I said. "Or, more accurately, when you ejaculate."

"I thought that stuff came from your, your, er, nuts," Kyle said.

"You can say any word you want to with us, Kyle. We're guys. We know how guys talk," Rick said.

"Actually, Kyle, sperm does come from your nuts, but sperm makes up a very small part of a load of cum. Anyway, when you have anal sex, the penis of the top guy, the one who penetrates the other one, rubs the prostate, and that feels very good. Most of the time that pressure and the pressure of having a dick in your ass, make the bottom guy's orgasm really strong."

"Have either of you guys ever stuck your finger up your ass while you were jerking off," Rick asked.

"Ewwww, gross," Tim said.

"Doesn't that hurt," Kyle asked.

"No, not at all," Rick said, "and Tim, don't knock it till you've tried it, buddy."

"Have you done that, Rick," Kyle asked.

"Yes, Kyle. I've done it to myself, and..."

"He does it to me, too. It really is pretty awesome, guys," I said.

"Why is it so awesome," Kyle asked. I could tell he was getting pretty interested in man-to-man sex. He adjusted himself, no doubt to accommodate his hard-on in a more comfortable position. I was hard myself, just talking about that stuff, but I didn't feel bad about it because the boys had a right to know about their own bodies.

"A couple of reasons. You can rub your prostate with your finger. It's maybe not as intense as a dick because it's not as big and you're controlling it. It's like when somebody else jerks you off. To me, that's always better than when I do it to myself."

The boys looked at one another, wide-eyed.

"Are we embarrassing you guys," Rick asked.

"No way! This is good stuff," Tim said. "Keep on."

"What's the second reason it feels good having a finger up your butt," Kyle asked.

"Well, you wouldn't know this unless you've done it, but your ass muscles contract rhythmically when you shoot. That's part of what shoots the cum out. It feels really good and really intense when those contractions happen," I said.

"Is that better when Rick has his dick in you," Tim asked.

"Yes, it is, buddy. His dick is fatter than his finger. Only slightly, but some."

Kyle roared with laughter, but Tim didn't seem to get the joke at first.

"Very funny, Dr. Ruth. Keep on," Rick said.

"Does the guy on the bottom cum just from getting fucked," Kyle said, obviously over his shyness about using "guy words."

"We both do, pretty much," I said.

"Yeah, we do," Rick said. "Some guys don't, though, apparently. You see in videos and such that the other guy has to jerk him off, or he jerks himself off while he's getting fucked. Sometimes you see guys getting fucked who aren't hard. That's never happened to either of us, either."

I glanced at my watch, and we had been at the sex lesson for forty-five minutes.

"Do you get shit on your dick when you fuck," Kyle asked.

"Sometimes," I said. "And your finger, too, if that's what you're using. Just wipe it off. It doesn't hurt. By the way, never stick anything up your butt, finger or dick or anything else, without a lot of lube. Do you have any, in case you need it?"

They shook their heads "no."

"We'll pick you up some tomorrow," Rick said. "In the meantime, there is a tube in the drawer of the table on either side of our bed. If you borrow one of them tonight, make sure it gets back where it belongs, okay?"

"Okay," Kyle said. "Thanks. What about condoms?"

"Good question, Kyle, but can we save that for another time? We're supposed to meet up with some friends to watch the Olympics. Even if you guys fuck each other blind tonight, it won't be a problem for you. You're both virgins, right? Or at least you were until a couple of hours ago?"

"Right," they both said at the same time.

"But we're not going to do that," Tim said. Then, looking at Kyle, "Are we?"

Kyle gave a very evil grin, and it looked like Tim got scared.

I knew Kyle was playing, but Rick wasn't taking any chances. His voice was kind, but it communicated that he really meant business.

"Kyle, not until he's totally ready, you understand? Not until he's begging you for it. Otherwise, I'll fuck you up, and I won't use my dick."

"Don't yell at him, Rick. He won't hurt me," Tim said.

"Oh, no, sir. I would never do anything to hurt this guy. Please believe me," Kyle said.

"I'm sorry if I came on a little strong, guys. But I really mean it. And, Tim, the exact same thing goes for you, man. Sex between two people who care for each other is more fun than you can imagine. Don't ever spoil that by being selfish and only thinking about your own pleasure."

"Rick, we know you're right. Thank you, guys, for talking to us. What do gay boys do who don't have friends like y'all," Kyle asked.

"Good question, Kyle. They fumble through, hurt each other, don't really understand what they're doing. Hey, fellas, we've got to go," I said.

We all stood up, and the boys walked over to us. Without saying a word, we had a grand group hug.

"Was I too tough back there," Rick asked, as soon as he had started his car.

"Not at all. I'm glad you said what you did, the way you said it. I was glad you included Tim in it, too. I think Kyle is the more eager of the two, but it applies to both of them."

"Well, good. I'm glad I didn't come across too heavy," he said. "Did I yell at Kyle? I didn't mean to."

"No, you didn't raise your voice. I think that's just an expression, Babe. You were great, and I was proud of you. You really care about that kid, don't you," I asked.

"Yes, I do. A lot. And you do, too, don't think I don't know that," he said.

We got to the bar in about ten minutes and located Mont and Ter. I ordered a beer, and Rick ordered water with lemon.

"I'm sorry we're late, guys," I said. "We had a little sex education gig tonight."

"You're not late. The show doesn't start until eight," Mont said.

"What's this sex education gig all about," Ter asked.

"You remember Tim and Kyle from the other night, right," Rick asked.

"Oh, sure. Cute kids," Mont said.

"Yeah, well they just became boyfriends this week, and this afternoon they had their first sexual experience together. Or with anyone, for that matter," I said.

"They told y'all about that," Ter asked.

"Well, I sort of walked in on them," Rick said. "We had told Tim to always lock his door when he had company. I tapped on the door, and I opened it before they told me not to. I won't do that again, even if it is unlocked."

Our waiter came for our order right then. He was a real hunk, but he was just the slightest bit effeminate. He asked if we wanted the bill in one big package or solo. Terry was taking a sip of his drink when he said that, and he started laughing and coughing at the same time. When we indicated we wanted the bill split up by couples, he said something like, "Ohhhhh. Good choices, guys." All four of us laughed.

"So, back to where we were. You caught them screwing, Rick" Ter asked, his grin a mile wide from the antics of the waiter.

"Oh, no," Rick said. "They were finished by then, but the evidence was all over the bed and all over them, too. They were pretty fucking cute, actually."

"I'll bet," Mont said. "So what did you do?"

"Well, I jumped out of there as fast as I could, apologizing profusely. They were cool with it, though."

"Were you just checking on them," Mont asked.

"Actually, the cable guy was supposed to come this afternoon to install a cable modem in Tim's room. I wanted to see if he had gotten there." Then, turning to me, Rick continued, "I still didn't get an answer to that question. Did you?"

"No, I don't know, either," I said.

"Was tonight like a safe sex thing or something," Terry asked.

"We didn't get that far. Tonight was much more basic than that," I said.

"This afternoon when they emerged from the den of iniquity," Rick said, "I talked to them. Kyle didn't think they had really had sex because there was no penetration, oral or anal. We had to get that worked through. Then, tonight, they wanted to know what's the big deal with anal sex, so we had to talk about that. You sort of take for granted what you've learned about sex over the years, and you forget how innocent guys like them really are."

"Well, I think what you guys are doing is fucking heroic, man," Mont said. "We'll have to get all of y'all out on the boat real soon."

"I can go! I can go!," Rick said. "Me, Kevin, and the spermlets."

Everyone laughed.

Our food came just then, and we turned our attention to it. The VOICE of NBC came on as we were finishing, so we turned our attention to that. We made small talk about our jobs, about sports, about the Olympics, about Matt Lauer (consensus: nobody would kick him out of bed), and about a hundred other topics. I thought about Kyle's comment about our Super Bowl party and how normal and natural the evening was.

We settled up our tabs around eleven.

"Do you guys want to stop someplace for coffee," Mont asked as we were leaving.

"Jeez, I'd like to," Rick said, "but I'm doing a long one tomorrow morning. We'll take a rain check, okay, guys?"

"A long one? A long what," Ter asked.

"Sorry. A long run," Rick said.

"How long is long," Mont asked.

"Twenty miles. Twenty-two. Something like that," Rick said.

"Jesus Christ! Is somebody chasing you," Terry asked.

We all laughed.

"Just a little compulsive disorder," Rick said. "Nothing major. I'll tell you about it some time."

"Well, good luck, and don't die."

"Thanks," Rick said.

We shook hands all around and said good night.

Light was coming from under the door of Tim's room when we got home. We looked down the hall and then at each other, and we both grinned. Rick ran the middle finger of his right hand into his mouth, and then he snaked it down the back of my jeans and underwear. He found my hole, and stuck it in.

"Ohhhhhh," I said. "You want some of that tonight, you little sex monkey," I asked.

"Yeah," he said. "I got horny as hell when we were talking with the boys earlier."

"God, I know it," I said. "Me, too. Don't run tomorrow."

"I'll just do ten or twelve tomorrow," he said.

"How many a week now," I asked.

"Well, I had been breaking a hundred, but this week was for shit. If I run twelve miles tomorrow, I'll be right at seventy-five miles for the week."

"Well, but it's not every week you become the parent of a fourteen-year-old, you know?"

"Good point. Now get your ass in there so I can demonstrate some of what you taught them tonight."

He swatted my butt, and I laughed.

Rick was gone when I woke up at nine o'clock the next day. I lay in bed for a few minutes, thinking about him and about how lucky I was to find him. I thought about him and how he related to Tim. Tim was mighty quick to defend Kyle last night when Rick was giving his little speech, I thought. Tim must really like that guy.

The urge to pee was getting stronger, and the woody I had woken up with was gone. I got out of bed, took care of my bathroom needs, and splashed some cold water on my face. It got my circulation going, and I felt good.

I went out into the den, and it was empty. I was still naked, but I didn't think the boys would be up. Even if they were, after what I knew they had been doing, seeing me naked would be no big deal.

When I got to a point in the room where I could see over the counter into the kitchen, I spied them. They were both in briefs, and they were obviously cooking. The coffee smelled great, and I wanted some immediately.

"Morning," I said.

They both jumped a little, startled. They both stared at me, checking me out up and down.

"Do y'all see anything you haven't seen before," I asked.

They both giggled and blushed.

"It's big," Tim said.

"Yeah. A shower, not a grower," I said. "Can I have some coffee, please. It really smells good."

They were all over each other getting me a cup of coffee. Tim tried to take it away from Kyle so he could deliver it to me, and Kyle gave him a hip bump.

"Shit," Kyle said.

He poured the contents of the saucer into the sink and topped off my cup of coffee.

"Cream and sugar, too, please. And a spoon," I said.

I watched what they were doing with pure delight. They were like two puppies trying to get the affection of their human. I noticed Kyle's physique, and the boy was built. The hair of both of them was flat on their heads, and I imagined the grease slicks on their pillows from the gel they wore.

They presented my cup of coffee and the cream and sugar like people presented the gifts at Mass. They stood there watching me.

"What are y'all doing in there," I asked.

"We're making breakfast. For you and Rick. Is he out running?" Tim was the spokesman.

"That's great, guys. Thank you," I said. "Sit down and talk to me. Did you guys do okay last night without us?"

They looked at each other and grinned.

"We did the finger, and you and Rick were soooooooo right," Kyle said.

"Yeah," Tim echoed.

I fixed my coffee like I liked it and took a couple of sips. There was a box of cigarettes on the table, and I lit one.

"I owe you a pack, Kyle," I said.

"No. Help yourself, Kevin," he said.

"So, you guys liked the finger trick, huh? It's not bad, is it?"

They both blushed a little and giggled.

"What's for breakfast," I asked.

"Don't you want to wait for Rick to get home," Kyle asked. There was concern in his voice.

"Oh, of course. I was just curious. I don't usually get this kind of treatment."

"It's not cooked yet, but it's going to be French toast, scrambled eggs, sausage links, and bacon. Does that sound good," Tim asked.

My stomach chose that precise moment to make a huge noise.

"Does that answer your question," I asked.

They both laughed.

"Do you know what they call French toast where I come from," I asked.

"Where do you come from," Kyle asked.

"New Orleans. They call it pain perdu. Lost bread."

"Why do they call it that," Kyle asked.

"Because they make it with lost bread. Bread that's stale and would have to be thrown away otherwise. The cooks there are very frugal. They hate to throw away anything, especially French bread that has gotten stale. So they make pain perdu and bread pudding with it."

"Have you been to Mardi Gras," Tim asked.

"About a million times. Did y'all know it's going on right now?"

"I thought it was last weekend and the weekend before," Kyle said.

"Naw, man. Mardi means Tuesday in French. It's this coming Tuesday. We had Mardi Gras parades here last weekend and the weekend before. In fact, Rick and I were in the parade two weeks ago. But that was just leading up to the real thing on this coming Tuesday."

"New Orleans has all the neat stuff," Kyle said. "The Super Bowl last week, Mardi Gras this week. I'd love to go there."

"And maybe you will, Kyle. With us." Pause. "Guys, Rick's going to want two huge glasses of water and a cup of coffee when he gets home. Do y'all want to get that for him?"

"Yes, sir," Kyle said. He and Tim jumped up to get the water and the coffee. I suggested they might want to wait to pour the coffee until he got home so it would still be hot. Kyle poured it back into the pot. Smart boy, I thought.

I finished my coffee and cigarette, and I went in and took a quick shower. The temperature outside was in the low 60's, but I knew it would warm up considerably as the day wore on. I put on shorts and a tee shirt. As usual for a Saturday, I didn't shave. I went back out just as Rick was coming in.

"Hi," I said and kissed him good morning.

"Hey. What the hell's going on here."

He had seen all the stuff in the kitchen and wondered about it, as I had.

"Sit down," I said.

Tim and Kyle were out in an instant with two glasses of water and a cup of coffee for Rick.

"Thanks, guys," he said. "What's going on?"

"Just be quiet and let them wait on us. They're cooking breakfast for us. Just relax and enjoy."

"What's this all about," he asked.

I whispered: "They did the finger last night."

He was right in the middle of a drink of water. He laughed so hard it came out of his nose.

"Shit," he said, and I laughed.

In about ten minutes they brought out the food. They had a huge platter of eggs (whites only) ringed with sausage. They also had a platter of French toast that had bacon draped across it in a cross-hatch pattern. It wasn't the most elegant presentation I had ever seen, but at least it had the concept of presentation. They went back and came out with a tray of jellies, syrup, and butter, and a pot of coffee. They set it all down and took their places.

"Er, guys, do you think we could have some plates, and maybe some silverware and napkins," I asked.

Tim backhanded Kyle hard on the shoulder, as they jumped up.

"I know. I'm sorry," Kyle said. It was all Rick and I could do to keep from doubling over with laughter.

They brought the stuff in, and we had a grand breakfast.

"What's going to happen today," I asked.

"I'm going to the nursery to see if they have any early spring bedding plants," Rick said.

"I'll go with you," I said. "Can you wait for me to get the groceries and the other stuff?"

"Sure. That'll be fun."

"We were thinking about doing some skate boarding today. We didn't know we both liked it until last night," Tim said.

"Kyle, will you spend tonight with us, too, please. I think our friends might invite us out on their boat tomorrow, and they want y'all to come, too."

As those words were leaving Rick's mouth, the phone rang. I answered it.

After the usual greetings, Mont said, "Do you guys want to go out on the boat with us tomorrow? We'll leave about 11:30."

"Absolutely, man," I said. "The kids, too?"

"Well, of course the kids."

"I thought so, but I was just checking."

We finished the conversation with the usual pleasantries.

"That was Mont. They invited us out on their boat tomorrow. I accepted. Did I do right?"

"Oh, wow," Tim said. "You guys do a lot of stuff, don't you?"

"Well, yeah, I guess," Rick said.

"I already told my parents I was spending the weekend here," Kyle said. "So it's all cool."

I went grocery shopping, stopped at an ATM machine for cash, and picked up Rick's cleaning. Rick was outside when I got home, and the boys were nowhere to be found. I put the groceries away and went out to see what he was doing. We had lost a good-size limb off one of the oak trees, and he had just finished cutting it up. I helped him move it to the fire pit behind a hedge of azaleas, which were beginning to come into bud.

Rick had become quite an avid gardener in the last couple of years. When I bought the house, it

had minimal landscaping that was put in by the builder. It looked fine to me, but it didn't suit Rick's taste. Since he managed two golf courses and a very large track of public land at the resort where we worked, it was second nature for him to be interested in the lawn. But he also got interested in flowers, and every spring and summer we had one of the nicest gardens in the neighborhood. The first year he tried his hand at vegetables, but the squirrels got most of the tomatoes while they were still green, and the rest of the stuff didn't produce very well. Part of the problem was the yard was very shady because of the trees.

We went to the nursery he used, but it was too early for there to be many bedding plants. He already had a nice crop of pansies and miniature snapdragons for color, so he didn't buy any of those. He picked out two Encore azaleas, the kind that bloom more than once a year, but those were his only purchases. Rick planted the shrubs when we got home, and I "helped" by keeping him company.

Rick bought a couple of movies for Saturday night. He and I got comfortable in our usual position on the sofa with our shirts off but our pants on. He called Tim and Kyle to see if they wanted to watch a movie, and they did.

"That looks pretty comfortable," Kyle said when he saw how we were sitting.

"It is," Rick said.

"Can we sit like that, too," he asked. He recognized the intimacy of the position, and he wanted our permission to do the same with Tim.

"Not on here, you can't," Rick said. "This is our place."

"Duh," Tim said.

Without waiting for permission, they both took their shirts off and got in the same position we were in, but on the floor. Kyle had his back against the sofa, and Tim crawled into his arms.

I hit the play button on the remote, and the movie started.

"I'm going to skip the previews," I said.

Rick, Tim, and Kyle said "NO!" in unison, so we watched them.

The movie was Hurricane Streets, and it was about a gang of teenaged boys in New York who had a clubhouse. They stole merchandise from stores and sold it on the black market to elementary school kids who were going to summer school. It had been a winner at the Sundance Film Festival in 1997, and, frankly, for \$4.95, it was a pretty good deal. I was sure we'd watch it more than once in the future.

The main character was a very good looking boy of sixteen. It was rated R, for violent content, but I knew Tim could handle it. There was a love interest on the part of the sixteen-year-old, but there wasn't any sex. Even the language was milder than what we heard around our house.

"Damn, that boy is fine," Kyle said about the sixteen-year-old.

"I know," Tim said.

"He's cute, too, but that one's a dawg," Tim proclaimed about two other characters.

Rick looked up and me and smiled. He was enjoying their reaction to the movie as much as the movie itself, and so was I.

We watched the movie, more or less in silence, with the odd "Did y'all see that?" and "Damn, that was cool" tossed in.

About fifteen minutes into the movie, Kyle said, "Kevin and Rick, do y'all ever get hard when you're sitting like this?"

"Yeah, sometimes," I said. "If you're uncomfortable, just change positions."

Rick put his hand on his crotch and slowly elevated his index finger to indicate an erection. Then he pointed down to the two boys and grinned. I grinned back and nodded.

We stopped the movie about half-way through so Kyle could take a bathroom break. I got up and made two bags of microwave popcorn and got everybody a coke. Kyle came back a few minutes later, smiling sheepishly and blushing slightly. We restarted the movie. I flicked my thumb over one of Rick's

nipples a couple of times, and he burst out laughing.

"Hey, what are you guys doing," Tim asked.

"Nothing. Watch the movie," I said.

We munched our popcorn, drank our cokes, and behaved like the All-American family of four, who just happened to all be queer.

We finished watching "Hurricane Streets" around 9:15.

"What else did you buy," I asked Rick.

"It's called O, Brother, Where Art Thou. It's supposed to be a re-telling of the Odyssey. It was nominated for a couple of Oscars," he said.

Kyle whispered something to Tim that I couldn't hear.

"We're real tired," Tim said. "We're going to go to bed now. Thanks for the movie, Rick."

"No problem, buddy. Glad you liked it," Rick said.

"Tim, remember the rule," I said. "You lock your door when you have company, and keep the noise down. Nobody wants to know what's going on in there."

"Kewwww-innnnnn," he said. They both blushed and wouldn't look at us, but they were both grinning.

"We're going to skip church tomorrow, guys. We've got to be at the marina at 11:30, and we like to take Sunday morning kind of slow. Tim, set your clock so you'll both be up," I said.

"There's no chance those two won't be...up," Rick said.

"Gaaaaaaa," Kyle said.

"Guys, you gotta know we're going to tease you, just like y'all tease us," I said.

"We know," they said at the same time.

"Night, fellas," Rick said. I echoed his good night, too.

"Good night, guys. I love you," Tim said.

"We love you too," Rick and I said in one voice.

"And you, too, Kyle," Rick said.

"Yeah, you, too, Kyle," I repeated. He grinned.

"I love y'all, too," Kyle said. Then the two of them went off to bed.

"Are you real tired," I asked Rick.

"Not too tired for what you want, you little sex monkey," he said with a grin on his face.

I gently pinched both of his nipples, and we went off to bed.

Chapter 8

I heard the boys scurrying around in the den and kitchen, and then I heard the unmistakable sounds of channel surfing on the TV. I could tell from what I could see through the window that the day was going to be beautiful, and I was really looking forward to being on the water with Mont and Ter and my family. At that particular moment, Rick was deep inside me, making my whole body hum with pleasure. He leaned down over me, and we kissed with the kind of passion that brought me over the edge.

"Uhhhhhhh," I moaned in a low voice.

He was an instant behind me. He lowered himself onto me, and I wrapped my arms around him in total engagement.

"God, I love you," I said.

"I love you more," he said.

"I know," I said.

He chuckled and then kissed me. It wasn't a passionate "let's make love" kind of kiss; it was the

"we're in this together forever" kind. We separated and used our handy towel to clean up.

"I wonder if it's as good for the kids as it is for us," I asked.

"Oh, no way. They're just horny. They probably race each other to see who gets off first," he said.

"Aren't you horny sometimes?"

"Nahh. I have to will it so that every cell in my body craves you. It's the old mind over matter thing I do," he said.

"I get your point. It was a stupid question," I said.

We lay in bed holding one another and not talking. Our bodies were touching in a hundred different places. Slowly, imperceptibly at first, Rick started to move over me. He carefully lined us up so that every part of the front of him was touching the corresponding part of me. We slowly brought our breathing into sync with one another, and, before long, I could feel his heart beating against my chest, as I knew he could feel mine. He very gently licked my ear, and I licked his. Neither of us moved, and we slowly, gradually melted into one another in spirit. Our mutual arousal grew between us, and, after many minutes of contact, we coated one another with the essence of our maleness. If I had died at that moment, my fulfillment would have been complete.

"Do you still love me," he asked in a whisper.

"Completely," I said.

After a quick shower and shave together, we went out to meet the day and the boys. They had gone to a nearby fast food place and gotten a stack of sausage biscuits. I knew Rick didn't want to eat that kind of food, but I also knew he'd toss down three or four of those grease bombs for no other reason than the boys were so proud of themselves for having gotten them for us.

"Did you fellas have a nice morning so far," Kyle asked with a leer.

Rick and I both laughed.

"The best, Kyle," I said. Rick leaned over and kissed me. I could feel the grease on his lips, as I'm sure he could on mine.

"You guys are so great," Kyle said. "I want us to be just like y'all when we get old."

"Hey, watch that 'get old' shit, boy," Rick said in mock indignation.

"Sorry, Mister Rick," Kyle said.

Rick and I roared with laughter.

"So, you guys ready for a day on the Gulf," I asked.

"Yeah. What kind of boat is it," Tim asked.

"I really don't know," I said. "We've never been out before. We haven't known Terry and Mont very long."

"Do you think we'll be able to ski," Kyle asked.

"The air is warm, Kyle, but the water temps are in the fifties, man," Rick said. "Your dick would chip off in water that cold."

"Is that how it happened to you," I asked in all seriousness.

Before Rick could even fully process what I had said, much less come back with a wisecrack of his own, Tim and Kyle both started chanting "uuuh, uuuh, uuuh, uuuh" and pointing their fingers at Rick. Rick started to say something, but he just laughed with the rest of us, instead.

"I love the way you guys tease each other about sex and shit," Kyle said.

I noted that he had wasted no time in taking Rick's "we're all guys, and guys talk like guys" advice to heart.

"If you think we're bad, wait till you meet his brother," Rick said. "He rags us unmercifully about being queer, but we get him about being straight, too."

Tim and Kyle suddenly looked uncomfortable.

"What," Rick asked. He clearly didn't grasp their discomfort, and neither did I.

"You just said the `Q' word," Tim said.

"The `Q' word? What, `queer,'" Rick asked.

"Yeah," Tim said. "Isn't that a hate word?"

"Not when I use it," Rick said. "That's what I am. That's what you are, too, buddy."

"Tim," I said, "have you ever heard two black guys joking around calling each other nigger?"

"Yeah. So?" Tim looked a little shocked that I had said the "N" word.

"Well, black people are a minority in this country," I said, "and they use that term among themselves to do at least two things, I think. First, to say, `You and I are brothers, and we don't offend each other if we call each other nigger. Nothing we say like that can piss each other off at one another.' Second, it's a way of saying, `Fuck you, white man. You can't put us down by calling us nigger anymore.' We're a minority that is often discriminated against, too. I think gay guys might use `queer' or `fag' or any of those names in the same way. Does that make any sense?"

"It does to me," Kyle said. "How'd you figure that out, Kevin?"

"He didn't figure it out. He read it somewhere," Rick said with mock derision.

"Yeah, I did read it somewhere. Tim, are you okay with that explanation," I asked.

"Yeah. My family all call each other `Mick,' which is a kind of bad word for the Irish in Boston. I think I understand. It's kind of the same thing," he said.

"Exactly," Rick said. "Now, you two little fudge-packers go get your shit so we can go."

"Fudge-packers," Kyle asked, apparently mystified.

"Fudge-packer wannabes?"

Kyle suddenly got the meaning of Rick's joke and burst out laughing.

"What," Tim asked.

"I'll tell you, Babe. Let's go," Kyle said.

In a few seconds, we heard Tim scream with laughter from his room.

Mont had told us where their boat was docked. We knew where the marina was, but it was huge. Knowing the location of the boat was a must.

We were walking from Rick's Trooper carrying a cooler, grocery bags, and back packs with clothes, swimming suits, and all the other stuff we brought. Coming from the opposite direction was a runner. I noticed he was shirtless, but he wore a pair of long, white sweatpants. He had on a pair of headphones. As he got closer to us, I noticed his dick flopping up and down inside the pants. The guy was a real looker, by anybody's standard.

He nodded politely as he ran past us. When he was well behind us and out of earshot, Kyle said,

"Damn, did you see that thing?"

"What," Tim demanded.

"His dick. It was flopping up and down inside his sweats. Man, that was totally awesome. Did y'all notice it?"

Rick and I both said that we had.

"No! I didn't see it," Tim said. "Awwww, man."

"He wasn't wearing a jock, Tim. His dick was just bouncing up and down because he was running. No big deal," Rick said.

"It looked big to me," Kyle said. "He looked as big as you, Kevin."

"Huh," Rick asked.

"We saw Kevin's dick yesterday," Tim said. "It's really big."

"There's a story here," Rick said, "and I want to hear it."

"Not really. I went out into the den naked. I didn't know they were up yet, but they were."

"Oh," Rick said. Then he chuckled.

"What did you say it was, Kevin," Kyle asked.

"I don't know. Uncircumcised," I asked. I really didn't remember what I had said.

"You said it was a something, not a something," Tim said.

"Oh, I said it's a shower, not a grower," I replied.

Rick chuckled.

"Yeah, that's it. What does that mean," Kyle asked.

"It means his dick is big when it's soft, but it doesn't get a whole lot bigger when he gets hard," Rick said. "It shows off well in locker rooms and such, but it doesn't grow all that much."

The boys giggled at that, and I landed an affectionate punch on Rick's bicep.

"Okay, okay. It grows, but it doesn't grow proportionately as much as some do. As mine does, for instance." I could tell Rick wasn't totally comfortable talking about our dicks as we walked down the dock, but he was too good a sport to say anything about it.

"What are we," Tim asked Kyle.

"We're growers, not showers," Kyle said.

"Mine doesn't get totally soft all that much," Tim said. "I wonder if Mont and Terry are showers or growers."

Rick and I were ahead of them. I put my hand on his arm to indicate I wanted us to stop. The boys saw us holding up, and they stopped, too. Rick and I turned to face them.

"Guys," I said, "Mont and Terry are great guys, but we really don't know them all that well yet, okay? I doubt very seriously that they would mind a question like that, Tim, but let's be kinda cool on the subject of sex today, okay? Sex, and things like, 'Oh, guys, how big are your dicks?'"

Both boys laughed.

"What you're saying is, don't ask any questions that would embarrass them, y'all, or us. Right?" Kyle got it.

"Exactly, guys. You know you can ask or say anything when it's just the four of us," I said, "but that's family. Tim, do you understand what we're saying?"

"Yeah, big brother," he said, and he flashed an unbelievably cute grin.

Mont and Terry were standing on the dock in front of what I could only think of as a yacht. The "boat" was enormous, and it had the polish and gleam of a cruise ship. I'm sure I must have looked stunned.

"Jesus Christ," was all that Rick could say about it.

"Hi, guys," Mont and Ter said in unison. They shook hands with all of us, and they made sure they knew which one was Tim and which one was Kyle. They remembered their names, but they just wanted to get them straight.

"It's going to be a great day," Ter said.

We put the cooler on the stern deck.

"Why don't you put your packs in the stern stateroom," Mont said, "and then we can have a little tour."

I had been on some very fine sailboats with my friends when I was a kid, but even the best of them looked like rafts compared to that thing. Mont led us around. There was a stateroom that had a queen size bed in it. That room had it's own bathroom, or head, as Mont called it. There were two other staterooms that had four bunk beds each. There was another head between those two rooms, but it was a good bit smaller than the one for the stern stateroom. All of those rooms were down a flight of stairs, and I wondered if they were below water level. Then I noticed the portholes and knew that couldn't be.

"This is for the captain and the mate," Mont said of the tiny room that was right off the wheel house on what appeared to me to be the main level. As small as it was, the captain's room had a head,

too, and I thought you could probably shit, shower, and shave all at the same time in that place. That level also had a galley; an entertainment room with a TV set, stereo, VCR, and DVD player; and a "mess," or dining room.

"Why do these tables have these rims around them," Kyle asked.

"Well, Kyle, if you're trying to eat in rough seas, that rim keeps the plates and other stuff from sliding off the table," Mont explained.

"Cool," Kyle replied.

"Is that why the beds have a rail," Tim asked.

"That's right," Mont said. "Very observant, Tim. Those rails keep you from falling out of bed in rough seas."

"You mean like in a hurricane, or something," Kyle asked.

"Well, we wouldn't take her out in a hurricane, but sometimes the seas in the Gulf or the Atlantic can get pretty heavy, even if there's no storm. Did y'all notice that everything in here is fixed to either the deck or a bulkhead," Mont asked. He noticed that the boys didn't seem to know what a bulkhead was, so he said, by way of explanation, "a wall."

"Cool," they said at the same time.

The third level was a kind of observation deck. In fact, that's what Mont called it. It had a canvas awning over it, and it was amazingly spacious.

"How big is this thing," Rick asked.

"It's fifty feet, ten inches long, Rick," Mont said. "It's a 1997 Hattaras 50 Convertible."

"Tell me you guys won the Florida Lottery or something," I said.

Mont and Terry both laughed.

"We wish. It belongs to his grandfather's company," Terry said.

"OUR grandfather's company," Mont corrected.

"OUR grandfather's company," Ter echoed, mimicking Mont.

Mont just grinned.

"We can't even afford to fuel this fucker," Ter said. "We get to use it from time to time as pay-back for looking after it for OUR grandfather."

Mont chuckled at Terry's emphasis on "our."

"Well, let's get underway," Mont said. "By the way, I'm the captain and he's the mate, in more ways than one."

Rick and I laughed appreciatively. The boys probably didn't hear him because they were busy checking everything out.

Mont and Ter ushered us to the main deck where we took seats, and they got busy in the wheelhouse.

"Jesus Christ," Rick said as soon as they were gone.

"I know," was the only thing I could think of as a reply.

We all jumped a little when Mont fired up the 875 horsepower engine. It sounded a lot like a locomotive at first, but it got surprisingly quiet once he put it in gear. We chugged our way away from the dock for our first adventure on the sea with our new friends.

Terry, Rick, and the boys went to the stern on the main deck, and I went into the wheelhouse to keep Monte company. There was surprisingly little noise.

"Hey, buddy," Mont said as I entered the little room. "Do you want to take the wheel?"

I laughed, but he looked like he was dead serious.

"Maybe later," I said, "but thanks."

"I definitely want the boys to take a turn at it," he said. Then he added, "Under my careful supervision" when I started to object.

"Oh, they'll love it," I said.

"They are really cute. I don't think I was ever that cute," he said.

"Oh, sure you were. But I agree they're pretty cute."

"What it like being a dad," he asked. "Especially of a gay kid."

"Rick and I are still trying to figure that out. Both of them are incredibly open with us," I said.

"That's good, though, don't you think," he asked.

"Oh, absolutely, and we encourage it" I said. "You wouldn't believe the questions they've asked."

"Like what," he asked.

I told him about how Kyle's question about whether butt sex was better than what they had done had led to a lesson on male anatomy and how they had joyfully announced the next morning that they "did the finger" the night before.

That cracked him up, as I figured it would, but then he got sort of misty-eyed.

"God, they really trust you guys, don't they," he said.

"That's the second time you've said that, and, yeah, now that I think about it, I guess they do."

"I really envy you and Rick, Kevin. And Ter's going to turn green with jealousy when he finds out. You don't mind if I tell him, do you?"

"Of course not. Rick and I don't keep anything from one another, and I assumed y'all don't either. But why the envy and jealousy," I asked.

"Well, we've talked about maybe adopting a kid at some point. And we've talked specifically about adopting a gay kid. I know y'all haven't adopted Tim, but you might as well have, at least as long as his dad is gone," Mont said.

"Have y'all looked into it," I asked.

"Well, you know adoption by a gay couple isn't legal in Florida, don't you?"

"Yeah. Only too well. But what about long-term foster care, like until he's an adult," I asked.

"That's the route we'd take, for sure, but that route is littered with land mines," he said.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, a kid's probably not going to know he's gay until puberty, and by then he'll be twelve or thirteen. It's pretty obvious Tim's a happy, well-adjusted kid..."

"Yeah, George, his dad, has seen to that," I interjected.

"But they're not all like Tim at that age. We couldn't take a kid into our lives and then kick him out in six months when we found out we couldn't handle him. Imagine what that would do to the poor little bastard," Mont continued.

"I see your point. By the way, where the hell are we going," I asked.

He laughed.

"Have you ever been to Dune Island?"

"I've heard of it, but I've never been there."

"Well, that's it on the horizon, and that's our destination. Is that okay?"

"Who's the captain of this ship," I asked.

He laughed. "It'll be fun. Riding around on a boat, even one as nice as this one is, gets pretty boring if that's all you're doing. I saw the cooler. What's in it?"

"A six-pack of beer for the adults and soft drinks for the kids. Plus a couple of pounds of cold cuts, a couple dozen hot dogs, chili, condiments, ice cream, I think. I don't know what all, really," I said.

"Well, we've got about the same amount of stuff, too. We forgot to talk about eats on the phone, so we figured we'd be on the safe side, in case y'all didn't bring anything to eat or drink," he said.

I chuckled. "You were thinking about those three bottomless pits I brought with me, weren't you," I asked.

"Three?"

"Okay, four," I said, and we both laughed.

I could see through the windshield that the other guys had moved to the bow deck. The boys had changed into their bathing suits, and Kyle was wearing what appeared to be a Speedo. Mont noticed them, too.

"Jesus," he said. "Those boys are really built, especially Kyle."

"And they ain't too bad in the what-you-can't-see department, too," I said.

"Pervert," he said jokingly.

"Nope. Not a bit," I said.

"I know, man. I was just teasing you. But it's a good thing I'm happily married," he said.

We both laughed.

As we got closer to the island, Mont slowed the boat down. There was a dock, and I figured we'd tie up there.

"This is convenient," I said.

"Yeah. It's the dock for a ferry that brings people over in tourist season. It's on public property, so anybody can use it, but one side is reserved for the ferry, by common consent. They built it and maintain it, after all."

Mont docked the boat, and he and I went forward to where the others were.

"What is this place," Kyle asked.

Mont told him.

"Damn, I've heard of this island all my life, but I've never been here before. Oh, man, this is too cool." Kyle was obviously very excited.

"Is anything here," Tim asked.

"Yeah! There's a fort from hundreds of years ago," Kyle said. "They told us about it when I took Florida history in seventh grade. Don't you remember that?"

"I went to seventh grade in California," Tim said.

"So?"

"You don't take Florida history in California, Babe," Tim said.

"Oh."

Rick mouthed "dumbass" after Tim said that, and the four older guys laughed.

"Well, anyway, we're going to find that fort," Kyle said. "And you and I can get naked and..."

"Kyle," Rick said with an edge to his voice.

"I'm just teasing him, Rick," Kyle said with devilment in his voice. Then he pulled a Rick and mouthed "not" to the four of us.

Rick, Mont, Ter, and I burst out laughing.

"What are you guys laughing at," Tim asked.

"Kyle's being an asshole," Rick said.

Tim shot Rick a stern look.

"Sorry," Rick said, and that made us all laugh again, including Kyle.

"Come on, Babe, let's get our shit and get on the is-land."

They moved away to get their stuff, and we could hear Kyle mumbling to Tim. He said "old farts" two or three times loud enough for us to hear him, and Tim giggled each time.

When the four of us had stopped laughing at Kyle's antics, Terry said,

"Okay. That's it. I want `em. I want `em both, and I want `em right now. I don't care if they have parents. They're mine."

Rick, Mont, and I laughed.

"That Kyle's a cutie, for sure," Mont said.

"Not any cuter than Tim," Ter said. "They're perfect. They play off one another. You should have

heard them back on the stern on the way over."

"Wait till you hear the stories Kevin told me about them," Mont said.

The boys came forward with the cooler and the grocery bags of non-refrigerated stuff we had brought. They had both packed back packs, but I noticed they didn't have them.

"Okay. We're here. Let's go," Mont said, and he and Terry led the way.

We were near the eastern tip of the island, and it wasn't very wide right there. We walked for about fifteen minutes up and down sand dunes until we made it out onto the most magnificent beach on the south side of the island I had ever seen. The sand was so white it hurt my eyes, and the water was a shade of clear bluish green that I had rarely seen on the mainland beach. There was a light wind, but the air temperature must have been in the mid-seventies. The sky was cloudless, and Rick commented on how much darker blue the sky was there.

"Less humidity out here than in town," Terry said.

"Surrounded by water, and there's less humidity?" Rick sounded like he doubted that.

"Yeah. Actually, our humidity comes from our bay system and the ambient pollution from the city. It's about as pure and natural out here as you'll find anyplace in Florida," Terry said.

It was almost one o'clock, and everybody was hungry. We set out a couple of beach tarps and used the tops of their cooler and ours as a buffet table. We took turns scooting down the "table" on our butts, making sandwiches, getting pickles and chips, and grabbing something to drink. It was a really cool lunch.

After lunch, the boys took off to find the fort.

Before they left, Rick said, "What time should they check back here, Mont?"

"Oh, I don't know? Four o'clock," he said.

"You heard him. Do you guys need a watch," Rick asked, pulling his off as he said it.

"I want to watch," Kyle said.

"In your wildest dreams, buddy," Rick said, handing his watch to Tim. Rick was grinning, and we all laughed when we processed what Kyle had said. Kyle grinned, obviously proud of his witticism. They took off like two puppies, pushing and trying to trip each other as they ran down the beach.

Rick took off his shirt, and the rest of us joined him. Then he pulled off his sweat pants to reveal running shorts underneath. We all stared at him as he was doing that.

"No free show today, boys," he said.

We all laughed.

"So what did you tell Mont about in the wheelhouse," Ter asked.

I repeated my spiel for Terry's benefit, but Mont and Rick laughed in all the right places, too.

"The thing about those two is you never know what to expect," Rick said. "I mean, one minute they're totally naïve and innocent, and the next they're talking about having sex in the dunes. Kyle's pun about the watch and then them running down the beach playing is a good example of what I mean."

"I noticed you jumped right in when it came up about sex in the dunes," Mont said.

"I thought I knew Kyle was saying that for comic effect, but I didn't want him to say anything to embarrass Tim," Rick said.

"I'm glad you jumped in, Babe, but my money is on..."

"They're doing it," Rick, Mont, and Ter said in unison. We all laughed.

We made small talk for a little while, discussing a recall election in a local city, the pair figure skating controversy in the Olympics, the upcoming ACC baseball season, and the boat. Just ordinary queer talk.

"Do you guys ever like to take afternoon naps on the beach," Mont asked. He was cute the way he said it, but it was obvious he wanted a nap.

"You just said that to get rid of us," Rick said jokingly.

"No. He said that so maybe you'd shut the fuck up and let us sleep," Terry said. He was grinning at us.

"Let's go find the fart, er, fort," Rick said.

Rick and I put our arms around each other's waist as we walked down the beach. We stopped when we were out of sight of Mont and Ter, who were probably already asleep anyway, and kissed. It was one of those "let's make love" kisses, and I knew it because I felt the same way.

I reached up to his chest and started playing with his nipples.

"Oh, God, I want you so bad right now," he gasped.

"Me, too," I said, my breath ragged as his.

Our erections rubbed against one another as we kissed again.

"Do you think we should," I asked.

"No."

"I don't either," I said.

"But you just wait till we get home," he said. "I love you so much."

He'd said that many times before, but, for some reason, that time it just took my breath completely away.

"Me, too," I whispered. He stroked my face, and that gesture said, for the thousandth time, "I'm all yours." We loosened our grip on one another and continued walking. Our hard-ons led the way.

"What if they see this," I asked, touching his cock. I was talking about the kids, and I knew he knew it.

"Or this," he asked, touching mine.

"Yeah," I said.

"They'll know we're in love and we turn each other on," he said.

We walked leisurely down the beach, sometimes holding hands, sometimes holding one another around the waist. We heard the sound of the surf, the sound of the wind, and the sound of the odd seagull overhead. It was about as peaceful and idyllic a place as we had ever been.

We turned around after about forty-five minutes and headed back to our camp. We got there just as Mont and Ter were breaking from what appeared to be a pretty passionate kiss. They grinned at us, and we grinned back at them. They were both hard in their pants, but nobody said anything about that.

"God, I would kill for a cup of coffee," Rick said.

"Me, too," Terry echoed.

"We can make some when we get back on board," Mont said. "I could do with a cup, too."

"This place is beautiful, man," I said to no one in particular.

"It is, isn't it," Mont said. "It sends chills up my spine when I think of oil drilling off this coast and possible oil spills. That would be a crime."

"Do you know anything about the fort Kyle was talking about," Rick asked.

"Yeah. It was a Civil War fort, not from hundreds of years ago," Mont said. "I've read about it on the Florida state parks Web site. It's small, but it's pretty well preserved, apparently. I've never seen it."

"Is this a state park," I asked.

"Not officially. The official state park is on the bay, right over there." Mont pointed in the direction we had come from. "But the state park service owns the island, so there won't be any development here."

"Do they allow camping," I asked.

"Oh, yeah. Do you guys like to camp," Ter asked.

Monte and Terry were so easy to be with that I forgot from time to time that we hadn't known them very long. Questions like that one reminded me that we were still all getting to know one another.

"We love to camp," I said. "Are there any facilities on the island?"

"Nope, not a one," Mont said, "but we'd have the boat to use. We've camped here a few times, and it works great. Do you think y'all might be interested?"

"Oh, no question," Rick said.

"Great," Mont said.

Just at that moment a shadow of a man cast itself over our little site. He was standing west of us, so the sun, fairly low in the sky as it was, made him appear enormous. It startled me, and, judging from their reactions, it startled the rest of us, as well. Rick jumped to his feet.

We all turned to look, and we were presented with Kyle, buck naked.

"Hi," he said sheepishly.

"What the fuck is going on here," Rick demanded. "Where's your suit."

"We lost them," he said.

We all caved at that line, and Terry flopped down, laughing hysterically.

"How the hell did you lose your suits," Rick asked.

"We took `em off to, er, go nudist, I guess, and we couldn't find them. All the dunes look alike. We don't know where we left them. Please don't look at me." I could tell he was embarrassed, but I couldn't tell if it was because he was naked or because they had lost their suits.

"Kyle, you can't come up to a group of guys stark naked and expect them not to look at you. Besides, you don't have anything to be ashamed of, man." Rick's gentleness with him impressed me. People who knew Rick only casually didn't see his sensitivity, but he was certainly showing it then.

"I know I don't, but we lost our suits," he said. Kyle's penis suddenly began to grow. He tried to cover it with his hands, but it couldn't be done. He was as hard as a rock in a matter of seconds. "Fuck," he said, and he started to cry. He turned bright red all over his body. He looked down and turned away from us.

Rick bounded over to him and wrapped him in his arms.

"Shit, man. Why are you crying. It was just a crappy-ass suit. That's no reason to cry."

"I know. It's this," he said, indicating his erection. "I'm so ashamed." He sobbed.

"Kyle, buddy, you're a gay man standing in front of four other gay men. We're your brothers, dude. We love you. You can't be embarrassed in front of us for a hard-on, for Christ sake. It's natural, buddy. Any one of us would do exactly the same thing as you, man." He switched to his confidential tone of voice. "Plus, I happen to know that Kevin is so hard right now he's about to bust through those jeans he's wearing."

That last statement made Kyle laugh a little through his tears.

I glanced at Mont and Ter, and they were taking it all in. Their faces were hard to read. They were somewhere between sympathy for Kyle and admiration for Rick.

"Where's Tim," Rick asked.

I could tell Kyle was feeling better.

"He's behind that dune. He was too scared to come out, so I did. Please be nice to him," he said.

The way Kyle said that was so tender, so loving, so concerned that it just about made my heart break.

"Hell, no. I'm kicking his fucking ass, and you are, too." Rick pulled his shorts off right at that moment, and, suddenly, he, too, was naked except for his shoes. He grabbed Kyle by the hand and pulled him until Kyle started running, too.

In about ten minutes, the three of them came over the dune, all buck naked. The boys were carrying Rick on their shoulders. They both staggered a little under Rick's weight because of the loose sand. Kyle was soft by then, and all three had huge grins on their faces. Both boys were tear streaked, but they weren't crying any more. When they got to where we were standing, they dumped Rick off their shoulders. He fell down into the sand, and, when he stood up, his dick and mid-section were covered

with sand.

He pointed down to his crotch and asked, "Who wants to get fucked?" I think we were all stunned for a few seconds at that question, but, when we realized he was coated with sand and saw the implications of that fact for sex, we all howled.

We struck our little camp in about two minutes as Rick cleaned himself off, and we started our march back over the dunes to the boat. I glanced at my watch and noticed it was only 4:15. The sun was still about twenty degrees above the horizon, and I wished we could stay for sunset. There were clouds in the west, and I knew the sunset would be spectacular. I had read about the sunsets at the western end of Key West, but I had never seen one.

As though he read my mind, Mont said, "You'll see one soon. By the way, that boy you're married to is a total keeper, man. You'd better do whatever it takes to hold on to his ass."

We continued our trek over the dunes, and I just grinned. I was already bursting with pride at the way Rick had handled the boys, and Mont's comment only added to it.

Rick and the boys got dressed when we got back on the boat. It was still full daylight, but the sun was sinking fast. Mont took the boys into the wheelhouse, presumably to let them steer the boat on the trip back. They must have done a decent job of it because I didn't notice any lurching or unplanned movement.

Right after we got home, Kyle had a phone call from his parents. They hadn't seen him all weekend, and they told him to come home. Tim stayed in his room doing homework, and Rick and I crashed on the sofa to watch TV. It had been a great weekend, and we went to bed pleasantly tired.

Chapter 9

(Tim's Perspective)

"Did you know all that stuff about sex," Kyle asked after we had gone to my room.

"No. Did you?"

"No. What did you think," he asked.

"I don't know. What did you think?" I had been excited all during the talk, and I wanted to try some of the stuff they had told us about. But I wanted to make sure Kyle was cool with it before I said anything.

"It sounded pretty neat to me. Would you do that? Or let me do it to you," he asked.

"What are you talking about," I asked.

"You know. The finger stuff."

"I guess," I said.

"Yeah, me, too. He said they had some lube in their bedroom. Want me to get it?"

"Yeah. I guess."

Kyle went to Kevin and Rick's room and came back with a tube of something in a minute or two. He flipped it open and squirted a little on his finger. He put it to his nose, but he didn't react to the smell. Then he rubbed it around on his fingers a little, but he really didn't react to that, either.

"Let me see," I said. I did the same thing. It didn't smell at all, and it was super slippery on my fingers.

Kyle put the tube down and came over to me. He started kissing me and rubbing against me, and that felt really good.

"Let's take our clothes off," he said, and we did.

Kyle sat down on the bed, and I stood in front of him. My erection was really hard, but my foreskin was still covering part of the head.

"Can I touch it," he asked.

I nodded, and Kyle gently took it between his finger and thumb. He pushed the skin back and forth

a few times.

"That is so cool, man," he said.

"Don't do it too much, okay," I asked.

"Why not?"

"You're going to make me shoot if you keep doing that," I said.

He grinned at me and pulled me by the hand into bed with him.

We kissed some more in bed, and then Kyle got the lube and put some on his finger. He rubbed my butt hole, and that felt wonderful.

"Can I put it in," he asked.

"Okay," I said. I was a little scared, but I wanted to see what it felt like. His finger went in a lot easier than I thought it would, and it really felt good. He moved it around a little inside of me, and he must have found that thing Kevin and Rick had told us about. All of a sudden I got this incredible jolt, and my dick let out a big wad of pre-cum.

"How does it feel," Kyle asked.

"It feels...it feels really good. Don't stop," I said.

Kyle shifted position so he could reach me with his other hand, and in a couple of seconds I shot the biggest load I had ever made. It was really, really powerful, but it was hard to tell where all the good feelings were coming from. When I was finished, I had a big puddle of stuff on my stomach.

"Shit. We forgot to get towels," Kyle said. "I'll get some."

He got up and went to the linen closet in the hall. I watched him walk back, and his hard dick bounced a little. He cleaned me up, and then it was his turn. We liked doing it a lot, and we tried it a few more times that night. I woke up when Kevin and Rick got home, but Kyle was still asleep. I turned off the light and got back into bed.

The next morning we woke up early, or at least early for a Saturday. We took a shower together and played some. We decided to make breakfast for everybody, so we just put our underwear on and went out to the kitchen. Kevin came out naked, and I couldn't help staring at his dick. It was big, really big, but it wasn't hard or anything. He had a foreskin just like me, only his covered everything and even hung down lower than the tip. I hadn't seen either guy naked before, and I sort of wanted to touch it to see if his skin moved back and forth like mine did.

We had everything ready to cook when Rick got home from running. We did most of it in the microwave. I cooked bacon and heated up sausage links and frozen French toast, and Kyle made scrambled eggs. The guys really seemed impressed, but they probably thought we were dumbasses because they had to ask us to get plates and silverware. That was supposed to be Kyle's job, but he forgot to do it.

After breakfast everybody went in different directions. Kyle and I went down to his house and got his skateboard, and we skated over to his parents' motel. The parking lot only had a few cars in it near the entrance, and there was a really cool slope down toward the Gulf. We did that until we got tired, and then went back to my house. We shot some hoops for a while.

Sunday was awesome. We got to go out on this huge boat that belonged to their friends Mont and Terry. I had met them before at the Super Bowl party, and they had been nice to me. That day, though, they were super nice, and Mont even showed us how to steer the boat when we were coming home. That did a lot to cheer me up from what had happened just before we left the island.

"Can we go for a walk," I asked. There was an old fort on that island, and we wanted to find it.

"Sure, just be back by four o'clock," Rick said. He even gave me his watch so we'd know what time it was.

Kyle and I took off down the beach. He started chasing me, and I ran up into the dunes. He caught me, though, and knocked me down onto the sand. We wrestled a little while, but I let him pin me.

"Can I kiss you," he asked. He was already hard, and so was I. I said yes, and we kissed for a long time.

"Do you want to take your suit off," he asked.

"What if somebody sees us," I said.

"Who would? There's nobody else here."

"Okay," I said. We kissed some more, and pretty soon we were rubbing against each other, and then it was over.

"That wasn't as good as last night, was it," he asked. "I mean with the finger and all."

"No, but it was good," I said.

"I know. We should have brought the lube."

"What would you have done with it? Carried it in your Speedo," I asked.

He giggled at what that would have looked like.

"Good point," he said. Then, "Come on."

We got up and realized we had a little goo problem. We scraped most of it off ourselves with our thumbs and slung it into the sand.

"Do you want me to lick the rest of it off you," Kyle asked, grinning like a devil.

"Eeeew, gross," I said, and we both laughed.

We started walking. It felt really neat to be naked outside like we were. Kyle put his arm around my waist, and I did the same to him. Then he reached down and started rubbing my butt. That felt a whole lot better than I ever thought it would.

"That feels good," I said.

"Does it? Do it to me." I did to him what he was doing to me, and it actually felt nice in my hand, too.

Kyle dared me to run down to the water. He called me a pussy when I didn't want to, and then I gave in and did it. He was waiting to tackle me when I made it back to the top of the dune, and we rolled down the dune in the sand. We wrestled around and played and chased one another for a long time.

"What time is it," Kyle asked. I looked at Rick's watch for the first time.

"It's 3:30," I said.

"Shit, we better get back."

We retraced our steps looking for our suits, but we couldn't find them anywhere.

"Do you think somebody found them and stole them," I asked.

We heard Mont or somebody laugh.

"Damn, we're right there," Kyle said.

"What are we going to do," I asked.

"Well, we can't stay here, that's for sure," he said. "We're going to have to go down there."

"Go down and get our clothes," I said. "Bring them back here. That way only one of us has to do it."

"Shit, I didn't bring any clothes, and neither did you, remember? They're in our backpacks on the boat."

"I'm scared," I said. It hadn't gotten any colder, but I started trembling a little.

"Why are you scared," he asked.

"I don't know, but I am. Aren't you?"

"A little," he said. After a few seconds he said, "Okay, I'll do it. Wish me luck."

He walked off toward the other guys. I listened real hard. I could hear them talking, but I couldn't understand what they were saying. Then I thought I heard Kyle crying. In a few seconds, Rick and Kyle came running over the dune, and they were both naked. Kyle had a hard-on, and they were both laughing. Tears were rolling down my face, but I wasn't really sobbing. When I saw Kyle, I got hard, too.

"Hi, Tim. What's up," Rick asked.

Kyle giggled, and I laughed, too, when I realized what he was talking about.

"Are you mad at us," I asked. More than anything, I didn't want Rick or Kevin to be mad at me.

"Only if you lost my watch," he said.

"No. Here it is," I said, handing him his watch back. Then I asked, "What do we do now?"

"Let's wait here a few minutes for those things to go down," Rick said.

Kyle reached for his penis.

"No, Kyle," Rick said. "Just let it go down by itself. Let's sit down."

I saw Kyle take a big eyeful of Rick, and I looked at him, too.

"Go ahead and look all you want to," Rick said to both of us. "I know you want to, and, no, it's not weird or strange to be curious about my dick."

We both blushed a little, and Rick laughed. Then he sat down, and Kyle and I followed.

"You must think I'm some kind of little girl, or something," Kyle said.

"Son, I think you both have proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that you're both all boy," Rick said. "Very much so, in fact."

We all laughed.

"Why would he think you're a girl," I asked.

"Because I started crying in front of all of them," he said. The laughter was all gone from his voice.

"Hey, buddy," Rick said. "Knock it off, man. You were embarrassed, that's all. Every other guy there was embarrassed for you. We all wished we could do something to make it not happen, but we couldn't. We know what it's like, dude."

"What happened," I asked. It wasn't at all clear to me why Kyle was hard or why Rick was naked.

"He was telling us what happened, and he got an erection, Tim. It embarrassed him, as it would have me or Kevin, and probably Mont and Ter, too. Everything about the situation was perfectly normal and perfectly natural, guys. Everybody there was saying 'Thank God that ain't happening to me,' but we all knew it probably would have under those circumstances."

"I didn't do anything to make it happen," Kyle said, somewhat defensively.

"We know that, Kyle. Nobody thinks you caused it. Everybody gets spontaneous erections. There's no shame in that," Rick said. "I call those 'free bones.'"

"Do you," Kyle asked Rick.

"Of course," Rick replied. "Not as often as I used to, but I still get them, and so does Kevin. I have wet dreams occasionally, too. Again, not like I used to, but I still have them."

"Why did you get naked," I asked. "Or were you already naked?"

"No, I wasn't already naked. I got naked because I wanted to, that's why," Rick said.

"That made me feel a lot better when you did, Rick," Kyle said.

"Good. I wanted it to, man."

We were quiet for a few minutes.

"It looks like you guys are ready to go back down. You'll have to walk to the boat like that. You didn't bring any other clothes, did you?"

"No. Will you stay naked, too?"

"Sure, Tim. Let's go."

When we stood to leave, Kyle said, "Tim, let's carry him down."

"What?! No way," Rick said.

"We can do it," Kyle said. "You're our hero, Rick. Let us carry you."

While we were getting dressed later on the boat, Kyle said, "Rick is really a great guy, isn't he?"

"The best," I said.

"His dick is nice, too, isn't it?"

I felt a little funny talking about Rick's penis, but he had told us we could look at it. "Yeah. It's like yours," I replied. "It's bigger than I thought it was."

"Yeah, and he's a grower, too."

"Were you going to jerk off back there when Rick said for you to leave it alone," I asked.

"Yeah, so what," he asked.

"I could never do that in front of him or Kevin," I said.

"Why not? They know you do it."

"Yeah, they know I shit, too, but I couldn't do that in front of them, either," I said.

"You're cute, you know that," Kyle said.

"Thanks, so are you." He gave me a quick kiss and we went out on deck.

Terry said Mont wanted us both in the wheelhouse, and I got a little scared. I was afraid he was going to yell at us about what happened. Instead, he asked if we wanted to steer the boat, and Kyle and I both got pretty excited about that. He watched us real close, and it was pretty much fun.

Kyle took me to school the next morning, as usual.

"Can you take the bus home today," he asked. "Rehearsals for the spring play start today, so I'll be pretty late leaving."

"I've got to stay late, too. JV baseball tryouts start today. I'll just walk home, or I'll call Rick."

That afternoon I reported to the JV baseball field right after school. There were a bunch of boys there. I recognized a few of them, including my friend David, but a lot of them looked like they were sophomores.

"Hey," Dave said. "Third base again?"

"Yep. Shortstop?"

"Yep. Damn, I didn't think there'd be this many guys out," he said. "Most of these guys are sophomores, too."

"You guys freshmen," a big ole boy I didn't know asked us.

"Yeah. You," Dave asked.

"No way, dude. I'm a sophomore," the boy said. "Y'all ain't got a snowball's chance in hell of making the team."

"Why not," I asked.

"Coach don't pick more than four freshmen every year, and he's already been talking to two guys. I was on the team last year, but that don't mean I'll make it, either." That boy didn't exactly raise my hopes any.

Coach had us sit down on the first base line three or four guys deep, and he explained what was going to happen. He told us to play our best, and he'd take care of the rest.

He divided us up into groups. Dave and I were in the same group, and we went off with a senior who was kind of like an assistant-assistant coach. He hit grounders to us, and we had to take turns catching them. I missed a really hot one, and I felt totally stupid.

"That's okay, Murphy," the senior said. "That was hard to handle."

"Get out of my way, piss ant," a big sophomore said to me. It made me a little mad, but I didn't say anything.

We went after grounders long enough for all of us to have a chance at five. I caught three of them with no problem, but I had another one that took a bad bounce. I stopped it, but I didn't catch it. Dave missed three of his five.

"This ain't going very good, is it," Dave asked me.

"We'll see," I said, but I thought the same thing he had said.

Next we did line drives. That senior, Mark, hit good, and he hit hard. I caught my first one, and it

just about blistered my hand. I didn't let him see that it hurt, though.

That same sophomore who called me a piss ant called me a douche bag.

"What's your problem, dude. I haven't done anything to you," I said.

"I don't like fags, that's what. You want to do something about it?" He looked mean, and he sure was bigger than me.

"Come on, Tim," Dave said, pulling me back. "He ain't worth a fight. But I would sure like to kick his nuts off."

"I don't know what's up with him," I said.

We heard the sophomore call another boy fag.

"If he don't stop with the gay shit, his head and my baseball bat are going to have to have a little talk," Dave said.

"He's just a prick," I said. "He don't really mean he thinks other guys are gay. Haven't you called guys that?"

Dave had a very serious look on his face. "No, I haven't, and I don't like guys saying that to or about other guys."

At the end of practice, Coach read off a list of names and said he wanted to talk to those boys. Most of them were freshmen, but he didn't call my name or Dave's name. He talked to those boys for a few minutes, and then they walked off the field. I could see disappointment on the faces of most of them.

"Okay, guys. Same time tomorrow," Coach said to the rest of us. "You can use the showers in the gym, if you want to." Then he walked away with the guys who had helped with practice.

"I forgot to bring any clean clothes to put on after a shower," I said. I had been sweating pretty hard, and I knew I was dirty.

"Me, too," Dave said. "Besides, my mom is probably already here. Do you need a ride?"

"Would you mind," I asked. Dave lived on my street, too, a few houses down from Kyle, also on the water side.

"Hell, no."

When we got to the car, it wasn't Dave's mom, but his big brother, Les, who was driving.

"Who's this? Your boyfriend," Les asked when we got into the car.

"Fuck off," Dave said.

"My, my. Aren't we in a sweet mood today," Les said. "Where do you live, kid?"

"His name is Tim, not kid, and he lives in the next block down from us." Dave's voice had a lot of irritation in it.

"Sorry, Tim. I'm Les, not Lez, the way Dave pronounces it." He actually shook my hand, and he smiled when he did it. "And I'm not the prick my little brother thinks I am."

"So why do you always act that way to me," Dave asked.

"Act what way," Les responded as he started the car.

"Always teasing me about having a boyfriend and being gay and all. Huh?"

"If the sh..." Les stopped before finishing, but I knew he was going to say, "If the shoe fits, wear it," and David knew that, too. Dave and I were in the back seat, and he flicked his brother off, but low enough that he couldn't see him do it.

At practice on Tuesday, that big, mean sophomore ragged me some more. I just ignored him, but David got mad when he called him a fag. Again that day Coach called out names of guys who evidently didn't make the team, but, again, mine and David's names weren't on his list.

"How was practice," Rick asked. I had showered up and was just wearing my briefs and a tank top. The three of us were in the den, eating our evening snack.

"It was okay. I wasn't cut again today," I said.

"How many more days of cuts," Kevin asked.

"I don't know."

We ate in silence for a few minutes, then Rick said, "You don't seem very happy, little buddy. Did something happen at practice?"

I told them about the sophomore who was picking on me and Dave, and I told them about what Dave's brother had said the day before.

"Is Dave gay, Tim," Rick asked.

"I don't know. One time a couple of weeks ago he said something about being jealous of Kyle. When I asked him what that was supposed to mean, he just said for me to figure it out."

"Would it bother you if your friend was gay," Kevin asked.

"Why would it bother me," I asked.

"Well, he might have a crush on you, if he is. Could you handle that?"

"You mean because of Kyle," I asked.

"Yeah. That kind of thing happens all the time."

"I don't know, Kevin. I haven't thought about it," I said.

We finished eating, and they switched on the TV.

"Can I take the phone to my room? I want to call Kyle," I said.

"Sure, just bring it back when you're finished," Rick said. "Okay?"

"Okay."

Kyle and I had ridden to school together both days that week, and we had had lunch together, too, but we really hadn't spent any other time together.

"Hey, what's up," I said, after he answered the phone. I had called his cell phone number.

"Me," he said, and giggled.

"Really? Whatcha been doing," I asked.

"Thinking about you."

"For real," I asked.

"Yeah, for real. Don't you ever think about me," he asked.

"Of course I do," I said.

"Do you ever get hard when you think about me?"

"Yeah." I was a little embarrassed by the conversation.

"So why should I be any different when I think about you," he asked. His logic was perfect, so I didn't have anything to say back to him on that point. Besides, I wanted to move on from that topic. Thinking about him being hard for me had made me hard, but I wasn't about to tell him that.

"How did practice go," he said, after a brief pause.

I filled him in on everything, including the stuff about David.

"What are you doing hanging around with him," Kyle asked.

"He's my friend, man. We're trying out for the team together. Rick asked me tonight if he's gay."

"He is," Kyle said.

"How do you know," I asked.

"Rumors, mostly, but I saw him kiss a boy once. Right in his driveway."

"You did?" Suddenly, I didn't know what to say.

"Dave's a cute guy, Tim. It's okay if you like him."

"What do you mean by that," I asked.

"You're my boyfriend, but I don't own you, you know."

"Does that mean you don't care if I do sex with him," I asked.

"The way I figure it, we're both just learning, right? If it was him and me in a room with you, and you chose him over me, that would hurt my feelings a lot. But it wouldn't make me stop liking you."

"I'd never choose him over you, Kyle. Never," I said.

"Good. But if I'm not around, would you do it with him? I wouldn't mind it if you did."

"I don't think I would," I said. "Would you?"

"Probably not. Would you get pissed off if I did?"

"No," I said. I really didn't know if I would get pissed off or not. I hadn't thought about it before. I felt sort of like he expected me to say "no," even if I wasn't sure.

We moved on to other topics of conversation after that. Kyle told me about play practice and that he would have to stay for practice on Tuesdays and Thursdays until the play got closer. Then he'd have to practice more often than that.

I thought about my conversation with Kyle when I went to bed that night, and I thought about David, too. David was a cute guy, and he was well built, too. He was my height, 5'7", and he had sort of reddish-blond hair. I tried to imagine what it would be like to kiss David, and I had a picture in my mind of him naked. Afterwards, as I was cleaning up, I thought about Kyle. I got a mental picture of him watching me and smiling.

David and I joined the rest of the guys on the baseball field the next day after school. Coach seemed surprised to see us. He talked privately with Mark, the senior who had been working us out, and then he called me, David, and another guy from our group over.

"Fellas, I'm really sorry about this. Your names were supposed to be on the cut list yesterday, but Mark forgot to write them down. You guys are not bad, and if you play ball this summer, I'm sure you'll all get better. Give it another shot next year, okay, guys? And thanks for coming out."

Coach walked away and got busy with the rest.

"I knew it was too fucking good to be true," the third guy said.

"At least we weren't embarrassed yesterday by having our names called out in front of everybody," Dave said.

"True," the other boys said. "Well, see y'all around, guys." Then he left.

"Is Les picking you up," I asked David.

"Yeah, but not until five. I'm not waiting around for him. I'm just going to walk home."

"Yeah, me, too. It ain't far," I said.

We walked down a block from the school to the street that ran right along the Gulf. It was all residential right around school, but it was all businesses on the beach road. We passed a fast food place.

"You want to get a snack," Dave asked. "I'll pay, if you don't have money."

"Okay," I said. "But I've got some money."

We ordered burgers, fries, and cokes, and then we took our seats in a booth. The place was empty except for us. I knew that place was packed 24/7 when tourists were in town, but I wondered why they even stayed open the rest of the year.

"Are you disappointed," I asked.

"Yeah. Aren't you," Dave asked.

"Yeah, but I'm not heart broken about it," I said.

"Naw. Me, either. Are you going to play summer ball, like he said," Dave asked.

"I don't know. Are you?"

"Probably not. I'm going to try to get a job. I want to save to buy a car."

"Where would you get a job," I asked.

"Oh, hell, a million places, man. You know that go-cart track near where we live? I talked to the owner, and he said he hires guys our age. I'll be fifteen."

"So will I," I said. "My birthday's in May."

"Mine's in April," he said.

"Cool."

We finished our snack, and we both refilled our soft drinks.

"Can I ask you something," Dave said. He sounded pretty serious.

"Sure. What?"

"Is Kyle Goodson your boyfriend?"

My heart didn't actually stop, but it sure felt like it did. I suddenly got extremely nervous when he asked that.

"Wha, what makes you say that?"

"It's okay if he is, Tim. I'm gay, too."

"You think I'm gay," I asked.

"Aren't you?"

"Do I act gay," I asked. I did not like that conversation AT ALL.

"I don't exactly know what you mean by that, but you don't act like a sissy or anything, if that's what you mean."

I looked at the table for a long time, not really knowing what to say next.

"It's okay if you don't want to talk about it, Tim," Dave said. There was gentleness in his voice.

"No, I do want to talk about it. I just can't figure out how you knew."

"Knew what? That Kyle is your boyfriend, or that you'd even have a boyfriend?"

"Both," I said.

"The first part's easy. You guys have been hanging out together a lot lately. I've thought Kyle was gay for a while now. When I saw you guys together so much, I figured you must be gay, too."

"How'd you know about Kyle," I asked.

"No one thing. It was just a feeling I got. Have you ever heard of gaydar?"

"I've heard of it. Kevin and Rick say they don't have it, but their friend Mont has it big time."

"Who are Kevin and Rick," Dave asked.

"They're the guys I live with," I said. "They're our next door neighbors."

"You live with two gay guys," he asked. "Where are your parents?"

"Well, my mom's dead." I had decided a couple of years before to just say that about her rather than go into all the business about her being sick. "And my dad's in the Navy, and he's on a ship because of the war in Afghanistan."

"I can't believe your luck, man. Damn. I've seen both of those guys, but I had no idea they were gay. One of them runs a lot. Which one is that?"

"That's Rick. Kevin's the other one."

"Rick is a real hottie, dude. I wouldn't mind getting after some of that," he said.

"I think they're both pretty hot, but you won't be doing anything with either of them, man. They're married."

"To each other? Really?"

"Well, it's not really legal, but they had a ceremony, and everything. They have a certificate, too. And wedding rings."

"That is so cool, man. Would you let me meet them sometime?"

"Sure," I said.

We left the burger place then and continued to walk home. It was just a few miles to our street. Kyle's car wasn't in his driveway when we passed his house, and I wondered where he was.

"That's Kyle's house," I said.

"Yeah, I know. I've known him for a long time, Tim," he said.

"Are you guys friends," I asked. It was obvious on the phone the night before that Kyle knew David, but he had never really talked about him like he was a friend.

"Not really. The only sport he's ever played is cross country. We shot hoops a few times, but we sort of run in different circles. Besides, I didn't think he'd be friends with somebody my age. He's

supposed to be a junior, you know."

"Yeah, I know," I said.

"Do you guys have sex," Dave asked.

"What do you mean?"

"Come on, Tim. You know what I'm talking about. Sucky-sucky, fucky-fucky." He was trying hard not to laugh.

"We don't do any of that, but, yeah, we have sex."

"So what do you do, if you don't suck and fuck?"

"We kiss. We rub against one another. We jerk each other off. We do the finger."

"The finger? What the hell is that?"

I told him about the finger.

"I've seen pictures of that. Isn't it gross?"

"Not at all, and it feels so good, you wouldn't believe it."

"Well, I guess I'll have to wait to find out."

"Have you ever done anything with anybody?"

"Not really. I kissed my cousin one time, though."

"Girl or boy?"

"A boy. He's gay, too. Or bi or something. It surprised the hell out of him, too. It was in the driveway when he was leaving one time. We've never done it again, and we've never even talked about it."

We had been standing in front of Dave's house for our talk. He asked me if I wanted to come in. He said he had to call Les to tell him not to pick him up but that we would have the place to ourselves until his parents got home from work.

I said okay, and we went inside. His house was big and very nice. His room was big, too, and it had a bathroom off of it. I looked through, and I saw another bedroom. Dave went in the bathroom and locked the door into the other bedroom. He also locked his hall door.

"I don't want my brother coming home and surprising us," he said. "Sit on the bed so we can talk."

I sat down, and he sat right next to me. He took my left hand in his and just held it.

"What would you do if I kissed you," he asked.

I figured that's what was going on.

"I'd kiss you back," I said.

"Can I kiss you?"

"Okay," I said.

He put his lips very lightly on mine. I felt my dick start to get hard. I wrapped my arms around him, and I kissed him harder. I started running my tongue over his lips. He didn't open his mouth for me as first, but he did in a few seconds. Our tongues touched, and it felt so good. We kept up the kiss for about a minute.

"Are you hard," I asked.

"Yeah. I'm sor..."

"No. You're supposed to get hard when you kiss. Kyle and I do all the time, and so do Kevin and Rick. That's what's supposed to happen."

"Have you seen Kevin and Rick get hard when they kiss," he asked.

"No, but they told me they do."

"Damn, it must be great to have those guys to talk to about sex and stuff," he said.

"Yeah, it is."

"Are you hard, too, right now?"

"Uhn hunh."

"Tim, er, can I see it?"

Kissing was one thing, but taking my hard dick out was something else again. I looked at him for a long time, not knowing what to do.

"Please," he said.

He looked so cute when he said that that I couldn't resist.

"Show me yours first," I said.

"Okay." He stood up, unbuttoned his jeans, and pulled the jeans and his underwear down to his knees. He sat back down on the edge of the bed, and his dick stood straight up. He was circumcised, just like Kyle and Rick. It wasn't as big as Kyle's, but it was pretty. He had a drop of pre-cum on the end of it.

"Wow. Nice," I said.

He smiled awkwardly.

"Your turn," he said, and I did exactly as he had done. "Foreskin, right," he asked.

"Yeah."

"Can I touch it?"

I nodded, and he took the head between his thumb and first finger.

"Push down on the skin and see what happens," I said.

Dave did as instructed.

"Wow, that's really cool. I wish mine did that."

I moved his hand away, and then I pulled him up as I stood. I put my arms around him and kissed him. I hugged him to me so that my dick and his were rubbing. I swayed a little bit to cause friction. It was over in about a minute.

"That was incredible, Tim. Thank you," he said.

"You're not a virgin anymore, Dave."

"Really? Oh, wow. Just from doing that?"

"Kevin and Rick told Kyle and me we weren't virgins anymore the first time we did it. They should know."

"Right. For sure. I'll bet my brother's still a virgin. I'm not telling him we did it, though."

"Let's don't tell anybody, okay? Not even Kevin and Rick for right now, and especially not Kyle, okay?"

"Okay. Do you think Kyle would be jealous," he asked.

"He said he wouldn't, but I don't want to rub his face in it, you know? He's still my boyfriend, and I'm still going to keep doing it with him."

"Will you do it again with me," he asked.

"I don't know. Maybe. But I can't be your boyfriend. I'm Kyle's boyfriend, and he's mine."

"Okay," he said.

Kyle was sitting in his car in my driveway when I walked up. I didn't expect him to be there, and I got a little nervous because of what I had done with David.

"Hi," he said, as I walked up. He gave me a wonderful grin, and my nervousness went away.

"Hi. Come on in."

We grabbed each other for a kiss as soon as we shut the door, and we held it for a long time.

"God, I've missed doing that," he said.

"Me, too." We kissed again, and that time we rubbed against one another, feeling our hard dicks through our pants. Kyle started taking my shirt off me, and then he started kissing my chest. He put his mouth over one of my nipples and played with it with his tongue. He had never done that before, and the feeling was almost more than I could stand. I took his shirt off him, and did the same to him. He moaned.

We were still in the den, but I didn't care. I knew it would be a good while before Kevin or Rick came home from work, so we were safe.

Kyle started undoing my pants, and I got to work on his. We had never undressed one another before, but I had thought about doing it a bunch of times. We slipped our shoes off and got on the floor naked. Kyle slid on top of me and kissed me. He started moving like he was fucking or something, and I moved that way too. Kyle was urgent, and he shot his stuff on me in just a couple of minutes. I was slower because of what I had just done with David, so he kept moving on top of me. In about two minutes, we both shot, Kyle for the second time.

We didn't have anything to clean up with, but we were careful not to spill any on the carpet. Kyle rubbed his in on me, and I rubbed mine in on him. We cuddled for a long time on the floor. When I noticed it was getting dark outside, I told him we had to get up. All the stuff was dry by then, so we just put our clothes on.

"How was practice," he asked.

I told him what had happened, and he said that Mark was a dumbfuck for forgetting to write it down.

"I've got to get going, Babe," he said. We had started calling each other Babe, just like Kevin and Rick did. I thought it was neat.

"I know. I'm so glad you came over today. I've missed you."

"I've missed you, too."

We kissed goodbye, and he went home.

I spent Thursday afternoon with Dave while Kyle was at play practice, and Kyle and I got together at my house on Friday afternoon. Rick was running in a marathon Saturday morning in Tallahassee, so the four of us drove over there after they got home from work. We all slept in the same motel room, and I thought we wouldn't be able to do anything that night. I was wrong, though. I was kind of scared doing anything with Kevin and Rick right in the next bed, but we were super quiet. They never knew about it.

We had to get up early the next morning so Rick could get to the race. Kyle got pretty excited being around all those runners. I saw some pretty hot guys, but nobody was any hotter or better looking than my big brothers. After the race started, we went to a little restaurant downtown for breakfast, and then Kevin took us to see the FSU campus. He and Rick had both gone to college there, and he pointed out landmarks, like the library, the student center, and the College of Business.

"I thought this was a university, not a college," I said.

"It is a university, Tim, but a university is divided up into different divisions. Some are called colleges and some are called schools. I don't know the difference, though."

Kyle listened to what Kevin said nodding like he already knew all of that, but I knew he didn't. If he had, he would have answered my question, instead of waiting for Kevin to do it.

We went back to the starting line, which was also the finish line for the race, and we watched Rick cross it. He got a medal and a certificate for finishing the race. He had a little timing chip on his wrist, and he was pleased with his time. Kyle, who actually knew something about running, said his time was awesome.

Rick went to sleep on the way home, and the rest of us were pretty quiet. We got home mid-afternoon, and Kevin and Rick wanted to take a nap.

"We're going to church tonight at six o'clock. You guys need to be ready to leave at a quarter to six."

"Okay," I said.

Kyle and I got our skateboards and skated over to his parents' motel to use them.

"Do you think they're really taking a nap," he asked after we got there.

"That's what they said they were going to do. Why? You think they're having sex?"

"Do you ever hear them," he asked.

"Naw. That would be pretty rude, don't you think? Besides, they'd kick my ass if they caught me."

"They wouldn't touch you, man. They love your ass too much for that."

That made me feel happy. In the two weeks I'd lived with them, I had gotten to love them a lot. It made me feel good to know it seemed to Kyle like they loved me, too.

"They wouldn't hurt me, but they sure would chew my ass out. And probably ground me, too. And I'd deserve it, too."

We rode our skateboards up and down the asphalt of the motel parking lot for a long time. Kyle did it better than I did, and he did some aerial tricks that I couldn't do. Then we went in and got cokes from the machine. We sat by the pool drinking them and relaxing. Suddenly, Kyle stood up and called David's name. I turned toward the road, and he was riding by on a bike. He waved, and Kyle signaled for him to come over to join us.

"Hi, Kyle. Hi, Tim," Dave said.

Kyle lit a cigarette, and Dave asked for one. Kyle extended his pack to Dave, and then Dave handed it to me. What the hell, I thought. I hadn't had one since before my dad had left, so I lit up, too. I was careful not to inhale too deep to keep from coughing. I didn't want to look like a klutz in front of those guys, and I handled the smoke fine.

"What's going on," Dave asked.

"We're just boarding," Kyle said.

"They won't run you away from here," he asked.

"Naw. My parents own it," Kyle said. "Everybody here knows me."

"Wow. Do you work here," Dave asked.

"In the summer I do. I'm the pool boy. My brother works the beach renting chairs and umbrellas and selling stuff."

"Cool. I'm going to get a job this summer," Dave said.

"We can probably put you to work here, or at one of the other places," Kyle said.

"What other places," I asked. He had told me about the motel, but he had never mentioned anything else.

"We have two more motels, and six gift shops on this beach," he said.

"Is this the nicest one," I asked.

"Actually, no. The other two are way nicer. But this one's in walking distance of home. That's why I work here. Of course, now that I have my car, I guess I could work anywhere. But this one's fine."

"Could I work here, too," I asked.

"I don't see why not. If Clay, my brother, stays in Gainesville this summer, like he said he wants to, I could run the beach, and you could be the pool boy."

We didn't talk for a few minutes. Then, out of the blue, Kyle put his hand on Dave's thigh and said, "I know you and Tim have had sex, man, and I'm cool with that. Just don't get better at it than I am."

Dave turned a deathly shade of white, and then his face got as red as Kyle's box of Marlboros. I was sure my own face was probably that color, too.

"You told him," Dave asked me, terror on his face.

"No, he didn't tell me, David," Kyle said. "And truly, man, I'm not upset about it. He and I even talked about you guys doing it, and I told him I wouldn't mind if he did it with you. I meant that then, and I mean it now."

"Phew. You scared me, Kyle. I thought you were fixin' to beat me up or something." David was visibly more relaxed.

"Would you consider doing a three-way," Kyle asked.

Neither Dave nor I said anything. I was trying to picture how that would work, and I got hard

thinking about it. Kyle noticed and put his hand on my dick through my shorts.

"I guess this means `yes.'" He squeezed the head of my dick a little. Dave saw him do it, and he blushed again. I loved having his hand on me, and I sort of thrust up into his hand a few times. "Not here, Babe," Kyle said gently.

"That might be pretty awesome," Dave said. "Would we do the same stuff Tim and I did?"

"I don't know. What did you and Tim do," Kyle asked.

"Some of the same stuff we do," I said. "Not all of it, though."

"Then yeah, Dave. Same stuff," Kyle said. "Do you guys want to sleep over at my house tonight?"

"Yeah, I do," I said, "but we have to go to church first."

"I meant to ask you about that. What's up with church on Saturday night," Kyle asked.

"We're Catholic, and you can go either Saturday night or on Sunday. We only have to go one time on the weekend. Are you going to go with us?"

"Sure. I've never been to a Catholic church before. Do you think you can spend the night, Dave?"

"I have to ask, but I'm pretty sure it'll be okay. My parents know your parents, so that won't be a problem," Dave said.

"How long does church last," Kyle asked.

"About an hour, but I'll bet we'll stop someplace to eat afterwards. We ought to be home by 8:30 at the latest."

"Be at my house at 8:30, Dave. No, make it nine o'clock, just to be on the safe side. By the way, my parents aren't home this weekend." He grinned evilly.

We walked home and carried our boards so we could talk.

"Are you really okay with this thing tonight, or did you just say `yes' because I suggested it, Tim?"

"No. I had thought about it before, and I want to do it. You know what else I've been thinking about?"

"What?"

"Kissing you," I said.

"You kiss me all the time, Tim."

"I know, but I meant down there. On your dick. Would you like it if I did that?"

"Woohoo! You know it, man. I want to do that to you, too, Babe, only I want to do more than that. I want to suck it and make you shoot in my mouth. I want some of you inside me."

"That's what I meant. I want to do that, too, Babe," I said. "Do you want to do that tonight?"

"I want to do it right now. It's only 4:30. We have time, you know."

"Okay," I said. We started jogging home. We only had a couple of blocks to go, and neither of us was very out of breath when we got there.

Nobody was in the den when we got home, and the door to Kevin and Rick's room was still closed. I listened for sound from there, but there wasn't any. We went back to my room and locked the door. It didn't take us long to get started or to finish, the first time. The second time lasted longer. It wasn't as easy to do as it looks like it is in the pictures on the Internet. Kyle's dick wouldn't go all the way in my mouth, but I got more than half of it in. He couldn't take all of mine, either, but it sure felt good.

We heard the big brothers in the den. Then Kevin knocked on my door and told us to get in the shower if we need to. We had taken a shower that morning in Tallahassee, but we were sweaty from playing and from what we had been doing. We hopped in the shower together and were ready for church in just a few minutes.

Kyle was still in my room getting dressed when Rick answered the phone. He handed it to me and mouthed Dave's name.

"I can't spend the night. Shit!"

"Why not," I asked.

the counter onto him. I wrapped my legs around his middle and my arms around his neck. He carried me that way into the den and lowered us onto the sofa.

"I want everything you've got," I said.

Rick was the gentlest of men, but, when he heard that code statement, he thrust himself into me with enormous power.

"Tell me if I'm too rough, okay," he said.

"Okay," I said, "but I want it hard."

Rick gave me precisely what I asked for. He had a sixth sense that let him know when I was close. He would slow down or stop altogether for a few seconds to let us catch our breath. When we had first started making love a few years before, both of us were quick to pop off. By then, though, we had both learned to vary rhythm and intensity to make it last and last. We still had an occasional "spurt surprise," as we called it, but usually we could make it last a long time. That was true that morning, and we enjoyed a thunderous climax.

"I don't want to go to work today," he said, his dick still hard and still in me. "Let's call in sick."

"We can't do that," I said.

"I know, but I can still want to," he said.

I chuckled.

"What would you do if Tim walked in here right now," I asked in fun.

"I'd say, 'Hey, Tim. What's up? Wanna watch?'"

I laughed out loud, remembering Kyle's comment about watching when we were on the island with Mont and Ter.

"And he'd say, 'Yeah, can I do the finger?'"

"Doing the finger" had become a part of our private language, and he knew it made me howl with laughter every time I heard it. We both laughed so hard when he said it that morning that we came apart.

"He's really made a difference, hasn't he," Rick said. I knew he was talking about Tim.

"Yeah. I sometimes dread when George gets back."

"I know what you mean," he replied. He kissed me, and we went about our day.

The next evening, I was sitting in the den reading. Rick was watching TV, and Tim, and the ever-present Kyle, were in Tim's room. We had been to Mass earlier, and then had stopped for a bite to eat at one of those trendy "grill and bar" places. Tim and Kyle came into the den, and Tim was carrying a sheet of paper. It was only 9:30, but the boys were wearing only their briefs, apparently in preparation for bed or whatever.

"Look what I just got," Tim said, thrusting the paper at Rick, who happened to be closer to him. He was wearing a very unhappy look. In fact, he appeared to be close to tears.

"What is it," I asked.

"E-mail. From my dad. I think he might be in trouble." Tim's face had a look of anguish on it when he said that.

"Read it, Babe," I said.

"Okay."

Dear Tim,

I hope you're doing well and are behaving yourself. In your last letter you said you love Kevin and Rick, and I know that's true. And you're right, I know they do love you like their own son. I know things were very rushed before I left, but I would have asked them to be your guardians even if I had had six months to make the arrangements. You won't find...

"Skip that part," Tim said.

"No. Read it, Rick," Kyle demanded.
Rick looked at Tim for permission to continue.
"Okay. Go ahead," Tim said.

You won't find two finer men, gay or straight, anywhere, and believe me I've known many men in my life. Those guys have my complete and total trust, and it sounds like they have yours and Kyle's as well. You boys are very young, but it's certainly possible for you to care deeply for one another. I wish I were there to meet Kyle and get to know him.

Tim, this is going to be the last e-mail from me for a while. Please don't worry. Electronic communications are still relatively new, and the Navy, and the military in general, are still learning what can and cannot be done safely. The way I look at it, if we were in any danger, I never would have been allowed to send this message.

There is a line of officers waiting to use this computer, so I need to make it short. I love you, Son, from the bottom of my heart.

Dad

Rick handed the letter back to Tim. I saw Rick making a valiant effort to hold back his tears. I quickly wiped a tear from my eyes. I knew we were overcome by the sentiments George had expressed about us, but we didn't want to give Tim the impression that we were worried.

"Ohhh, Rick," Tim started to say, and he burst into tears. Rick grabbed him into a hug immediately. I moved down to where they were and wrapped my arms around them. In seconds, all three of us were a puddle of tears. I looked up and saw that Kyle was crying, too, so I motioned him to me. He got in my lap as Tim was getting into Rick's lap, and then the four of us cried.

Rick petted Tim, and I petted Kyle.

"Baby, he's not in danger," Rick said. He started rocking back and forth, and he said the same thing over and over.

"I'm scared, Rick. I'm so scared," he said. His sobs were obscuring his speech.

"I know you are, Tim. I know, but you don't need to be," Rick said.

Kyle calmed down, and he wedged himself between Rick and me. He took Tim's hand in his, and he gently rubbed it. Tim shifted position on Rick's lap, and he spread his legs over Kyle's lap. It was genuinely touching to see him trying desperately to comfort his friend and, yes, lover.

"Tim, he says in the letter they wouldn't let him send it if it was dangerous," Kyle said.

"I know," Tim whimpered. "But still..."

Kyle started rubbing the front of Tim's thigh. He had only done it a few seconds when Rick said, "Kyle, just hold his hand, okay, buddy."

Tim buried his face in Rick's chest and let out what could only be described as a howl of agony. Kyle and I both saw at the same time that Tim was erect, and Kyle scrambled to get up. He was blocked by Tim's legs, the coffee table in front of the sofa, and Rick's and my bodies. He put his face in his hands and howled, too.

"Tim, sit up, please," Rick said.

Both boys were emotional wrecks, and I didn't have a clue about what to do or say to calm them down.

"Kevin and Kyle, y'all push down to the right to give us some room at this end," Rick said.

We did as instructed.

"Okay, Tim, get up and sit right here next to me," Rick said.

When Tim was in place on Rick's left, Rick said, "Okay, everybody, let's calm down. We're going to all take a big deep breath when I count to three. Ready? One. Two. Er, Kevin, help me out here.

What's next?"

"What's next? I don't know." I'm sure my voice communicated impatience.

"Three," Tim said quietly between sobs.

"Oh, yeah! Three!" Rick bellowed.

I had my arm around Kyle's shoulders, and I felt his movement change from sobbing to laughing. Then I heard it. Then I heard Tim laughing, too. In a second, all four of us were laughing as though we had just heard the funniest joke in history.

"All right! Now that's what I wanted to hear," Rick said.

"Phew," I said.

"I know," Rick replied.

We all relaxed. In a few moments, Tim began to speak.

"Kyle, why did you..."

"No, Tim. We're not going to talk about it," Rick said.

"But he knew..."

Rick cut him off. "Tim. What did I just say? Kyle didn't do anything wrong. He cares about you, man. He was trying to comfort you, not sex you up. Am I right, Kyle?"

"He's totally right, Tim. I'd NEVER do that to you in front of them. Scout's honor, man."

"On your honor?"

"Yes, Tim. On my honor. On my EAGLE honor."

There was a brief pause.

"Okay, Babe. I'm sorry I freaked like that," Tim said.

Kyle stood up, and he was half hard in his briefs. He took Tim's hand and the two of them walked back to Tim's room.

"Whoooooooa," Rick said softly.

"I know. I'm having a drink. Do you want one?"

"Yeah, and make it a double."

I chuckled. I could count on one hand the number of times in the almost-four years we had been together that either one of us had had a drink apart from some kind of social event. Rick had a horror of "empty calories," so he almost never ate candy or drank alcohol. I knew his "make it a double" line was for comic effect, but the fact that he wanted a drink at all let me know just how draining that scene had been.

I set his drink on a napkin on the table in front of him. I leaned in and kissed him.

"You were wonderful. I love you," I said.

"Thanks, Babe. You were pretty damn wonderful yourself, and I love you, too."

I sat next to him, and we each took a sip of our drinks.

"That e-mail was a lose-lose proposition, anyway you look at it, wasn't it," he said.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, sending the e-mail scared Tim, but not sending it would have made him think George was dead or something when he noticed they had stopped coming. Fucking Navy!"

"Good analysis. I hadn't thought of that," I said.

"I wish I had this whole damn thing tonight on videotape."

"For what? To show to the Navy?"

"No, to show to the fucking Boy Scouts. They don't want guys like those two boys because they're queer. I can't fucking believe it."

"Scout's honor sure seems to mean something sacred to those two," I said.

"That's my point. Whatever the hell the scouts do to produce men of character, it sure seems to have worked with our two little fags. But they don't want them. God, I hate bigots!"

"Do I need to hold you to calm you down," I asked.

He chuckled. "Sorry about that. No, but you do need to hold me."

We took our shirts off and got into our usual position. When we were comfortable, I said,

"Could they get kicked out of the scouts just for being gay?"

"That's right. It goes against the scout oath that they'll be morally straight. They're word, not mine. They're also supposed to be clean in word and deed. If they kicked out every Boy Scout who ever said `fuck,' let alone `shit,' there wouldn't be a one left. I can fucking guarantee that."

"Do they have to get caught doing something," I asked. I had not been a scout, but their whole homophobic orientation interested me, especially after what I had seen happen that night.

"No, not at all. They consider the homosexual orientation immoral. Face it, Babe, you and I were doomed to hell the day we were born, according to them."

"I didn't know Kyle was an Eagle Scout, did you?"

"Yeah. Tim told me. He's one of only eight Eagles in their troop."

"Is Tim one of them," I asked.

"He's close, but he's not there yet. I don't know if he's even going to go for it. I wish he would. I'm sorry I didn't."

"How far did you get," I asked. I knew Rick had been a scout, but we had never talked about it much.

"Life Scout. The next rank is Eagle. I think they changed the ranks, though, and I think you now go from First Class to Eagle."

"Why didn't you finish it," I asked.

"When I went to high school, I got involved in sports. Sports became my life and just replaced the scouts. It's rare to find a kid Kyle's age still as active as he is."

"Why do you wish you had gotten your Eagle Scout rank," I asked.

"Well, it's a pretty big life achievement, for one thing."

"You mean like finishing the Ironman?"

He chuckled.

"And I'd love to be able to plop my Eagle badge down on some scoutmaster's desk and say, `I'm an Eagle, I'm queer, and I'm here.'"

"You really care about this, don't you? I knew you had been a scout, but I had no idea you cared this much."

"Well, I haven't thought about it much in a long time, you know? But I think scouting is just about the best thing a young boy could ever do. You heard them tonight. All Kyle had to do was pledge his honor, and Tim accepted it right away. Tim knows Kyle wouldn't lie on his honor. Some kids might, and I'm sure plenty of them do, but Tim knew Kyle wouldn't."

"I always thought that scout's honor thing was a joke, sort of."

"Not to a real scout, it isn't."

"Were there any gay kids in your troop?"

"You mean, besides me? I didn't know it then, but there were several." He mentally counted on his fingers. "At least five that I know of. Six, including me. Of course, BSA claims there are no gays in scouting."

"BSA? Boy Scouts of America?"

"Right. Not only are there gay scouts, there are gay Eagle Scouts, and we've got one right here in the house."

"Maybe they could let gay kids be in it, but just have different ranks. The gay kids could be Penguins instead of Eagles."

I didn't think I had ever seen Rick laugh that hard. Or that loudly. In fact, his laughter roused the

boys, and they came out of Tim's room to see what was going on. They were both wearing shorts.

"What happened," Kyle asked.

"Nothing. We'll tell you tomorrow. Y'all go to bed," Rick said, still trying to get his breath after his laugh.

"Before I go to bed, I want to say I'm sorry for how I acted tonight," Tim said.

"We both do," Kyle piped in.

"Your dad's going to be okay, Tim," I said.

"I know. Kyle helped me understand that." Tim took Kyle's hand.

"There's no reason to be sorry, Tim. You acted like a fourteen-year-old boy who was scared," Rick said.

"Exactly," I added.

"But the other thing..."

"We're not going to talk about that, Tim. That was about as important as this."

The "this" was a long, loud fart Rick let rip right then.

Of course, everybody laughed.

"Rick, I want to thank you for what you did. You have a gift, man. You can turn tears into laughter in a heartbeat." Kyle was being very sincere, and, incidentally, cute as hell.

"Thanks, Kyle," Rick said. "Sometimes I try too hard, but sometimes it works."

The next morning, Rick and I made slow, gentle love to one another without saying a word. Our room was filled with sunlight, and the white bed linen contrasted with Rick's tanned skin perfectly. I was totally in love with that man, and totally in awe of him. That morning, his every gesture, every facial expression communicated strength, love, and, yes, honor. He opened himself to me completely, and I filled him with my love.

"Goddamn, that was good," he said softly. "I think you're getting better."

"No. We're getting better," I said. I was gently rubbing my finger back and forth across his chin. He had shaved the afternoon before to get ready for church, but the stubble was already there.

"I wonder what the tykes are doing," he said.

I smiled. "You really love those boys, don't you?"

"I'll admit it," he said. "And you do, too. Don't deny it."

"I won't."

"They're so vulnerable. So naïve. I know Kyle didn't rub Tim's leg to turn him on. Kyle's a good kid. Plus, he's not stupid. I know he just wanted to comfort his boy. I know he'll learn, but I don't want him to get hurt like he almost did last night. You couldn't feel Tim's muscles harden when that happened. That little fucker's strong as a bull, man, and he was very close to wanting to take Kyle out."

"I didn't realize that, Babe," I said. "Oh, by the way, I agree with what Kyle said last night. You DO have a gift for turning tears into laughter. What an incredible line."

Rick let out a rather heavy sigh.

"Are you sad, Babe," I asked.

"No, I'm happy. There's so much love in this house. I'm about to cry."

He took several deep breaths and concluded with "Phew." He wiped his eyes on the sheet. "I'm okay," he said.

"Thank you," I said.

"For what?"

"For what you just said. For what you just did. For sharing your soul with me."

Then he did something that was totally Rick, totally jock, totally "guy," and totally disgusting. He used the edge of the top sheet to blow his nose!

"It'll be dry by tonight. Besides, it's my side."

All I could do was laugh. We got up and made the bed. Before we left the room, though, we kissed and embraced.

"I love you, shithead," he said.

"I love you, too, asshole."

Sunday mornings were, by tradition, "underwear only" at our house. Before Tim came to live with us, Rick and I stayed naked pretty much all morning, but we had changed that to underwear for his benefit. All four of us wore briefs, so it was "briefs only." Rick and I put on our briefs before leaving our room.

It was around nine o'clock when we emerged, and the boys were already up watching TV. They had the set tuned to one of the versions of ESPN. They had already gotten the paper for us, and they had a pot of coffee made and waiting.

"Hi," they said in unison. "Hi," we both replied.

We didn't say anything else until we had our cups of coffee and were seated at the breakfast room table. The boys came over and filled the other two chairs. There was a pack of cigarettes on the table which I knew to be Kyle's. He almost never smoked in front of us, but his cigarettes were always on the table on the Sunday mornings he was at our house.

"You mind if I have one of these," I asked.

"Help yourself," he said, as he always did.

"I owe you a pack," I said. It was a reflex response, and I no more meant it than I would have if I had said, "I'll suck your dick." And he knew it.

"You always say that, Kevin, but you never do," Tim said.

"Tim, dude," Kyle said, "y'all feed me like twenty meals a week. He can have a smoke without paying me back." Then, "Can I have one?"

I looked at Rick, and I just knew the devilment was right on the tip of his tongue.

"No. Buy your own," Rick said.

I was glad I didn't have a mouthful of hot coffee at that moment because my laugh would have spewed it all over Kyle.

Kyle grinned. "Asshole," he said. He lit up.

"Kyle, where do you buy your smokes, man," I asked. The state of Florida had a pretty strict rule about not selling tobacco products to kids under eighteen.

"I don't buy `em," he said.

"So what do you do? Shoplift them."

"Kewwwwinnnnnnnn," Tim said, in Kyle's defense.

"I do, sort of, Babe," Kyle said. "But not really."

"Well, do tell," I said.

"My family has these gift shops up and down the beach, and in Destin and Fort Walton, too. Oh, Tim, I forgot about those and about the motels over there, too. Anyway, we have a warehouse where we keep the stock for those places. About once a month, I go to the warehouse and tell the manager I need two cartons of Marlboro Red Box, and he gives them to me."

"And your parents are okay with that arrangement," I asked.

"They know I smoke, but I don't smoke in front of them. I don't know if they know about the arrangement or not. They've never said anything to me about it."

"So, Kyle, you're an Eagle Scout and a cross country runner, right," I asked.

"Right."

"Do many Eagle Scouts and runners smoke?" We had never talked about that before, but I was

fascinated by it. In fact, I saw Kyle in a whole new light that morning, after what had happened the night before.

Rick pointed to himself and nodded vigorously, grinning broadly.

"Are you an Eagle," Kyle asked, excitement in his voice.

"No. I'm a Life."

I took note of the fact that they both used the present tense.

"Oh, I know what that is. It's like where you are, Tim," he said. "They used to have that rank when I first joined. How many badges did you have?"

"I had more than enough for Eagle, but I never did the project," Rick said. I didn't know what they were talking about, but the other three at the table were intensely interested.

"That's exactly where this jerk is," Kyle said, pointing his thumb toward Tim.

"Hey," Tim said with a little indignation in his voice.

"You need to do the project, Tim. I'm so sorry now that I never did it," Rick said.

"Why didn't you do it, Rick," Tim asked.

Rick told him about high school and sports and all.

"I'm not sure I want to be an Eagle Scout anymore," Tim said.

"Why the hell not, man? It's cool," Kyle said.

"Yeah, Tim, why not," I asked in a much calmer voice than Kyle had used.

Tim got pretty tense at that moment, and it was obvious on his face.

"They don't like me," Tim said quietly.

"Bullshit! Everybody likes you," Kyle declared. "Hell, you got eight votes for Senior Patrol Leader, and you're not even an Eagle. The Senior Patrol Leader has always been an Eagle."

"Not the troop, Kyle. I know they like me. The scouts don't."

"What are you talking about," Kyle demanded. I could tell Kyle took his scouting more seriously than I had imagined.

"The National Committee, Kyle. They don't like you and me because we're gay."

Kyle appeared stunned. He looked back and forth to me and Rick, and he settled on Rick.

"He's right, Kyle," Rick said. "You don't know anything about that?"

"No. What's up with that," Kyle asked. "What does what he and I do back there in that bedroom have to do with us being scouts?"

"Nothing, as far as most people are concerned, but it can get you kicked out of the scouts," Rick said.

"Even if we weren't doing anything, Babe, they would kick us out just because we wanted to do it, if we told them," Tim said.

"Scout's honor, Kyle," Rick said.

Kyle looked confused and deflated, but he obviously took Rick at his word.

"How did y'all find out about this," Kyle asked.

"It was in the news. My dad and I talked about it," Tim said. "Before I told him I was gay."

"I'm quitting," Kyle said in disgust.

"No, you're not. Neither one of you is quitting," Rick said. "You're going to stay in, and Tim, you're going to make Eagle."

There was a strained silence for a few moments after Rick's pronouncement. Kyle had a look on his face that was very close to "who the hell do you think you are." Kyle picked up his box of cigarettes and turned it over and over in his hands. Tim looked a little confused.

"Kyle, you don't really want to quit, do you," Rick asked.

"No, sir," Kyle said in a low voice.

"Are you Order of the Arrow," Rick asked.

"Not yet. Close."

"Have you been to Philmont," Rick asked.

Kyle's face brightened into a smile. "Oh, yeah. Last summer. It was awesome."

"Well, you need to get your Order of the Arrow. In fact, both of you do."

"I don't get it, Dad," Tim said.

There was dead silence.

"Rick, I mean," Tim said.

I knew Rick was about to burst with emotion, but he continued.

"Tim, the National Executive Committee puts out propaganda about there being no gays in scouting, and you and I both know that's a crock of shit. Hell, there are three gay scouts at this table."

The boys grinned.

"Kyle, what was it like at Philmont? Any gay guys there?"

"Ohhh. Ohhh. Oh, yeah. There were plenty," he said. "That's why I was so surprised about what you said, Rick."

"We'll check it out on the Internet later, guys," I said.

Tim and Kyle looked at me like I had announced that the world was really flat, after all.

"Don't y'all want to see for yourselves," I asked.

"They know I didn't lie, Babe," Rick said.

"He gave his honor," Tim said. His tone of voice said that that should have been perfectly obvious to me.

I was suddenly acutely aware that Rick had a bond with those two boys that I could never have. The three of them were scouts, and I wasn't. I had always thought the Boy Scouts was for losers, for kids who weren't athletes, for kids who needed someplace to fit in and belong because they couldn't anywhere else. At that moment, I realized that scouting was a way of life, for your whole life, and that it was part of how a man like Rick could relate, on a level I couldn't really comprehend, with his sons.

"Kevin's right, guys," Rick said after a few moments' pause, "y'all do need to read some of that stuff on the Web about it. And Tim, you need to get your Eagle just because you're gay, man."

"Yeah. And Order of the Arrow, too," Tim said.

"Okay. Changing the subject. Who in this group could handle a breakfast buffet right about now? Kevin's treat."

The boys said "yeah" in unison. We got dressed and proved once again that no restaurant could possibly make money on an all-you-can eat buffet when my guys swarmed in.

Chapter 11

Tim got busy on his project for Eagle Scout. I was very impressed with how much planning and methodical research he put into it. He had decided on a landscaping project at a local nursing home, and he recruited Kyle, Tim, and me, along with several boys from his troop and one of the troop leaders, a guy about our age, to help him. Part of the project was to provide a service, but part of it was to exercise leadership by being in charge of getting things done.

About two months after the Sunday morning discussion that prompted him to renew his interest in becoming an Eagle Scout, his work detail assembled on a Saturday morning to start the job. Tim had gotten shrubs, bedding plants, and other landscaping necessities donated by several local nurseries, and Rick let him borrow from work the tools we would need.

I was somewhat surprised at the seriousness with which everybody went at the job. Several problems came up in the course of doing the work, and Tim handled them nicely. I half expected the troop leader to step in and take over one time, but he didn't. He let Tim make a decision, and everything

worked out well.

It was a hot morning in April. Tim had devised a work schedule for us, and it included a couple of breaks. The kids took their break by throwing a football around, but the adults took theirs under a shade tree.

"Tim's got this thing really well organized," Sam, the troop leader, said.

"Yeah, we're proud of him," I said.

"How do you fellows happen to know Tim," he asked.

"We're his guardians," I said.

Sam had a very puzzled look on his face, so we explained the arrangement.

"That's really generous of you guys," he said. "Does he divide his time between each of you?"

"No. He lives with us. We live together," Rick said.

At that point, Tim told us the break was over, and we had to get back to work.

"Ole Sam is curiouser than hell right now," Rick said with an evil grin. "I'm sure he thought we both had wives at home."

"I suggest we try to be evasive, if we can. We only tell him the truth if he asks point blank, okay?"

"Sure," Rick said, "and he probably won't."

As it worked out, Sam didn't bring up our living arrangements again. During the lunch break, we got to know him a little, and it turned out he was a hell of a nice guy. He was twenty-six, single, from someplace in Mississippi, and an engineer for the Navy by profession. We asked if he knew our friends Monte and Terry. He worked for the same company that Mont worked for, but he didn't know Terry. Sam and Rick talked about scouting, and each of them told funny stories about things they had done in the scouts. I learned that Rick was more of a badass than I had thought, although I knew he hadn't been an angel. We really enjoyed the guys's company, and I think all three of us left that lunch feeling as though we had made a new friend.

We continued working and sweating on into the afternoon, and Tim finally blew the final whistle at four.

"Hey, guys, I got our pool in shape this week," Kyle said. "My dad said it was okay if we use it today."

There was a chorus of "All right!" and "Cool!" and "Awesome!" from the boys. A couple said they had to get home, but two of the boys, plus Tim and Kyle, of course, said they wanted to swim.

"Are you going to join us," I asked Sam.

"Yeah, I thought I would," he said.

"Great, man," Rick said.

We loaded up Sam's car and Rick's SUV. One of the kids who had to go home had his own car, so he took the other one with him. Philip and Ryan rode with Sam, and, of course, Tim and Kyle rode with us.

We weren't in the car more than ten seconds when Kyle demanded our attention.

"Listen, guys. Do you know what Philip asked me today? If Tim and I were boyfriends."

"Oh, Christ," Rick said in obvious disgust.

"No. Rick. It's okay," Kyle said.

"How can that be okay," Tim demanded.

"Jeez, let me finish," Kyle said. I had noticed that both boys had picked up several of our speech mannerisms, and physical mannerisms, too. "Jeez" was one of Rick's favorite interjections.

"When he asked me that, I thought to myself, Oh, shit, he's going to bust us, and we'll both be kicked out of the troop. I must have had a look of panic or something on my face because, before I could say anything, he said, 'Ryan's mine.'"

"What!?" Tim's reaction was classic.

"That's exactly what I said. He repeated himself. He said, "Ryan's my boyfriend."

"No, he didn't," Tim said.

"Scout's honor," Kyle said.

"Oh, man. That's unbelievable," Tim said. "Was Ryan the other guy who came to get you out of our tent on that camping trip in January?"

"Yep. He sure was," Kyle said. "They were tent mates."

"And you know what else he said? He said he thinks Sam is gay, too," Kyle announced with glee. Tim laughed delightedly.

"Did he say what he based that on, Kyle," I asked.

"I asked him that. He said he wasn't sure, but he just had a gut feeling about it."

"When did you have time to talk to him in private," Tim asked.

"We both had to take a leak, so we went behind the nursing home into those woods a little way," Kyle said.

"You guys were talking about this with your dicks hanging out," Tim asked.

"Yeah. So what?"

"Did you see it," Tim asked.

"Oh, yeah. And it's really nice, too. It's like mine, and it looked like it was about..."

"Kyle," I cut in. "Too much information," I said.

"Maybe for you, but I know Rick is dying to hear about it," Kyle said.

Rick reached behind him and tried playfully to slap him. He missed, and the boys howled with laughter.

"Punch him for me, Tim," Rick said.

"I'll kiss him, but I won't punch him," Tim shot back. Tim leaned over and kissed Kyle chastely on the cheek.

"Awww, ain't that sweet," Rick said, mimicking a lisp.

I leaned over and did the same thing to him, and, again, the boys laughed.

Sam was right behind us in an extended-cab pickup, and it suddenly dawned on me that he and the other two boys had probably seen our carrying-on.

Kyle's dad came out of the house just as we walked around to the pool. We had met him several times before, and he had been extremely friendly and nice. He knew all about Rick's and my relationship, and he was fine with it. He knew about Tim and Kyle, too, and two or three times he had teased Tim about having to settle for an ugly boyfriend. Gene Goodson was a totally likeable man, and Rick and I thought Kyle was pretty damn lucky to have him for a dad.

After handshakes all around (Gene already knew Sam and the other two kids), he told Kyle to get us something to drink.

"Did you guys bring your suits," Gene asked.

Rick and I looked at each other.

"Duh!" Rick said.

I looked at Sam, Philip, and Ryan, and they all wore decidedly disappointed looks.

"That's no problem," Gene said. "Swim naked. Me and my boys do it all the time. Nobody can see you back here, and my wife's in Charleston visiting her sister. If I didn't have to be somewhere in thirty minutes, I'd join you."

"But what if one of us..."

"Tim. Come here," he said. He grabbed Tim in an affectionate headlock and gave him a nuggie. "If it happens, it happens, son. Just ignore it, and it'll go away. It's not like y'all ain't all seen `em before."

Tim blushed more than I had ever seen him blush before.

"You understand what I mean, son," Gene asked.

"Yes, sir," Tim said, and Gene turned him loose.

Kyle came out with a tray of cokes in plastic cups. The boys all grabbed for one, leaving Rick, Sam, and I to go after the last three. They moved away from the grown-ups, and they all started getting undressed to get into the pool.

"He didn't put anything in those, I know," Gene said. "My older son would have, at least for him and his buddies, but I know Kyle didn't. Come over here."

He led us to a cabinet that had a padlock on it. He fished out his keys and opened the cabinet door. Inside was a full array of liquor.

"What'll it be? A little Jack Daniels?"

"I'd better not," Sam said.

"Son, you ain't in charge of them boys right now," Gene said. "Philip and Ryan's daddies are two of my closest friends. We've known each other since the fourth grade, and I guarantee you they'd both want you to have a drink right now, if you wanted one, kids or no kids. Those boys know adults will take a drink. You ain't going to shock them. Hell, they'd be in this cabinet themselves, if I didn't keep it locked, and that's a fact, Sam."

"I don't know," Sam said.

"Son, I know you want a drink, and I know you need a pick-me-up after spending the day with those hellions," Gene said. His Southern accent was charming, and he was obviously an educated man, despite his good-ole-boy grammar flaws.

"Okay, twist my arm," Sam said.

"That's the way," Gene said. He poured a slug into Sam's cup, and then he did the same honors for me and Rick. "Y'all lock this cabinet when y'all are finished, okay boys?"

"Okay," I said.

"Kevin, I'm leaving you in charge of the liquor. You make sure this bottle is empty by the time y'all leave here tonight, you hear?"

I chuckled and grinned. "Okay," I said.

"Kyle, come over here," he called to his son.

Kyle came trotting up, his dick flapping as he ran.

"Sir?"

"In about an hour, call and order some pizzas. Give them the credit card number and tell `em to leave `em on the front porch so you don't have to go out there naked to get `em. Did Timmy do good today?"

"Oh, yes, sir. He did great," Kyle said. There was obvious pride in his voice.

"I told y'all he would. Did all the boys show up?"

"Yes, sir. Two of them had to leave when we were finished, though. They couldn't come over."

"Well, you know I'm proud of both of y'all. I would have been there today, if I could have been." Then, addressing Rick and me, "I have too damn much going on." Then, "Go on and play with your friends, Son. You're spending the night with Tim, right?"

"Yes, sir," Kyle said.

"Well, y'all have fun. Oh, and if your brother calls, tell him Mama and I decided he can go on that trip, but he has to pay for it."

Kyle's face lit up in a huge grin. "Okay, Daddy. I'll tell him."

"Good night, Kyle. I love you." He kissed Kyle on his forehead.

"I love you, too, Daddy."

Kyle trotted off to rejoin the boys in the pool.

"Rick, Kevin, I want to thank y'all for all y'all have done for him in the last four months. He's like a different child. I feel like I've got my son back now."

I was speechless at that revelation, but Rick piped right in.

"Thank you for letting us be his big brothers, Gene."

"It's damn hard being a kid, but it's even harder being a gay kid. You boys have been outstanding role models for him and Tim. Thank you." Gene got an almost startled look on his face, and then he looked at Sam. "Shit, I think I just fucked up big time."

"Naw. I knew. About these guys, at least," Sam said.

"Phooooow," he said. "Thank Jesus for that. Just forget about what I said about the kids, okay?"

"No, I'm not going to forget it. I always like to know who my brothers are," Sam said.

"You mean....," Gene started to say.

"Yeah," Sam said, "but I've been way deep in the closet until I met these guys today. I love the scouts, and I want to stay a troop leader, so I can't come out to everybody just yet. But seeing Kevin and Rick interact with those boys made me know I've got some serious re-thinking to do."

"Jesus Christ, look at the time. I wish I could stay, but I can't. Kevin, I meant it about making sure that Jack's all gone tonight, you hear? Y'all have fun tonight with the boys. I sure ain't going to have fun where I'm going. Business dinner on a Saturday night. Can you believe that?"

Gene was gone as fast as he had appeared.

Sam and I had been working on our drinks while we had been talking to Gene, but I had noticed Rick hadn't even had a sip of his.

"I don't know about you guys, but that water looks pretty nice to me," Rick said. He walked over to the lounge chairs, got undressed, and headed into the pool. The kids cheered when he dove in.

There was an awkward silence between Sam and me. I had a million questions for him, just as I'm sure he had a million questions for me, but neither of us said a word. Finally, after we watched Rick do a cannon ball flip off the diving board, Sam spoke.

"You won the prize, I think."

"What are you talking about," I asked.

"Rick, of course."

"I think so, too," I said. "He's great with the kids."

"I'll bet that's not all he's great with," he said.

I was a little surprised he said that, but I was proud, nevertheless.

"You said earlier today that you're single," I said.

"I am right now. I've had boyfriends, though. Just not since moving here."

"How long has that been?"

"Two years," he said. "I get over to Tallahassee or Ft. Walton now and then when it gets too bad, but that's not really my style. I'm more like you guys. I want a mate. A life partner."

I lit a cigarette.

"Can I have one of those," Sam asked.

"Sure." I handed him my pack and my lighter.

"I thought I was the only smoker left on earth," he said.

I just laughed.

We finished our drinks at about the same time, and I wanted a little more. I could tell Sam did, too.

"Here, let's split this. It's probably watered down to hell by now, but I know he won't drink it." I divided Rick's untouched drink between us.

"He doesn't drink," Sam asked.

"Yeah, he does, in theory, but he has a terrible fear of what he calls empty calories," I said.

"What is he, some kind of Olympic athlete or something? He looks like he could be."

"Naw. He's not Olympic material. Right now he's all about marathon. Used to be, he was into triathlon. He had a bike accident right before New Years, so he's quit tri for the time being. He'll be back

to tri, though. Marathon's a challenge, for sure, but I think he'll run tri again, someday."

"He's not really built like a runner," Sam said.

"I know. He knows it, too."

"Those shoulders are incredible. Where'd he get those?"

"Those are surfing shoulders. Rick's misspent youth was on a surfboard. Surfers have to paddle a lot, and their paddling gradually builds up those huge shoulder muscles."

The pizza person came just then. He or she rang the doorbell, and we heard it out back. I hadn't noticed that Kyle had called in an order, but he obviously must have. He went through the house to get it, and he brought back six extra-large pizzas. He and Tim organized the meal, and they brought out a bowl of ice, a couple of liters of coke, more cups, napkins, and peppers and cheese for the pizzas.

The boys and Rick were in various stages of partial erection. They had been playing a game of tag that involved grabbing a guy's dick to make him "it," and the effects of the game showed. They were totally shameless when they got out of the pool, and I thought that was the way God intended it to be.

Sam and I ate in our lounge chairs, but Rick ate with the kids at the table.

Tim worked diligently finishing up his service and leadership project, and the final documents he produced were quite impressive. Rick and I both proofread his material for him, and we were both proud of what he had accomplished. He went through his Board of Review and Scoutmaster's Conference with flying colors, and he was ready to receive his badge.

"Well, how does it feel, buddy," Rick asked him when he got home from jumping through his final hoop.

"Pretty damn good." He grinned.

"Well, we're just as proud of you as we can be," Rick said.

"So am I," Kyle said. "Remember that old saying, 'Birds of a feather fuck together.'"

Rick and I burst out laughing.

"Kyyyyyyyle," Tim said in horror.

"What," Kyle demanded, obviously confused.

"Did you mean to say, 'Birds of a feather flock together,'" I asked.

"Yeah. Didn't I say that?"

"No. You said, 'Birds of a feather fuck together,'" Rick said, and laughed hysterically again.

"Jeez," Kyle said. He was a deep red. "I'm going home."

"No, you're not, asshole," Rick said. "Stay right where you are. You have to admit that's pretty funny, though, right?"

He finally laughed. "Yeah, I guess so. You guys must think I'm some kind of horn-dog or something."

"No, son," Rick said in his most serious voice. "We KNOW you are!!!! And so are we!"

Everybody laughed again. When we quieted down, Kyle got serious.

"I want to thank y'all, all three of you, for making me feel good about myself," he said. "Before I knew y'all, I was so ashamed of myself I wanted to die. I hated being gay, and I hated myself because I was gay. I didn't really have any friends, and now I've got a houseful. I love you guys. All of you."

Kyle started crying a little. Tim was sitting next to him on the floor, and he said,

"Babe, don't be sad."

"He's not sad, Tim. He's happy right now, and goddamn it, so am I," Rick said.

"Me, too," I chimed in.

"Me, too," Tim said.

Kyle recovered quickly from his tears, as he had the three or four other times I had seen him cry.

"When's the Court of Honor, Tim," Rick asked.

The scouts in my life had taught me a whole new vocabulary, and "Court of Honor" was yet another new term. I asked what that meant, and Tim explained that it was the ceremony where ranks were bestowed.

"Our troop has a separate Eagle Court of Honor, and the scout can pretty much decide when it will be. I want to wait for my dad to get home to have it. My other dad," Tim said. Then it was his turn to cry. He got up and went to Rick. Rick welcomed him into his lap and arms.

"You miss him bad, don't you, baby," Rick said.

"Yes," Tim mumbled through his tears.

"Well, maybe it won't be too long now," Rick said. He looked at me, and his look communicated the guilt, the ambivalence he felt about George returning. I knew that Rick secretly hoped George would never return, and I knew his guilt at feeling that way was eating him alive. I loved Tim, but Tim was Rick's child. In fact, Tim and Kyle were Rick's children. I knew it. He knew it. They knew it.

"Sometimes I wish he wouldn't come home," Tim said.

"Oh, Tim. Please don't say that, buddy. Don't say that," Rick sobbed. "Don't ever say that." It was my boy's turn to cry.

"I know," Tim said, and he and Rick hugged one another and cried together.

Kyle turned up his hands in a gesture that said, "I don't know what to do."

I shook my head to indicate that I didn't either. Then an idea came to me.

"Come with me," I whispered to Kyle.

I took him into the kitchen and told him to take out four large bowls. I went to the freezer in the garage and brought in three half-gallons of ice cream. We got out four bananas, a jar of red maraschino cherries and a jar of green ones, a jar of pineapple, a jar of hot fudge sauce that I heated in the microwave, a jar of marshmallow cream sauce, and a can of whipped cream. We built the four biggest ice cream confections I had ever seen and had fun doing it. We stuck some paper-thin chocolate chip cookies around the sides, and got four soup spoons to eat it with. I grabbed a handful of paper napkins and stuck them in my back pocket, and Kyle and I carried the bowls into the den.

Tim was still in Rick's lap with his head on his chest, but both of them had stopped crying. Tim's eyes got as big as saucers when he saw what we had, and Rick grinned and nodded.

We all attacked our ice cream as though we hadn't eaten in a week. There were odd comments about how good it was, but mostly we didn't talk. We had some serious eating to do.

When we had finished eating, Kyle and I lit up smokes. He no longer asked permission to smoke, and, as best I could tell, he had, maybe, three or four a day.

Rick sat up straight and started gulping air. I knew what was coming, and, sure enough, he let out an enormous belch.

After the laughter died down, Tim asked how he did that.

"I know how he did it. I can do it, too," Kyle said.

Tim watched eagerly, and then he wanted to try it. He gulped air, as he had seen Rick and Kyle do. He contorted himself to let rip a huge belch, but, when he did, his mouth filled with ice cream and the other stuff he had just eaten, and some of it ran down his face. He ran from the room to the bathroom.

Rick and Kyle apparently thought that was the funniest thing they had ever seen, and they laughed so hard that they couldn't sit up. I got up to go check on poor Tim.

"You all right, buddy," I asked, when I went into the bathroom.

He was laughing so hard he couldn't answer.

"Rinse out the sink before you leave," I said.

He said "Okay," but I could barely understand him through his laughter. He was still laughing when he came back into the den.

I spent the next half hour listening to Rick and the boys compete in a burping contest. It was a

Friday night, and I assumed Rick would run the next day. I brought it to an end around 11:30, and we all went to bed.

Rick turned off his alarm clock.

"Are you not running tomorrow," I asked.

"No, I'm taking a break."

"Me, too," I said.

He laughed.

"You got pretty emotional with Tim back there," I said. "Do you want to talk about it?"

"Can I have some space on this one, Babe?"

"Sure."

"You know I want to talk to you about it, but I've got to get my head right about this first. I know I'm wrong on this one right now. Way wrong. But I just can't help it."

"Maybe I can help you get right," I said.

"Kevin, the bottom line is, I don't want George to come home. And that scares the fucking shit out of me that I would feel that way."

We were naked in bed by then, and I put my arm around him.

"I really don't feel much like it tonight, Babe. Is that okay?"

"Of course it's okay. I just want to hold you. I know you're hurting, man, and I just want to be here for you. Just relax in my arms."

"There's too fucking much love in this house, Kevin. Way too much love. And it hurts. It hurts bad."

Rick cried himself to sleep that night in my arms. I thought about what he said about there being too much love in our house.

"No, Babe," I whispered. "The love in your heart is making it burst."

Chapter 12

(Tim's Perspective)

David and I had sex a couple of times, but Kyle said he didn't mind. He even tried to set up a three-way with him and us, but that fell through. But I thought about Kevin and Rick. I knew those guys loved each other so much they probably wouldn't care if the other one had sex with other guys. But I also knew they didn't do that. I liked Kyle more than I had ever liked anybody in my life, but I didn't know if we were in love like Rick and Kevin were in love. Regardless of that, though, I wanted to be like them in every way, and they were totally faithful to one another. That's what I wanted. So I told David we couldn't do it together anymore. He said he didn't think I would keep on with him, and he was fine with it.

I got some e-mail from my dad saying he wasn't going to be able to write to me anymore. I lost it big time that night.

"I'm sorry about your dad not being able to write to you," Kyle said. We were in bed in my room. We had been through a very tough scene in front of Kevin and Rick. I had thought Kyle had tried to turn me on by rubbing my thigh. I got hard and freaked out. He freaked out, too, but he promised me on his honor that he hadn't intended to get me hard, and I knew I could believe him.

"Me, too. I'm sorry I freaked out back there," I said.

"I freaked out as bad as you. No shame in that, Babe."

We didn't say anything for a few minutes. We had already made love a couple of times since we had come to bed, so feeling him snuggled up against me didn't really turn me on all that much. I broke the silence.

"Can you keep a secret," I asked.

"You know I can," he said.

"I know. I don't think I would be too sad if my dad didn't come home."

"What do you mean," he asked.

"I've never been happier in my life. I've got you; I've got Rick and Kevin. I feel really bad about it, you know what I mean? I was okay before, you know? But I wasn't really happy like I am now."

"Can you keep a secret," he asked.

"Of course. What?"

"I was miserable before I met you and them. I was totally ashamed of being gay, and I hated myself. Every night I prayed to God I would die in my sleep."

"I never thought of it that way, but I was kind of like that, too. I don't feel that way anymore, do you?"

"No. Not at all," Kyle said. "I've even started feeling sort of proud of being gay since I met you and Rick and Kevin. Do you know what Gay Pride is?"

"I've read that word, but I'm not sure I know what it means," I said.

"Well, I'm not sure I know what it means, either, but I'm damn proud of Rick and Kevin, and that they're my big brothers. And I'm very proud of you. I wish we could stand on the stage in that amphitheater at school and kiss and say to everyone, 'We're boyfriends.'"

"Me, too. But we can't do that. Rick and Kevin have talked to me a lot about being careful, and I think we need to be," I said.

"No question," he said.

I got really busy working on my Eagle project. Rick and Kevin told me I should do it just because the scouts were anti-gay and that by making Eagle I could sort of rub it in their face. I didn't feel good about even being a scout and being gay. I talked to Rick about it.

"Rick, can I talk to you," I asked him one day.

"Of course you can, buddy. What's up?"

"I've been thinking about the scouts."

"And...?"

"Well, I think I might be telling a big lie just by staying in the scouts," I said.

"I don't follow what you mean, Tim," he said.

"When I take the oath, I say I will be morally straight, you know?"

"Yeah? So? You are. I can vouch for you."

"How can I be, Rick? I'm gay."

He got really tense when I said that, and I thought he was going to be mad at me. I was sorry I had brought it up, but Rick was the only guy I knew who would understand. He didn't say anything for a long time.

"Tim, what do you think being morally straight means," he asked. He said it really nice and wasn't mad at all.

"I think it means following the rules. All of the rules," I said.

"What rules do you think you break, Tim? What important rules, I mean."

"Well, the rule about being gay," I said.

"Whose rule is that, Tim?"

"It's a scout rule, I guess. I'm not morally straight."

"Do you ever hurt anybody on purpose, buddy? Huh?"

"No."

"Do you help other people at all times," he asked.

"I try to," I said.

"Are you loyal to your friends? Do you stand up for them when they need you to?"

"Yeah," I said.

"Well, Tim, if that's not being morally straight, I don't know what is, man," he said.

"But what about being gay," I asked. I was getting pretty confused.

"Tim, did you wake up one morning and say, 'Hey, do I want to be straight or gay? Hell, yeah, I'll be gay. That way, some of the guys might beat the shit out of me or even kill me if they find out. And I'll have to hide who I really am. And I won't have some of the legal protections that everybody else has. Yeah, that's it. I'll be gay.'"

I was laughing by the time he finished that. Rick could make me laugh just about any time he wanted to.

"Of course I didn't decide that," I said. "It just happened, I guess."

"And who made it happen, Tim?"

I drew a total blank on that question. I had never thought about it before, and I had no idea who made it happen that I was gay.

"I don't know," I said.

"I know," he said.

"Who," I demanded. I'd like to talk to that son of a bitch, I thought.

"Son, God made you gay."

I was shocked. "How do you know that," I demanded again.

"Because He, or She if you listen to some priests, made me gay. He made Kevin gay. He made Kyle gay. He made..."

I cut him off. "Why would God do that?"

"Why would God make us special? Different? Maybe because He loves us a little bit more, Tim. Maybe because He knew that we could handle the challenge and we'd be more compassionate and more tolerant people because of it. I really don't know."

"You don't seem very religious at all, Dad," I said. I realized after I said it I had called him "Dad," but I didn't correct myself that time.

"I guess I'm really not. Kevin is more religious than I am, that's for sure. But I'm a Catholic, just like you, and I pretty much believe a lot of it. But you don't have to be religious to believe in God and to know that God loves you, do you?"

"No, I guess not," I said.

"Let me tell you a story. Kevin and I went on a trip to Rome. His grandmother had given him a trip for two for his college graduation, and he took me. We had been together about nine months then. One of his dad's best friends is a priest, and he teaches theology at a university in Rome. We spent a day with him. It was a Sunday, and we met him at a church where he said Mass. We went to Mass, but Kevin and I didn't go to communion. We had a great day, and we really liked that guy. That night he asked us why we hadn't gone to communion. Kevin told him we were gay and we lived together, in sin.

"He asked us if we cared for one another, and we both said 'yes' right away. By then, we more than just cared for one another. We were in love, and we both pretty much thought it was probably going to be for life. Then he asked us if what we did in bed was an expression of the care we had for one another. Again, we both said 'yes.'"

"Then he said, 'Caring for one another, or, obviously, love, in your case, is the opposite of evil. How can the expression of love ever be evil, or sin?'"

"That's when I knew Kevin and I were morally straight in every way, Tim."

"But the scouts say being gay isn't being morally straight," I said.

"But, see, they don't know everything. Do you feel immoral just because you're gay?"

I honestly didn't, and I said as much.

"I don't either, Tim. In fact, I know I'm not. You're not lying when you take that oath, man. Please trust me on this. And you're not unclean. And you do your duty to God and your country, too, man."

I didn't say anything. I was letting it all sink in.

"Lord Baden-Powell. Do you know who he was," Rick asked.

"No, Rick. I've never heard of him. Who was he?" My voice was dripping with sarcasm. How could he think I didn't know who the founder of the Boy Scouts was?

He pinched my nipple hard, the way my friends and I did to one another. "You little shit," he said. He laughed, and I laughed, too, even though my nipple was hurting pretty bad.

"Anyway, smartass, Baden-Powell wanted the scouts to be for every boy. He never said gay boys couldn't be scouts."

"Do you think he was gay," I asked.

"I know some biographers have said that, but so what if he was? So what if you are, and so what if I am? Huh? Huh?"

He moved in on a tickle attack. We wrestled around for a little while on the floor, tickling one another. We ended up knocking an ashtray off the coffee table, but it didn't break. That pretty much ended our talk.

After that talk with Rick, I felt just fine about being a gay scout. I loved Kevin, but Rick was sort of my idol. He was my second dad, and Kevin was my third dad. I felt sort of guilty about making a difference between them because I knew Kevin loved me, too. But I felt like I had a bond with Rick that I didn't have with Kevin.

I went ahead and did my Eagle project. It was to landscape a place in the yard of a nursing home, and I got Kyle, Kevin, and Rick to help out. Kyle got his friends Philip and Ryan to help, too, and I got two other boys who I had helped on their projects to help, also. Sam, an assistant scoutmaster, also helped.

The project went really good. I had worked for a couple of months planning it, getting all the stuff we needed, and everything, and the day went perfect. Kyle invited everybody to go swimming at his house, and on the way there, he told us that Philip had told him that day that he and Ryan were boyfriends.

I did my project in April so the plants could take advantage of the growing season to get established and all. The week after the project, we had Spring Break. Spring Break in a beach town like ours was always a big deal, only for us it lasted seven weeks, not just the one week we were off school. The Goodsons were real busy with their hotels and gift shops during Break, and they hired me and Kyle to work during our vacation week. Kyle worked the beach, renting chairs and umbrellas, selling sunscreen, and bottles of water and soft drinks.

I was the pool boy. I had a concession stand, too, but I also had to keep the pool and the area around it clean and neat. They had sets of tables and chairs around the pool, along with lounge chairs. Part of my job was to bus the tables when they needed it and to empty the ashtrays. I stayed pretty busy, and it was great being out in the sun. One of the things I enjoyed was looking at all the cute college guys in their bathing suits. One guy in particular wore a light blue Speedo, and he must have been really well built down there, judging from the bulge.

One day the guy in the Speedo fell asleep on his back in a lounge chair, and he got an erection in his sleep. That big pole he was toting turned that Speedo into a circus tent right there for everybody to see. I noticed some girls, and a few guys, too, pointing at it and giggling about it. I called Kyle on the cell phone I had been given and told him to come up to see it. He did, and he and I laughed our asses off at the poor guy.

We closed down the concessions around four o'clock every day, and that's when Kyle and I played. We started hanging out some with Philip and Ryan that week. On the day of the Big Erection, we all met up at Kyle's house after work. His brother was still in school because his Spring Break had been two weeks before ours, and his parents wouldn't get home until around nine o'clock that night, as usual. I was staying at Kyle's house that particular night, so it was just the four of us boys that afternoon.

Philip and Ryan were both sixteen, and they both had cars. Philip was the cuter of the two, and he had really nice muscles from surfing. Ryan was cute, too, but he wasn't built and cut like Philip was.

We got cokes and went up to Kyle's bedroom. We were sitting around talking about nothing in particular when I remembered the guy with the erection. I told them about it, and everybody was laughing and being silly.

"Goddamn, I wish I had seen that," Philip said.

"Why? You've seen mine," Ryan said.

"You got a big one, Ryan," Kyle asked.

"He don't call me footlong for nothing," Ryan said, meaning Philip.

"Bullshit," Kyle said. "You ain't got no foot long dick."

"I didn't say it was a foot long. I just said he calls me `footlong.'"

"So how big is it," I asked.

"That's for me to know and you to find out," Ryan said.

"This boy's holding on to some major sausage, too," Kyle said, referring to me.

I'm sure I blushed, but I had had so much sun already that week that it probably didn't show too much.

"Only one way to settle this, dudes," Philip said. "Get a tape measure."

I got a little nervous when he said that.

"I don't know about that," I said.

"Aw, come on, Babe," Kyle said. "These guys are our friends, and we're all gay, for God's sake."

"Okay, I'll do it, but only if everybody does it," I said.

"Back in a minute," Kyle said.

Philip and Ryan were grinning. I smiled, too, but it was kind of a nervous smile, not a smile that said I was happy. They started taking off their clothes, and Kyle was back before they were fully undressed.

"Come on, Babe," Kyle said. "Let's get naked."

Kyle was just as enthusiastic about the idea as Philip and Ryan were. I wasn't at all embarrassed about the size of my dick, but I wasn't real comfortable getting hard in front of the other guys. I went along with it, though, to be a good sport, and pretty soon all four of us were naked.

Everybody was a little bit hard without even doing anything. We needed full hard-ons, though.

"Ryan, you get Tim hard," Philip said, "and I'll get Kyle hard."

This was a wrinkle I hadn't expected.

Ryan jumped over to me and got behind me. I felt his dick on my ass and then his hand on my dick. He started playing with the foreskin, not really knowing how to make me hard. He licked my ear a few times, and that, together with the feel of his hand on my dick and his dick getting hard against my ass, got me hard in no time.

When everybody was ready, Philip did the honors with the tape measure. It was one of those cloth tape measures, and he held it across the tops of our dicks.

"Somebody write this down," Philip said. "Ryan's dick is seven and three eights inches long." Then he did circumference. "And it's five and seven eights inches around.

"All right, Ry," Kyle said.

I was next. "Tim is...whoa! Seven and five eights inches long, annnnnnnnnnnnd an even six inches around. Holy shit, boy. How old are you, anyway?"

"I'll be fifteen next month," I answered.

"You let him stick that thing up your ass, Goodson," Philip asked Kyle.

"No way," Kyle said. "At least not yet."

Ryan and Philip both laughed.

Kyle measured in at six and three eights inches long and five and a half inches around. Kyle measured Philip, and he was the runt of the litter with five and three quarter inches of length and four and seven eights inches of circumference.

"Well, I guess you're the winner," Ryan said to me. "Course, not by much."

"So what do we do with these things now," Kyle asked.

"Circle jerk," Ryan asked tentatively.

"Yeah. Let's do it," Philip said. "The guy who comes first has to suck off everybody else."

I really got nervous when he said that.

"Oh, come on, Babe. It's just a game," Kyle said.

"Okay," I said reluctantly.

We spread a towel out on the floor, and the four of us knelt down around it. Philip wanted to set the pace, and we were each supposed to stroke when he said to. That way, he said, nobody would have the advantage of going slower than the rest of the guys.

Kyle and I had jerked each other off while we were taking a shower before we left work that afternoon, but I knew that didn't necessarily mean we would have any advantage. I knew I wasn't interested in sucking off three guys, though, so I used my foreskin to keep from shooting too fast. Instead of jerking off the way I usually did, using two fingers to rub the skin back and forth over the head of my dick, I grabbed it in my fist the way the others did theirs.

Philip set the pace, saying, "Down, up, down, up" in a pretty regular rhythm. I watched the others, of course, and they watched me and each other, too. Ryan let out a loud moan after about a dozen strokes, and he shot his load. Kyle was maybe a second behind him, and he started pumping out his stuff before Ryan was finished. Philip declared it a tie.

"What do we do now," Kyle asked.

"You suck off Tim, and I'll suck off Philip," Ryan said.

"It's a deal," Kyle said.

I was relieved that I didn't have to suck anybody, and I was glad it would be Kyle working on me. We had been doing oral for about two months at that point, and I knew it would be good. He got me on my back on the floor and took my dick into his mouth. I had assumed Ryan would work on Philip at the same time, but he didn't. The two of them watched Kyle and me. Kyle knew how to do me good, and he did the finger, which only made it better. When I shot, it was long and hard.

"What was that shit with your finger up his ass, Kyle," Philip asked.

"Y'all don't do that," Kyle asked in reply.

"No. Don't it hurt," Philip asked.

"No, it don't hurt," Ryan said. "I'll show you."

"You've done that with a guy," Philip asked his boyfriend.

"Not with a guy. You know that," Ryan said. "But I do it to myself all the time. There's a spot you have to rub that feels really good. Lay down. I'll show you."

Philip's dick was maybe ten percent less hard than it had been a few minutes before, but Ryan got it back up to speed in about two seconds once he took it into his mouth. He wet his longest finger real good with spit, and he rubbed Philip's hole a few times before he stuck it in him. Philip shrieked, and I figured Ryan must have found the special place. It didn't take Philip long to lose it after that, and he let out a big moan when his muscles stiffened up.

"Whooooa! That was un-fucking-believable," Philip said when it was all over. "We're going to have to do that again real soon." He kissed Ryan right there in front of us, and they were pretty cute.

"Hey, guys. Since we're all naked, let's go for a swim," Kyle said. We spent the rest of the afternoon in the pool.

That night in bed, after we had done the finger to each other a couple of time, Kyle said, "I guess

Philip learned something this afternoon."

"Yeah," I said. "Do you think we would have figured that out on our own if Kevin and Rick hadn't told us about it?"

"I don't know. Maybe," he said. He kissed me and snuggled up to me, and we went to sleep.

Saturday was check-out day at the motel for people who had been there all week, and that's the day we got paid. We had both worked forty-eight hours over seven days, and we each got \$480.00 in cash.

"Now this summer y'all are getting checks, and you're going to pay taxes," his dad said when he paid us. "But this is just a little gift for helping me out over your break."

"Thanks, Dad; thanks, Mr. Goodson," Kyle and I said at the same time.

"Did y'all make any tips," Mr. Goodson asked.

"Yes, sir, Daddy," Kyle said. "I made ninety bucks. How much did you make, Tim?"

"I made seventy-five," I said.

"Well, it looks like you boys done pretty good for yourselves. Kyle, you're spending tonight at Tim's house, right?"

"Right."

"Well, y'all be good, and y'all be careful. I don't want nobody turning up pregnant around here."

"Daaaaaaaaaddddd," Kyle said. He blushed, and I'm sure I did, too.

Mr. Goodson used both hands to ruffle our hair. "Y'all are cute. Now, get out of here."

"What do you want to do," Kyle asked after we had showered and dressed.

"Kevin told me to get a haircut, so I guess I better do that," I said.

"I could use one, too," Kyle said. "Let's get haircuts."

On the way to the hair salon, Kyle said, "You know what I'm thinking?"

"What?"

"With this good tan I've got, I need blond hair."

"Blond hair," I asked in disbelief.

"Sure, why the hell not? You ought to do it, too," he said.

"My hair's already blond," I said.

"Yeah, but it's dark blond. Sort of dirty blond. I mean, I want mine real blond. Lighter than yours is now. Will you do it too?"

I thought for a few seconds and couldn't come up with a reason not to.

"Okay, if you do it."

It ended up costing us sixty bucks each for a haircut and bleach job. Two different people worked on us at the same time, and we didn't see one another until we were all finished. Kyle really looked hot with blond hair. His eyebrows and eye lashes were still dark brown, and the contrast looked great. He said I looked hot, too, but I thought I looked like I was eight years old, which had been the last time my hair was that light.

"Let's get tattoos," Kyle said.

"No way, dude," I said. "Kevin and Rick would kill me."

"Not real ones, asshole. Paste-on ones. There's a tattoo shop down the beach that does wicked fakes. They last about a month or six weeks. Longer if you don't take a shower."

"Ewww," I said to the idea of not taking a shower.

He laughed and gave me a quick kiss.

"What do you say?"

"Okay," I said.

So we went to the tattoo shop and got fake tattoos. We got them on our left bicep, and we made the girl do them high enough so that the sleeve of a tee shirt would cover most of them, but not all. We

each picked out what the shop called primitive designs, and they looked very real. That was another twenty bucks a piece. It's a good thing we got paid, I thought.

Driving back to my house, Kyle pulled off the main road onto a side street.

"Where are we going," I asked.

"To our warehouse," he said.

I knew about the place, but I had never been there before. We pulled into the parking lot of a big metal building. The sign out front said "Goodson Enterprises." Inside there were a couple of offices and one enormous room with rows and rows of shelves.

"Hi, Kyle," a young guy in one of the offices said. "Here for some smokes?"

"Yeah," Kyle said.

The guy came out of his office into the area we were standing in. We were both wearing tank tops, so our new tattoos were clearly visible. The guy sort of did a double take when he saw Kyle.

"Whoa, dude," he said. "What's with the hair, man?"

"You like it?"

"It's fucking cool, man. Especially with the tan. And what's up with the ink? Has your old man seen this?" He touched Kyle's tattoo.

"Not yet. We just got them," Kyle said.

"Who's your friend, man," the guy asked.

"Oh, sorry, Evan. This is Tim Murphy, my best friend. Tim, this is Evan Franklin, a cool guy."

Evan grinned. "Nice to meet you, Tim."

"Same here," I said, as we shook hands.

"Can we just look around," Kyle asked. "We want to do a little Easter shopping."

"Help yourself, dude," Evan said. "It's all your shit, anyway."

"Thanks."

After we had walked away from Evan, I said, "What are you talking about? Easter shopping?"

"Yeah. Tomorrow's Easter, remember? Do you have something for Kevin and Rick?"

"Shit, no. I didn't even think of gifts," I said.

"Do you want to get them something," he asked.

"Of course I do. And you, too," I said.

"Well, let's go shopping."

That warehouse was totally amazing. It had all the stuff they sold in their gift shops, only by the dozens. There were all the tacky things that tourists buy for their next door neighbors, but there were a lot of good things, too.

"This is what I'm giving them," Kyle said, holding up two swim sets that each had a bathing suit and a matching beach jacket sort of thing. They were really cool, but I noticed they didn't have a price tag on them.

"How much are they," I asked. I wanted to spend the same amount, or more, as Kyle.

"They're free," Kyle said.

"Free?!"

"Yeah, to us. We're not paying for anything here," he said.

"I have money, Kyle," I said.

"Yeah, but Evan can't take it. This isn't set up for retail. If you pay Evan, it's going right straight into his jeans, that's for sure," he said. "I ain't giving that fucker money for stuff our company bought."

"Have you done this before," I asked.

"Hell, yeah. This is where I do all my gift shopping. My dad's the one who told me to do this."

"I don't know what to get them," I said. "You got any suggestions?"

"Do they have ankle chains, do you know," he asked.

"They aren't into anything kinky. You know that."

Kyle laughed so loud the warehouse echoed.

"What the fuck's so funny," I said. Kyle had never made fun of me, and I knew he probably wasn't making fun of me then, but I didn't understand what was so funny.

"You've been reading too many stories in the Nifty Archive by that guy Danny Meyer and that other guy David Buffet."

"So? Their stories are awesome."

"I know they are, but they both write about domination and bondage and slavery and that kind of stuff. The kind of ankle chain I'm talking about is jewelry, not bondage stuff, you dork."

"Oh," I said, and I giggled at my own ignorance.

"Let's find them. I'll show you what I'm talking about."

We went back to the jewelry area, and they had just about everything you could imagine.

"Okay. Here they are," Kyle said, pulling a box from the shelf. We had had to get a ladder on wheels to get to them.

"They look kind of like bracelets," I said.

"Well, they could be. But a lot of people wear them around their ankles instead of their wrists. They could wear them in either place. Do you like `em?"

"Yeah. They're really cool."

"These are 14 karat ones. Let's see if we can find some better ones."

He went up on the ladder again and came back with a box of 24 karat gold ankle chains.

"Get them these. They're better quality," he said.

"Cool," I said. Then, "Would you like to have one?"

"Yeah. Would you?"

"Yeah."

We took four packages of them out of the box. The packages had directions for how to take out links if they were too big. I felt really good about them.

"Do you want anything else you see," he asked.

"Naw. I already sort of feel like I'm stealing," I said.

"Okay, you can pay for them."

"I thought you said Evan couldn't take any money."

"He can't. You can pay me for them."

"Good. How much?" I reached for my wallet to pay Kyle for the stuff I had bought.

"Not money, dude."

"What, then?"

"Blowjobs, with finger."

"But I'm going to do that anyway," I said.

He laughed. "You still don't get it, do you? You cannot pay for shit here. Period. Over and out!" He kissed me right then, and it wasn't just a peck on the lips, either.

"Kyle, it's time to close up, man. I need to get going." That was Evan's voice over a PA system.

"Come on. Let's go," Kyle said.

We passed a huge stack of cartons of cigarettes, and Kyle grabbed two of the kind he liked. We walked a couple of feet more, and he turned around and went back. He grabbed two more cartons.

"For Kevin," he said.

"Did you guys find what you needed," Evan asked.

"Yeah. Thanks, Evan," Kyle said.

"No problem, little dudes. Come back anytime. We're open every fucking day."

"Bye, Evan," I said. "It was nice to meet you."

"Nice to meet you, too, Jim," Evan said.

"It's Tim, not Jim. Don't forget that," Kyle said.

"Sorry, Tim. Okay, I won't forget it," Evan said.

Kyle had sounded like a boss, and Evan had sounded like a guy who wanted to keep his job. That stuff was all so new to me, I didn't know what to think of it.

We got home around six o'clock, and Kevin and Rick were sitting in the den, obviously dressed to go out.

"What the fuck," Rick shouted when we went in.

Kevin was reading. When he looked up and saw us, his mouth dropped open. Kyle and I were both grinning from ear to ear.

"You like," Kyle said.

They both stood up and walked over to us. Kevin put his hand on my head to ruffle my hair, and he pulled back a handful of gel. He wiped it on my tank top.

"Yuck," he said.

"I love it, guys. I absolutely love it," Rick said.

Kevin was grinning and nodding his head. "Yeah, me, too. It looks so good with your tans. Y'all look so, so, healthy."

Rick spotted the tattoo on Kyle's arm.

"Yo, what's this? Ink?"

"Him, too," Kyle said.

"Oh, shit. Oh, God," Kevin said. He looked like he was about to have a heart attack or something.

Rick winked. "If the place is open, I'm getting one tomorrow," Rick said.

"Jesus Christ! I'm not believing this," Kevin said in a very serious voice. Kevin couldn't see Rick where he was standing, but Rick was about to choke from laughing so hard without making any sound. "Boys, how could you do this? You're so young. You're going to have those the rest of your lives."

Rick couldn't hold it together any longer, and he started laughing out loud.

"What the fuck is so funny, Rick," Kevin asked. He was as pissed at Rick for laughing as he was at us for getting tattooed.

"Those are fakes, Babe. They're not real tattoos."

Kevin calmed down a little bit. "How do you know? They damn sure look real."

"Did they have them this morning when they went to work," Rick asked.

"No. They obviously got them today," Kevin said.

"Do you see any red needle marks? Any swelling?"

"No, but they look real."

"But they're fakes, Baby," Rick said.

"Tim, are those tattoos fake? On your honor," Kevin said.

"You ain't a scout," Rick said.

"Shut the fuck up!" Pause. "Please."

Rick doubled over in laughter, and I guess I realized for the first time that Kevin could be really pretty cute, for a grown up.

"They're fakes, Dad," I said. "Scout's honor."

Nobody said anything for a few seconds. I could tell Kevin felt dumb, but it was in good fun. Of the two of them, Rick was the prank guy, the one who always wanted to have fun. Kevin was much more serious.

"It's ten after six, boys," Kevin said. "We're leaving for church at ten till seven. Go get ready."

"Why is Mass starting late tonight," I asked. It usually started at six o'clock on Saturday night.

"I don't know," Kevin said, "but the bulletin from last week said it starts at seven tonight. Now

move your asses."

Kyle and I went back to my room to change. We had showered up before we left work, as usual, so we just had to change into church clothes. Through the door to my room, we heard Kevin scream "asshole," and then we heard them both laugh very loud and very hard.

"Our big brothers are really cute, you know," Kyle said.

"Yeah," I said. "Our" big brothers, he had said. Yeah. Yeah, I thought. Our big brothers.

When we got to church, there weren't nearly as many cars in the parking lot as there usually were. I didn't think anything about that. When we walked into the church, it was dark. They had the front doors propped open so light could come in from the lights in the parking lot. We found places. Every place had a candle at it.

"What's going on," Rick asked Kevin, but loud enough for us to hear it.

"I think we made a big mistake, Babe," Kevin said. This is going to be loooooong tonight. This is the Easter Vigil."

"Tell me it's not, Kevin. I've been to one of those before. At FSU. Oh, man. Is there going to be a bishop here?"

"I don't know," Kevin said. "What year did you go to it in Tallahassee?"

"Freshman year. A bishop was there, and it was very, very long," Rick said.

"That's cool, man. I went to it freshman year, too, and, yeah, there was a bishop, and it was very long."

Before Rick could respond, a guy announced that we all had to go outside for the blessing of the new fire.

The service was very long. One of the deacons sort of apologized, but he said that that service was the highlight of the church year. There were lots of readings and some baptisms of grown-ups and all kinds of stuff. Finally, it was over at 9:30.

"Jesus Christ," Kevin said as we were leaving the church.

"Exactly," Rick said. We all laughed.

Kevin and Kyle lit up smokes on the porch of the church, where the fire thing had been.

"Well, at least you guys got a snack," Kyle said. "I didn't get nothing."

It took us all a few seconds to figure out that he was talking about communion, and when we did, we all laughed our asses off.

When we were in Rick's car, Kyle said, "I'm so hungry I could eat Tim."

"Can't you wait till you get home and in bed," Kevin said.

Nothing happened for a few seconds; then we all busted out laughing. That was the kind of thing Rick would say to tease us about sex, and coming from Kevin it was all the funnier. Comments like that used to embarrass me when Kyle and I first started dating, but by then I just thought they were funny. It was like they took Kyle and me seriously enough to tease us about it, and that felt pretty damn good. They never judged us or had anything negative to say, and that was really cool.

We went to a bar and grill place, and we all ate a lot of food. We went home after that, and we all went to bed.

Kyle and I got up before them on Easter Sunday morning. We knew they wanted privacy on Sunday morning, and we totally respected that. We were pretty excited that morning, though, and we scurried around the kitchen getting the breakfast stuff ready. We had fallen into a habit of cooking a really nice breakfast for them on Sunday mornings, and that day was even more special because it was Easter and we had presents for them.

"How are we going to wrap their gifts," I asked.

"Shit, I forgot about that," Kyle said.

"Me, too."

"Is there any wrapping paper around here," he asked.

"I've never seen any," I said.

"I've got an idea. They don't read the funnies, do they?"

"I've never seen them read them," I said.

"We can use the funny pages to wrap the presents in," he said.

I ran out to the street in just my briefs to get the Sunday paper. I had done that before, so it was no big deal. We pulled the funny pages out and went out to Kyle's car to get the presents from the trunk. We wrapped them in the funny pages and set them at their places. Kyle wrapped his present to me, and I wrapped mine to him. We set those in place, too. And then we waited.

By nine o'clock, we had made all the breakfast stuff except for cooking it, wrapped the presents, and watched three cartoons on TV.

"Do you think they're even awake," I said.

"Oh, yeah. They're awake," he said.

"What are they doing?"

"I can't believe you, Tim. What the hell do you think they're doing? They're making love, that's what they're doing."

"You think that's what they're doing?"

"Jesus, Tim. Of course they are, man. They're in love with each other. Of course they're making love."

"Are we in love," I asked. I just blurted that out. I knew Kyle liked me a lot, but I was definitely in love with him, I thought.

"I am," he said.

"With me?"

"No. With Philip. Of course with you, you jerk. Who the hell do you think?"

"Are you really in love with me," I asked.

"Yes, Tim, I am. Didn't you know that?" His voice sounded like I should have already known he was in love with me, even though he had never said it.

"I'm in love with you too," I said in a quiet voice.

"I know. Everything you say and do lets me know that."

"Do you think Kevin and Rick know?"

"No question they know. Everybody who knows us knows."

"We spend a lot of time together, you know? But I think about you all the time when we're not together. Like at school and all."

"The same with me, man. This past week, when we were working, I thought about you constantly."

"Me, too," I said.

"Let's get on the couch," he said.

We got into the position that Kevin and Rick got into all the time. I was already half hard, and I got fully hard when he wrapped his arms and legs around me. We didn't talk, and we didn't have sex, exactly. But it was an awesome experience.

We both went to sleep, and the next thing I knew there was a camera flash going off. Kevin and Rick were standing there grinning their asses off, and Kevin was holding a camera.

"Good morning, boys," they both said at the same time.

"Morning," we both sort of mumbled.

"Did you take our picture," Kyle asked.

"Yup. Hard-on and everything," Rick said.

I suddenly realized my dick was hard, and Kyle's was, too. I felt myself blush.

"Why," I asked.

"Because y'all were too cute to resist," Kevin said. "That's why."

"But I'm hard," I said. I was embarrassed and a little pissed off that they would do that.

"Oh, please," Rick said. "Get over it."

"I think you guys are turning into us," Kevin said.

"I hope so," Kyle said, and Kevin and Rick smiled. "Get up, Tim."

"Like this," I asked, not believing what he had said to me.

"Why the hell not," Kyle replied. "They know about us, Babe." He said that last part is a pretend whisper.

"Getting hard is your job, Tim," Rick said. "It's no biggie, man."

As we were getting up, Kyle said, "It's bigger than Ryan's, Philip's, or mine."

"Kyle! Jesus, man," I said. I felt self-conscious enough standing there with a big tent in my underwear, and Kyle was making it worse by talking about it.

"Did y'all have a little measuring contest," Kevin asked.

"Yeah. His is seven and five eights inches long and six inches around," Kyle said.

"Wow" Kevin and Rick said at the same time.

I wanted to vanish, to disappear right into thin air. I turned around and went into the bathroom, and I had tears of humiliation in my eyes. Rick was right behind me.

"Hey, buddy," he said in his gentle voice, "don't be mad, man. That was all in fun." He put his hand on my shoulder.

"Why did he have to tell you guys," I asked.

"Did you ever think that maybe he's proud of you?"

His saying that settled me down a little.

"It's obvious you guys are in love with one another. Let him brag about you, man," Rick said.

"But what if he said that to our friends? Like tonight when all the guys will be here?"

"He'd never say that to anybody but us, Tim. You know that, don't you?"

"I guess so."

"Tim. Can I come in?" It was Kyle at the bathroom door.

"Let him in, Tim. He's afraid you're pissed off at him. He didn't mean anything by what he said."

"Okay. Thanks, Rick. I love you."

"I love you, too, Tim. Now don't be too long, okay?"

"Okay."

Rick left and Kyle came in.

"Are you mad at me," he asked. He had a look of real sorrow on his face, and he was so cute right then that it just about melted me.

"I'm sorry I told them," he said.

I broke out into a big grin. "It's okay. I was just being dumb about it."

"I was, too," he said. "I guess I'm just learning how to act blond."

He broke me up with that line, and he and I both laughed. He kissed me quick, and we went out to where the guys were. They smiled at us, glad we were happy again.

"So how big is his," Rick asked me.

"Three inches," I said. Kyle punched me on my arm, and everybody laughed.

Chapter 13

The days flew by. Tim and Kyle were inseparable, and, as May moved along, they talked more and more about the coming summer. They were both planning to work at the motel where they had worked during Spring Break, and they were pretty excited about it.

Kyle's school play was on the second weekend of May, and, of course, we attended it. Tim attended all three performances, and he and Kyle talked about maybe Tim trying out for a play the next school year.

We celebrated Tim's birthday with a swimming party and cookout at the Goodsons' house at the end of May. Kyle was the host, and everyone on the guest list was gay. Our friends Mont and Terry were there; Sam the scoutmaster, who had by then turned into a regular member of our circle of friends, was there; Fred, Mont's younger brother, was there; and Philip and Ryan were there. Swimming was "suits optional," and, of course, nobody wore one.

Mont, Terry, Rick, and I were taking a break from the horseplay in the pool. We had towels wrapped around our waists, and we were nursing beers.

"That Sam is a nice guy. I wish he wasn't in the closet so deep," Mont said.

"You guys work together, don't you," Rick asked.

"Yeah. He's a damn fine engineer, too. I wish he and Fred would click."

"Is Fred still dating Mike," I asked.

"Yeah, off and on. They're good friends, but there isn't much chemistry there," Mont said.

"I sort of got that same feeling from Mike," I said. "And you're right. He really likes Fred, but I think it's pretty much a platonic hang-around-with kind of friendship."

"Those four boys are really cute," Terry said. "It's pretty amazing they've been together as couples this long."

"It's only been since January for Tim and Kyle," Rick said.

"That's not long to us, but to kids that age it's pretty good," Mont said.

"Our two are in love. There's no question about it," I said. "I wonder if it will last."

"It could. A lot of people marry their high school sweethearts, you know," Terry said.

"That's true. I guess I hadn't thought of it that way," I said. "Sort of destroys the stereotype about gay relationships not lasting."

"Well, look at you guys. And look at us," Mont said. "We've busted just about every gay stereotype there is." Pause. "Except for those damn pink hot pants Terry insists on wearing all the time."

"Shhhhhhh," Terry said with his finger to his lips, and we all laughed hard.

"I noticed all four of you guys wear ankle bracelets," Terry said. "Is there a story behind those?"

"Not really. Tim gave them to us and Kyle for Easter, and Kyle gave him one, too," I said.

"I like that," Terry said. "It kind of symbolizes a family bond or something."

"Yeah, we all really like that aspect of it," Rick said.

"So when are we going to get you guys out on the boat again," Mont asked, changing a subject that had run its course.

"Any time," I said.

"Yeah. We love going out with y'all, and the kids talk about it all the time," Rick said.

"When do they get out of school," Mont asked.

"At the end of this coming week," I said.

"What are the chances of you guys getting off in the middle of the week," Mont asked.

"We've both got plenty of vacation time built up," Rick said. "I could swing it. What about you, Babe?"

"Yeah. But why not on a weekend," I asked.

"It's tourist season, you know, and they're already swarming everywhere. It'll just get worse on into the summer. Besides, my grandfather and his friends are more likely to want to use the boat themselves on weekends, now that the summer is here."

"I see your point," I said.

"If the boys want to bring Philip and Ryan, that's okay, too," Mont said.

"They'll like that," Rick said. "They've gotten to be really good friends with those guys, and they seem to get along well, too. They even had a dick-measuring contest."

"Oh, yeah? Who won," Ter asked.

"Who would you guess," I asked. "You've seen all four of them."

"Gosh, I don't know. Ryan?"

"Well, he was evidently the favorite going into the contest, but it was actually Tim," I said.

"No, shit," Ter said.

The conversation drifted back to the boat trip. Mont said he knew a different island to go to that wouldn't have anybody on it at all. He said it had a reputation as a nudist playground and that we wouldn't have to worry about clothes, if we didn't want to. We planned the trip for the first week of June. We would leave on Tuesday morning and come home Thursday night.

The party lasted all afternoon and into the evening. Kyle and Rick grilled steaks for everybody, and they served microwaved baked potatoes, salad, and a green bean casserole that was very tasty. We had birthday cake and ice cream for dessert.

Tim got some really nice gifts. We gave him a nice camera that was waterproof. Philip and Ryan together gave him a gift certificate to a music store. Sam gave him some kind of fancy compass that no true scout should be without. Fred, Mont, and Ter gave him two polo-type shirts and a pair of shorts that Tim declared to be "wicked." Kyle insisted that Tim open his gift last. He brought out a rather large box that was wrapped reasonably neatly, and Tim tore into it.

Inside the box was six wrapped packages. Tim grinned at his boy, and Kyle grinned back. The love they had for one another was right there on their faces, and seeing them caused a lump in my throat.

The smaller packages contained shirts, a swim suit combo like Kyle had given us for Easter, a razor, a simulation computer game, and a baseball cap.

A few days before the party, Kyle has asked to talk to Rick and me alone. Once settled in the den at our house, Rick started us off.

"What's up," he asked.

Kyle seemed nervous. He was always totally at ease with us, but that afternoon I sensed that he was stressed about something.

"I wanted to talk to y'all about Tim's birthday present," he said.

"Are you looking for ideas," I asked.

"Oh, no. I have plenty of ideas. In fact, I've already gotten everything."

He ticked off his list of presents.

"You're giving him a razor," Rick asked. "He doesn't need a razor."

"Oh, yes, he does," Kyle said. "He shaves almost every day. He's been using yours, Rick."

"Okay. The pieces of the puzzle are starting to fit together. A couple of times he's left my razor on the counter in the bathroom, and I had to get out of the shower to get it. I'm glad you're getting him one."

"It sounds like you have everything taken care of, Kyle," I said.

"There's one thing I'm not sure of," he said.

"What's that," Rick asked.

Kyle had lost his nervousness after he started talking with us, but it seemed to come back at that moment. I knew Rick sensed his uneasiness, too.

"Kyle, if you want to give him a pony, the answer is `no,'" Rick said.

Kyle and I laughed.

Then Kyle took a deep breath. "I want to give him myself," he said quietly.

Rick and I were both puzzled about what he meant.

"Er, help us out here, Kyle," Rick said. "What do you mean, exactly?"

"You know how y'all talked to us after the first time we had sex, and Rick you said we shouldn't do anything unless both of us wanted it?"

"Yeah, I remember," Rick said.

"Well, we've stuck to that rule."

My heart just went out to Kyle. He was struggling so hard that I wanted to just hug him and pet him to make it easier.

"Kyle, what does that have to do with your gift," Rick asked. Kyle didn't respond right away, and what he was getting at seemed to dawn on Rick and me at the same instant.

"Are you talking about having anal sex with Tim," Rick asked. God, that man was gentle.

Kyle nodded shyly.

"Are you asking us if it's okay, buddy," Rick asked again.

"Sort of," he said in a voice not much louder than a whisper.

"Son, we can't give you permission to do that. That's something you and Tim have to work out between you," Rick said.

"Oh, we both want to do it," he said. "I don't know if you can tell, Rick, but Tim and I are in love. We're both thinking we could be it for each other, do you know what I mean?"

"Do y'all see yourselves being sort of like us," I asked.

"No. Being exactly like y'all. Not just sort of like y'all."

"That's pretty flattering, Kyle," I said. "Thank you."

"No, Kevin. Thank you and Rick for being who you are, man. Philip and Ryan are so jealous of us because we have y'all that they can't stand it. Philip's only out to his mom, and Ryan isn't out to either of his parents."

"Let's go back to the other thing," Rick said. "You and Tim have talked it over, and you both want to have anal intercourse. Am I right so far?"

"Sort of," he said.

"Help us here, Kyle. I'm not following everything just right, yet," Rick said.

"We've talked about it quite a few times, and he asked me if we could do it. He said he really wants to. Both ways."

"Both ways?" Rick's tone of voice let me know he was getting more and more puzzled.

"Babe, I think he means they'll both top and both bottom," I said. "Is that what you mean, Kyle."

"Yeah."

"And you've been afraid," I asked.

He blushed and hung his head.

Rick lifted his chin. "Hey, buddy, that's nothing to be ashamed of. Are you afraid you'll hurt Tim?"

"Yeah, but I was more afraid he would hurt me. He's really big, you know?"

"We've heard," Rick said. Kyle must have remembered the Easter morning episode, and he laughed.

"If your measurements are right, Tim's only a tiny bit bigger than Donkey Dong here," I said, "and he doesn't hurt me. Not even the first time. Well, maybe a little bit the first two or three times, but the pain was so little I don't even remember it."

"Another thing, we're not real sure how to do it. I mean, we know how to do it, but how do you do it so that it doesn't hurt?"

"Well, we can tell you that, but doesn't Tim need to be in on that conversation, too," I asked.

"See, that's the thing. He doesn't know yet that I want to do it, too. I kind of want that to be a birthday surprise for him. I was thinking I could wrap up a package of condoms and give it to him with his other presents at the party. That way he'd know."

"Jeez, I had forgotten this was about his birthday present," Rick said.

"And I want us to do it that night after the party," Kyle said.

"I think it's doable," Rick said. "We can still talk to both of you together about it without spoiling the surprise. Are you spending the night tonight? And where is Tim, anyway?"

Kyle glanced at his watch. "Shit, I'm supposed to be picking him up right now. He's at the motel. I told my dad I wanted to talk to you guys, so he figured out how to keep Tim busy this afternoon without me."

"Well, you better go get him," Rick said. "I'll order pizza."

"Can you believe those two," Rick asked. "It was almost like he was asking us for our son's hand."

"Or ass."

He laughed. "Right. Or ass."

Rick called in a pizza order, and they told him it would be at our house in thirty minutes or less. Rick always wrote down the time when the pizza place said how long it would be, and a couple of times he had gotten us free pizza when they weren't there when they said they would be.

Tim and Kyle got home shortly after he hung up the phone.

"Pizza's on its way," Rick announced, after Tim had said hello to us.

Tim got cokes and napkins for all of us, and we settled into the den to wait for the food. Before it got there, Tim started things moving.

"Can Kyle and I talk to you guys about sex," he asked.

"Of course you can. You know that," I said.

"Yeah, we know," Tim said. "Philip and Ryan and us were talking about sex yesterday..."

"Teenage boys talking about sex? When did this start," Rick asked.

Everybody laughed. There was my guy, turning tears into laughter again, only that time there weren't any tears.

"Go ahead, Tim. Just ignore him," I said.

"They asked us if butt sex hurts."

Very good, Timothy, my man, I thought. You figured out how to finesse this one pretty damn well.

"We had to tell them we didn't know," Kyle piped in. "We know they do the finger, and they like that."

"Ah, yes. Doing the finger," Rick said. I laughed, but the boys didn't find that amusing.

"Tim, the answer to your question..."

"Their question," Tim shot back.

"Their question," I said by way of correcting myself. "The answer is it might a little bit the first few times they try it, but the pain doesn't last more than a few seconds unless they don't do it right. It really doesn't have to hurt at all, though."

"Can you explain how to do it without it hurting," Kyle asked.

"Yeah. We can and we will, boys," Rick said. "But before we talk technique, let's talk meaning, okay?"

"Sure," the boys said in unison.

Suddenly the pizza delivery had arrived.

Rick looked at his watch and said "Damn." Evidently they were under the specified time. He paid for the food and we dug in.

"Okay, back to where we were," Rick said. "Why would two men want to have anal sex?"

"Because it feels good," Tim said.

"No question about that," Rick said. "It feels very good. But so does kissing and getting jerked off. Have you guys done oral yet?"

They both nodded.

"Oral feels mighty good, too, doesn't it? But why anal when other things feel good, too?"

"What are two guys really saying to one another when they have anal sex, boys," I asked.

"That they want to make each other feel good," Kyle asked.

"That's a very big part of it, Kyle, for sure. You want to give your partner pleasure," I said. "But can you think of any other reason?"

"Let me give you a little hint," Rick said. "We started off this conversation with a question about whether there's pain involved. Kevin told you there might be a little pain at first, unless the top guy doesn't do it right. Then there could be a lot of pain. What does that suggest?"

"That there's risk of pain," Tim said.

"Ah ha! Why would anybody want to take that risk when there are so many other things you can do that give pleasure?" Rick was on a roll.

"Maybe it's a way of telling your partner you trust him," Kyle said.

"Now we're getting somewhere," Rick said. "When you let somebody take your ass, you're really saying, 'Buddy, I trust you not to hurt me.' And if it does hurt a little, you're saying you are willing to put up with that to please him."

He paused to let that sink in.

"And you're also saying, 'Buddy, I care about you enough to put you in charge of my body for the next little while. I surrender to you.'"

"Do you guys think about that when you have anal sex," Tim asked.

"Probably not every time, Tim, but it's definitely there beneath the surface," I said.

"Another thing, guys," Rick said, "when we have anal sex, I think we feel like we're sharing sort of the essence of who we are with one another, the essence of our maleness. When Kevin gives me an anal orgasm, he does something I can't do for myself."

"I guess that's why they call it making love," Kyle said.

"Bingo! Right on the money," I said.

"So how do you do it," Kyle asked.

Rick explained in pretty good detail about making sure the receiver is relaxed and well lubricated. He told them about pushing down on the muscles of the rectum as the top is entering. He explained about starting out with the top on his back so the bottom guy can ease himself down and control the action. He did a remarkably good job in answering their questions, too.

They wanted to know about condoms, and we explained about not really needing them in a totally monogamous relationship.

"That means two virgins doing it together for the first time in their lives," Rick said. "Unless you are absolutely, positively sure about your partner, insist on a condom every time. You got that?"

"Yes, sir," they both said at once.

"Boys, tell Philip and Ryan they can always come to us for information, too," I said. They agreed they would, and that pretty much ended the conversation.

The next morning Rick asked Kyle to help him with something in the garage. Rick later told me he suggested Kyle save his surprise for Tim for a private moment. He suggested Kyle wrap up a pack of condoms and put them on Tim's pillow that night. He said Kyle liked that idea.

When the birthday party ended, Rick, Kyle, Tim, and I went home. I had assumed they would sleep at Kyle's house, but Kyle wanted to sleep at our house. We told the boys good night, and we all went to our rooms.

"God, I hope it goes well for our babies tonight," Rick said when we were in bed. We were nude, and I was holding him in my arms.

"Me, too, Babe," I said. "By the way, I don't think I told you how good a job I thought you did with them last weekend."

"Thanks," he said, "but I couldn't have done that alone, that's for sure. You were great, too."

"We make a pretty damn good team of dads, don't we?"

"I think we do, too. Ooooh, do that some more," he said.

"You horn-dog," I said, as I continued gently rubbing his nipples.

"Kyle seemed pretty nervous after the party, don't you think," he asked.

"He seemed excited to me. You're the one who seemed nervous."

"I was. I am, a little bit. I wonder which one is going first."

"I'm sure we'll find out tomorrow. Right now, though, I want this big thing in me, where it belongs."

That was all the encouragement he needed.

The next morning it was my turn to flood him with love. Afterwards, we lay in bed cuddling, as usual for a Sunday morning. In a little while, we heard noise and giggling coming from the den.

"Let's go see `em," Rick said. He was so cute about those kids that he was totally irresistible.

"Okay," I said. I kissed him before leaving our room. "I love you," I said.

"I love you, too. Now come on."

I laughed.

"Hi, guys," they said in unison as we entered the room. They were both beaming, and they seemed more excited than usual to see us. If I hadn't known what Kyle had had planned for the night before, I would have known something big was up just by the way they were acting.

"Guess what," Tim said.

"What," I said.

"No. Guess."

"You finally had a wet dream," Rick asked.

"Very funny," Tim said. "No. We did it. That was my surprise birthday present."

"What is `it,'" Rick asked. Kyle was grinning at Rick's little game.

"You know," Tim said.

Rick walked over to the phone and dialed a number.

"Hello. May I speak to Harry Potter, please," he said. "I need a mind read, and I thought he might be able to help me out."

The boys and I howled with laughter. Tim, a big Harry Potter fan, was especially delighted with Rick's antics.

"I've just been teasing you guys," Rick said. "I know what you're talking about, Tim. Y'all both seem pretty happy this morning, so I guess everything must have gone okay, right?"

"Oh, yeah. It was great. Do you want to hear all about it," Tim asked.

"Tim, man," I said, "I really don't think we do. You know we both love you guys, and we're flattered that you would be willing to tell us, but I think some things that a couple do should remain between them, don't you?"

"I told you," Kyle said.

"Yeah, yeah. You guys are right. Anyway, thank you for everything, guys. We do love you very, very much."

"And we love each other, too," Kyle said. He gave Tim a very sweet kiss.

School ended for the boys on the last Friday in May, which happened to be the thirty-first. They had the previous Monday off because of Memorial Day, which I thought was strange as hell that close to the end of the year. The beach was packed Memorial Day weekend, and Rick had run a full marathon to commemorate the holiday. The boys had had to work, but they both made it to the finish line to cheer him on as he crossed it.

On Tuesday morning, we boarded Mont's boat at six in the morning and motored to St. Vincent Island. Mont told us that as soon as we set anchor the trip would be totally clothing optional. The four kids, our two plus Philip and Ryan, were eager to get naked. The adults kept their clothes on for a little

while, but we were all naked too by the end of the day.

The island was more wooded than the other one was, and the boys gathered up firewood for that night. They decided they wanted to camp on land, and since all four were effectively Eagle Scouts, nobody had a problem with that. The beach was magnificent, even better than the ones closer to home, and there wasn't a piece of trash to be seen anywhere.

We had a wonderful time on that trip. We did some surf fishing with equipment from the boat, and Philip had brought his surfboard. The boys and Rick took turns surfing naked. Rick said that the surf wasn't the best he had ever seen but that the experience of surfing naked made it the best surfing of his life. He and Philip taught the other kids the rudiments of surfing, but they didn't look nearly as good out there as Rick and Philip did.

Night time was a time of intimacy for all the couples, I'm sure. The boys were off in the dunes doing their boy thing, and Mont and Ter, and Rick and I took advantage of the privacy of the air conditioned staterooms.

There was nothing bad about that trip. Everyone got along with each other, and nobody complained about anything. We were all a little sad when we had to weigh anchor and head home early Thursday afternoon.

We weren't home more than fifteen minutes when the phone rang. I answered it.

"Hello," I said.

"Hello, Kevin. This is George."

"George Murphy," I asked.

"Yeah. How the hell are you?"

"We're great, George. How are you? Where are you?"

"I'm in Virginia," he said. "I put in for compassionate reassignment, and it just came through about a week ago. It's taken me that long to get here."

"Babe, it's George," I said to Rick, who was just coming into the den from the kitchen.

"George Murphy?"

"Yeah. Get Tim."

"Sorry, George. Rick's getting Tim," I said into the phone.

"Okay. Great. How is he, Kevin?"

"George, he's the greatest kid I've ever known in my life. He's stolen our hearts, man."

"He's the best, isn't he," he said, parental pride dripping off every word he spoke.

"Dad!" Tim screamed as he came into the room.

"I hear him," George said. "Can you put us on speaker so everyone can hear?"

"Sure." I switched on the speaker.

"Dad! Dad! Dad!"

"Hi, Son. God, I've missed you, Tim."

"I've missed you, too, Dad. Where are you? How can you talk on the phone?"

"I'm in Newport News, Virginia, Tim. I'm coming home."

"When?"

"I should be home Saturday, Son. I got time off for good behavior," George said.

"That's great, Dad. I can't wait to see you. When do you have to go back?"

"I don't, Tim. We'll talk all about it when I get home, okay. I need to get off the phone now, though.

Can you and the guys meet me at the air base on Saturday at one o'clock? That's when my plane lands."

"Absolutely, George," I said. "We'll be there with bells on."

"Bye, Tim. I love you, Son. And bye Kevin and Rick."

"Bye, George," we said in unison.

Then the phone was dead.

Chapter 14

"I guess all those prayers we've been saying have paid off," I said after we finished the phone call.

"Yeah. I guess," Tim said rather halfheartedly.

"Aren't you excited about your dad coming home," Kyle asked.

"I know I should be, and I feel like a shit because I'm not, but I'm really not. I'm happy he's okay and all, but I don't want this to end. The time I've lived here has been the happiest time of my life, and now it's almost over."

I sort of felt the same way Tim did, and I didn't have to ask Rick how he felt about it to know he was even more distressed than Tim.

We moved over to our usual places: Rick and I at either end of the sofa and the two boys on the floor in front of us, facing us.

"What's going to happen now, Kevin," Tim asked.

"I don't know, buddy, but we'll still be here," I said.

"Yeah, but will I?"

"Well, no. You'll be next door with your dad, Tim. You know that," I said.

"Will I," he asked.

"Sure. Why wouldn't you be," Rick asked. "And you better be getting your scrawny little ass over here a lot, too, mister."

Kyle chuckled, but nobody else reacted.

"We won't be transferred," he asked. Implicit in the question was that George would be transferred.

"Excuse me," Rick choked out. He got up to go to our room.

"Come back, Rick. Don't leave me," Tim said in the most forlorn voice I'd heard from him yet.

Rick came back when Tim said that, but he was squalling. Tim got up and sat in his lap, trying to comfort him.

"It's all right, Rick," he said.

"Goddamn it! No, it's not," Rick said in an angry voice. He grabbed Tim tight and sobbed.

Rick started a chain reaction, and within seconds Tim, Kyle, and I had broken down. Kyle got into my lap after I had moved next to Rick, and the four of us released our fears and frustrations through our tears. We settled down in a few minutes, though.

"I'm sorry, Tim," Rick said. "I had no right to do that."

"Yeah, you did. You love me," Tim said.

Those words set Rick off a second time, but he pulled himself together almost immediately. Then the phone rang. Kyle got up to answer it.

"No, sir. This is Kyle."

Pause.

"Yes, sir. Everybody's here."

Pause.

"Okay. Tim, it's your dad again," Kyle said.

Tim got up from Rick's lap rather reluctantly to speak to his dad. George must have told him to turn on the speaker because that's what Tim did.

"Sorry I couldn't talk longer before, guys," he said. "I got back in line, though, so I get another few minutes. You'd think there would be more than one phone for us to use."

Nobody responded.

"Tim, I wanted to call again because I have something I want to tell you and the guys. I probably

should have waited to talk with you about this, Tim, but I've decided to get out of the Navy. I'm going to see if Dr. Kelly still wants me as an associate. If he does, great. If he doesn't, I'm going to open my own oral surgery practice on the beach."

"We're not going to move," Tim asked in disbelief.

"No, Son, and I'm not going to risk any more sea duty, either. It's just not worth it to me anymore."

"Oh, Dad. That makes me so happy."

"It makes us happy, too, George," I said.

"This is something I should have done a year ago, Kevin," George said. "I got some incredible experience in the last five months, but I can't be away from Tim this long ever again. You guys are fabulous, but I miss my boy."

Everybody was crying again at our end, and George heard us.

"Who's crying," he asked.

"We all are, George," Rick said. "But we're crying happy tears."

"Thank God," he said. "And thank you all."

We had a major group hug when we got off the phone, and everybody was genuinely happy again.

"Can that still be our room," Kyle asked.

"For as long as you want it to be," I replied.

George's plane was right on time Saturday afternoon, and we were all there to meet it. Tim said his dad had met Kyle once, but he probably didn't remember him. Despite that fact, there was much hugging and crying and carrying on, and Kyle was a part of all of it.

At some point, Rick and I had decided to have the power, phone, cable TV, and water turned off at George's house. We had called all the different companies to have it turned on again the day after George called us to say he was coming home, but the power company hadn't been able to get to it that day. That meant George had to spend the rest of the weekend with us or in his own house without power. He was eager to get home and to sleep in his own bed, but, for other reasons, it was better that he stay with us.

We had a grand homecoming party for George Saturday night. It was just the five of us, but Rick outdid himself in cooking a wonderful meal. We talked non-stop through dinner, and, after dinner, Rick sent Tim and Kyle off to a movie.

"I'm glad you did that, Rick," George said. "We definitely need to talk."

We had had wine with dinner, and George and I had polished off a good portion of the bottle. Rick had drunk water, as usual, and the kids had drunk coke, but Rick joined us in a glass of wine when the boys had left.

"I can't believe the change in him in five months, guys," George said.

"Did you notice how much he's grown," Rick asked.

"Did I? Wow. I almost didn't recognize him. And he's really filled out, too. He's not a little boy anymore, is he?"

"No, he's not," I said. "He shaves every day now, George. He's got his own razor and everything."

"Oh, shit! What?"

"Yeah," I said. "It's blond, so you don't really notice it, but we just came back from three days on a boat on the Gulf, and he didn't shave the whole time we were gone. He's got a man's beard."

"Speaking of blond, his hair seems so much lighter, like when he was little," George said.

"That's bleach and sun," Rick said. "Kyle's hair, too."

"Speaking of Kyle, tell me about him."

"Kyle's our second son, George, after Tim. He is an absolutely great kid, and we love him," Rick said.

"And he and Tim are in love, George. I don't mean just a crush. I mean they're really in love. Kyle could very well be your son-in-law," I said.

"Whoa! That kind of blows me away," he said. "What kind of family does he come from?"

"Very affluent," I said. "They own several motels here and in Destin and Ft. Walton, too, and several gift shops. Kyle and Tim are both working at one of the motels now."

"What kind of values, though," George asked.

"We've only met Kyle's mom once," Rick said, "but we've been around his dad several times. It's kind of hard to tell, but the dad is sort of an educated 'good ole boy' type. He is totally accepting of the fact that Kyle is gay, and he reminds me of the kind of guy who expects his sons to be men of honor. Kyle certainly is."

"Those are some magic words, Rick," George said. "And you guys say you like him?"

"No, George. We love Kyle, almost as much as we love Tim," I said. "If he and Tim end up together for life, you won't be disappointed. He does smoke, though."

"Yeah. I remember that from before I left. But so what, you know? Smokers can be good people, too." He put his hand on mine when he said that, and he smiled at me.

"Did you know Tim finished his Eagle requirements," Rick asked.

"No. That's wonderful. Do tell," George said.

"Well, I pretty much ordered him to do it. I told them about how homophobic the scouts are, and I encouraged Tim to defy them by making Eagle. Kyle's an Eagle, and so are their best friends, Philip and Ryan, also a gay couple."

"Wow! Has he gotten it yet?"

"No. He waited for you to get home," Rick said.

George bit his bottom lip when Rick said that, and his eyes filled up with tears.

"Yeah," Rick said. George nodded.

It took a few moments for George to get full control. Then we continued.

"How can I ever thank you guys for what you've done," George asked.

"You already have," Rick said.

"How's that," George asked.

"By deciding to get out of the Navy and stay here, that's how," Rick said.

"George, the four of us pretty much went to pieces last Thursday night when you called. At first, we were elated that you were coming home. Then Tim said you would probably be reassigned and would have to move. That's when we lost it. When you called the second time, Tim was on Rick's lap and Kyle was on mine, and we were basket cases."

"Tim was right, Kevin. I would have been transferred. We would have moved, and he would have had to reestablish himself all over again. I figured you guys probably meant the world to him. Maybe even more than I did. I couldn't do that to him. And I didn't even really know about Kyle then."

"So who's this Doctor Kelly," Rick asked.

"He's Tim Kelly, actually. Quite a coincidence, don't you think?"

"Yeah. Should we know him," I asked.

"Not really. But he's an oral surgeon out here on the beach, and he has an enormous practice. People have to sometimes wait months for an appointment. I spoke to him yesterday, and he wants me to start as soon as possible. Kelly and Murphy. Quite a pair of Micks, don't you think?"

"That's great," I said.

"Yeah, it is," George said. "I'll make four times what I make in the Navy, but the reason I'm doing it is Tim."

"We know that," I said. "What role do you see for us with Tim?"

George took a deep breath and let it out slowly. "I've thought about that, and I don't think there's

any turning back now. Did the `big brothers' role work out for you guys?"

Rick just about grinned his mouth off his face when George said that.

"All right," Rick said. "Oh, yeaaaah."

Tim and Kyle worked at the motel that summer, and they both got deep, dark tans. They kept their hair light blond for the duration of their "beach boy" days, and they kept getting cuter and cuter, and better and better looking. By the end of the summer, they both looked like men. They both grew taller that summer. They started working out at work with weights that Kyle's dad provided for his guests. We thought it odd that his "least nice" motel would have the best weight equipment he could buy, but Kyle let us know he had had a voice in making that happen.

Tim had his Eagle Court of Honor in late June, and all of his family—three queers and his dad—were there to celebrate with him. Kyle got an invitation to join the Order of the Arrow, and we all went to his induction, too.

The boys basically lived in three houses, George's, Kyle's, and ours. A couple of mornings we were a bit surprised to find Philip and Ryan in Tim's bedroom, and that was okay, too. We adopted Philip and Ryan as our own.

Our friendship with Monte and Terry deepened greatly during the summer, and Rick and I knew we'd never have better friends than those two guys and George. Sam the scoutmaster and Fred, Mont's brother, actually hit it off, and they became a couple. Sam thought he should give up the scouts, but Rick talked (shouted) him out of that decision one Saturday night around the Goodsons' pool. George helped a lot with that, too. It turned out my man was a pretty persuasive guy. The four boys and Fred applauded when Sam said he would stay with the troop.

The war in Afghanistan, which was what had started our whole adventure with Tim and the boys, continued at summer's end. Rick and I listened to, watched, and read about what was going on there on an almost-daily basis, and we continued to thank God it didn't affect us. Yeah, right!

The End