

Companions

Warren pulled into the all night store parking lot and saw Kit standing in front of it looking soaked and wearing the same clothes Warren had seen him in the day before. The rain was pouring down. Warren got out and walked over towards him. Kit looked at him like he wasn't happy to see him.

Warren pulled off his trench coat and held it out towards him. Kit turned into it getting his arms in it and pulled it over his back. "The bastard wouldn't let me stand inside and get dry, said I was making him nervous and wouldn't call the Sheriff if I stood outside." Kit said.

"Come on let's get you something to eat." Warren said and led the way into the store. The guy behind the counter looked at them suspiciously as Kit headed over to the food station and got himself some food. He grabbed several burgers and filled up a nacho tray and drowned it with cheese while Warren got them something to drink.

Warren met him at the counter and loaded it up. Warren bit his tongue several times trying not to say anything to the guy. After the guy rang up the sale and Warren handed him the money Kit suddenly waved his hands all about as the guy jumped back starting to put his hands up.

"That's enough." Warren said.

"Jesus Christ." Kit said as he gathered up the food, "Some people out here in nowhere just assume the worst."

The guy looked even more nervous now. He slowly handed Warren his change. "Some people just lack common decency." Warren echoed as they headed towards the door.

Kit shoved it open and headed towards the passenger side of Warren's car. "When are you going to get some real

wheels?” Kit asked. Warren unlocked the door and opened it for him.

“When I really need them.” He answered.

“The slum mobile.” Kit muttered. Still holding all his food Warren closed the door for him. He then went around the car and got in the driver’s seat.

“There is nothing wrong with my car.” He said.

“Fuck the car, what the hell happened to me yesterday?”

“You got drunk and I sent you home in a cab.”

“And then?” Kit asked while he started eating.

“I don’t know, Kit.” Warren answered.

“I just can’t believe I woke up in a ditch with rain pouring down over me, I could have drowned.” He complained.

“You look ok, though. No one beat you up.”

“Oh that just makes everything fucking ok.” Kit said.

“So much for your mood improving.”

“This isn’t about you today, Warren. What the fuck happened to me?” he asked again. Since Warren didn’t know he didn’t answer. They were quiet while Kit refueled some. Warren tried to relax back into driving mode, but Kit making arbitrary noises indicating his discomfort. “Fuck going all the way back, find us a motel.”

“I need to get home.” Warren said, “You can sleep in the car while I drive.”

“I don’t give a shit about sleep. I want to get dry.” Kit explained.

“You don’t have anything else to put on.” Warren said.

“My clothes can dry while I’m asleep.” He said, “That’s if I get to that, I think I’ve been asleep all day, not really tired. Just wet, confused and fucking annoyed.”

“I’m sorry.”

“You say that, but you don’t claim to know what happened to me, so how can it be your fault? I trust you to know if I’m so drunk I can’t walk over being able to get out of

a cab and get into my house. The problem there was since I didn't know, I imagined all kinds of twisted shit while I walked to that store."

"I mean I'm sorry this happened to you."

"I'll survive, just have to cancel my cards and my phone service, get a new driver's license, and what not." He explained.

"But you're ok other than that?" Warren asked.

"Yes, beyond being wet, cold and irritated I'm fucking ok."

"I don't think I spotted a motel on the way out here. Probably have to get close to town for one anyway." Warren said.

"If we see one, we'll stop, alright?" Kit asked.

"Sure."

"Thank you."

"What about your hat?" Warren asked.

"My goddamn hat, too." Kit said running his hand over his wet hair, "I looked for it in the ditch, didn't see it."

He turned to look at Warren. He could see his disappointment there. It had been his father's hat he'd been wearing since the old man passed away.

Warren turned back to the road and drove while Kit made more sounds of frustration and banged his head against the seat. Warren had been doing something similar on the same day.

Warren, now looking, found a motel after driving for a while. He pulled in and stopped the car. He was just about to get out when his cell phone rang. He closed the door back against the rain while Kit waited.

"Hello?"

"Yes, sorry to call you on this number, this is Todd at the bar." He said.

"How did you get this number?" Warren asked.

"It's on speed dial on this phone." He answered.

"What phone?"

“I believe its Kit’s phone.” He answered. Warren looked at Kit.

“How the hell did it get there?” Warren asked, “He had everything with him when he left yesterday.”

“Don’t know, was closing up and noticed his jacket hanging. Got into it trying figure out whose it was and found his wallet, phone and a book.” He answered, “I figured you’d be the person to call since I don’t know his number or anything. I figured he would want to know he’d left all that here.”

“But he didn’t” Warren insisted.

“I don’t know. It was just here, hanging on the rack.”

“Uhm, what about his hat?” Warren asked. Kit’s eyes lit up.

“Looking.” Todd said. “What do you know, old, used to be white, but not quite anymore?”

“That’s the one.” Warren asked.

“Well, I’ll be here for a while.” Todd said, “If you want to come pick it up.”

“Ok.” Warren said.

“Bye.”

“Thank you.” Warren said and hung up the phone. Kit looked at him expectantly.

“Well?” Kit asked.

“All your shit is at the bar.” Warren said.

“I left everything at the bar?”

“No you didn’t.” Warren said, “You had everything when I put you in the cab.”

Kit closed his door getting it tight, “Let’s go.” He said.

“What about getting dry?”

“Fuck it, let’s go get my shit. That’ll make me happier than just being dry.”

Warren headed back out onto the highway. While they got back into the city the rain stopped and the temperature evened back out. Warren pulled up to the deserted bar. Kit

jumped out right away and Warren followed him, locking his doors.

The bar was already empty. Kit headed towards their table where his belongings were. He immediately grabbed up his hat and put it on his head. He then took off the trench coat and handed it to Warren smiling. "I feel a hell of a lot better." He said. Warren smiled back at him.

"You guys are just in time, I was about to go ahead and lock up." Todd said as he approached. "I only made the one call."

"You did the right thing." Kit said and stuck his hand out towards him. "Your name?"

"Todd." He said.

"Thank you Todd." Kit said shaking his hand. He then grabbed his arm with his left and smiled at him. "You just saved my day."

"Sure." He said. Kit let go of his arm and reached over their joined hands to grab the book off the table. He held it up towards the guy.

"You want this? I'm done reading it." Kit said.

"Uhm, no." Todd said, "I'm pretty well informed on the subject." Kit smiled at him and let his hand go. He set the book down and sat down in his chair. He looked back at Warren.

"Hey why don't you go on ahead home." Kit said, "I'll get a cab."

"It's ok I can drive you out to your house." Warren said.

"Nah, you've done enough driving on my behalf. I appreciate it, Buddy. Thanks. Go home to the kid." He said.

"I can wait to see you in a cab at least." Warren said.

"I'll be fine." Kit said, "Got my hat. Just going to sit here a minute and then I'll go home."

Warren looked over at Todd who shrugged. Kit smiled again. "I'll see you Monday." Warren said.

“At the latest.” Kit said. Warren turned and headed towards the door. Just before he stepped out he looked back to see Kit saying something to Todd. Warren opened the door and went outside. He put his coat back on.

While he was doing that he caught sight of something out of the corner of his left eye. He was pretty sure he saw someone go around the corner of the building. Warren, knowing better even, headed over to the corner and looked down the alley. It was slim and cut off by a chain link, but the edge of the corner stuck out on both sides, front and side and had a little spot inside past its edge. As Warren turned he saw someone standing in that spot, trying not to be seen.

Warren stepped back at an angle until the light came across the man’s face. “Not you too.” Warren said. The guy leaned forward getting under more of the light.

“Just...” he started to say and stopped, “What do you mean by you too?”

“People watching me.” Warren explained, “That’s what you’re doing.”

“Actually.” He said and smiled, “I was standing out here wondering if I couldn’t just come in and say hello without us getting all tangled up again. I wasn’t convinced I could do it. So...I thought I’d duck and hide.”

“What are you doing here?”

“Maybe...maybe looking for you.” Chief said. “I didn’t know if you did the Saturday night thing or not. Been by a few times actually. Closed the place down.”

Warren looked him up and down. He took a deep breath. “Couldn’t do it?” he asked.

“Wanted to.” He said.

“I guess you don’t have my home number or my cell?”

“Ya, you only put your office number on the form I had you fill out.” Chief said, “I’m not even sure if SEPD has a short form. You believed it though.”

“Not really happy about that day.” Warren said, “I should be pissed at you about it.”

“But?”

“I keep forgiving you every time I look at you.” Warren explained. “Took it out on someone else. That probably wasn’t a good idea.”

“Happy to see me anyway?” he asked.

“Tell me how that is not supposed to sound gay?” Warren asked. He took in a breath through his clenched teeth. “Is that my jacket?”

“Yes.” Chief said and started to take it off.

“No, you keep it. I gave it to you didn’t I?”

“Yes, but maybe just to wear.” He answered, “Got it stuck in your head I looked cold.”

“I do anything else I should know about?”

“No.” he said, “After a while even I thought you looked cute all curled up in my lap even if your friend here at the bar hadn’t said it already a few times. Then you sat up and started singing. That...that we could have done without. Then I took you home. You took several different wrong turns along the way. I finally found it though.”

“I’m sorry if I embarrassed you.” Warren said.

“Its fine.” He said.

“Where do we go from here?” Warren asked. He took in his breath again through his teeth.

“I want to keep seeing you, but I don’t want it to get confused again.” He explained. Warren moved closer towards him.

“I thought I was going to have trouble with this. Apparently I’m fine it’s just everybody else.” Warren said.

“You haven’t been drinking?”

“No.” Warren said.

“I was thinking you were using that.” Chief said.

“For what?”

“To allow yourself to get close.” He explained.

“Not at all.” Warren said as he stepped right up to him, listening to him breath in through his teeth again.

“It’s not like this Warren.”

“I wouldn’t know from inexperience.” Warren said, “But I know what feels good.” He slid his arms around his sides and moved into him and hugged him. The other man wrapped his arms back around him.

“This is okay.” He said, “But I don’t think I had thought we’d do it often.”

“Everyday?”

“No.” he answered.

“Why not?”

“Can’t really explain it.” he answered. Warren pushed his head against the side of his neck. “Now that’s more.”

“I like that, too.” Warren said.

“I think, maybe after a while. Maybe you can just get past this infatuation with me. Then maybe we can work on the friendship.”

Warren pulled his head back to look at Chief, eye to eye. “You can love me, but I’m only just infatuated.”

“With real emotions, yes.” He answered, “Like I said, I do not want to offend you. That’s not my intent. I have presented myself badly. Not even considering you might actually be attracted to me...or...vice versa.”

Warren smiled.

“No, it’s minimal. I appreciate that you are a good looking man.” He said, “But it’s more about...pride.”

“That makes no sense to me.” Warren said.

“I want it to be clear, but I can’t say yet. I have reasons for that.” Chief said.

“You have to know that this not telling me things, where as it might push someone else away, all it is doing is making me want you even more.”

“Want me for what?”

“To be this close.” Warren answered and hugged him again while keeping them still facing each other. Chief breathed through his teeth again. He tilted his head to the side and looked back.

“This is wrong.”

“It doesn’t feel wrong to me.” Warren said.

“I don’t mean the general idea of two men. Uhm...” he stopped to move his hands up to be against Warren’s neck. “This...that...It would be new to me too.”

“You have been drinking.” Warren said. He smiled and looked up.

“Better for my reason to try and hide from you right now.” He agreed.

“Tell me why it’s wrong?”

“Take my word for it?”

“No.” Warren said smiling, “I’m not going to do that.”

“Okay, then I am asking.” He said, “Don’t do anything more.”

“You mean like this?” Warren asked and pressed his lips on Chief’s. He felt the stiff resistance, but it didn’t stop him and after a few resistant noises as complaints, he opened his mouth some and let Warren kiss him.

At that point Warren was overcome with the warmth that came into him from that. If knowledge was power, in knowing how much he would be enjoying doing it again and again, he was feeling pretty powerful.

Chief pulled his head away from him looking off to the side. “I’m going to hell for that.” He said breathing in deep, which Warren could feel through their contact. He was aware that the other man was nervous from the exploration.

“I don’t believe in hell.” Warren said.

“I’m willing to allow you the chance to convince me of that, but this isn’t helping.” Chief said. He rolled his head back so that he was looking straight up. It gave Warren a chance to run his face along the other man’s neck. For a moment he wasn’t sure if the other man was laughing or suppressing some form of crying. It made him pause in his movements. When he stopped, Warren decided he might have just been ticklish there. Chief’s hands squeezed Warren’s shoulders as they stood their in their embrace. He

made the same move again, either laughter or some form of crying very quickly.

Warren began kissing his exposed neck. The squeezing hands continued and Warren was getting an idea that going all the way with a man wasn't that much different than with a woman. He just didn't know how to go about it technically.

"This is bad, Warren." Chief said causing him to stop, "I know we're in trouble when I start to want to do this as much as you do."

"That sounds good to me." Warren said.

"You have a good excuse, I do not."

"Your making it harder than it is."

"Oh I'm...I'm definitely harder than I should be. This is me doing the worst possible thing I can imagine doing." He said.

"You have yet to shove me away." Warren said pulling back some letting Chief get his face back down from above so they could look at each other. He gulped several times after that.

"I am trying so hard to keep you at arms length." He said, "And if I had no reason against this, which I do. I would be all yours, right here, right now. But...we can't do anymore, ok?"

"I can." Warren said and lowered his hand down the other man's back. He made another noise and breathed through his clenched teeth.

"You..." he started to say and stopped. He had as yet to grab at Warren's wandering hand. "You, please stop."

"You're not being clear enough." Warren said, "In one hand you say I can have you, but you can't do it. If you want this like I do, there is *no* reason not to do it."

"There is, and if you push me anymore, you can't hold it against me." He said.

"I have no reason to." Warren said.

“You will and when you do, you can’t hold it against me. I’m trying to get you to stop. You’re...hard to resist. I’m kind of drunk. Be the better for both of us and stop.”

“I told you I wasn’t perfect.” Warren said, but at least he moved his hand back up to a different location on Chief’s back. He relaxed some at that. The hands on his shoulders were still there, though. And Warren was still engulfed in the warmth.

“Promise me, promise me you will not hold this against me.” Chief said.

“I promise.” Warren said. Chief’s hands moved up to Warren’s head and grabbed a hold of him. He then pulled Warren in close and began kissing him passionately. Warren swore he swooned from it. He became light headed and had the sudden realization as to why some woman being kissed just right might actually pass out in a faint. He didn’t however faint. And the kiss seemed to go on forever.

Chief grabbed his shoulders and forcefully pushed him back. He took a long haul on the air and smiled at Warren. “No more.” He said, “You need to leave now.”

Warren accepted the smile. He inclined his head and took a step back. “Something to think about if you should change your mind.” Warren said.

“Good night, Warren.” He said.

“Night Chief, you look just right in that old jacket.” he said. He turned to walk away. A second later he turned back to say more and the other man was gone. Warren stepped back, but there was no where for him to have gone down the alleyway. And he wasn’t on the street.

Warren turned and headed for his car. Just as he was opening the door, Kit stepped out of the bar and looked startled to see Warren still out there. Warren put up his hand in a wave and Kit slowly put his hand up.

Warren got in his car and was just heading out to take the car back to the garage as a cab pulled up for Kit.

2

Warren laid his head back on the back of the couch with his eyes closed. As he sat there he heard Nate finally came out of his room. He had an idea that the kid hadn't actually gone to sleep until he'd heard his uncle come home. Warren hadn't decided exactly what it meant yet.

"What are you smiling about?" Nate asked.

"A kiss." Warren answered as he lifted his head up to look at the kid.

"From your boyfriend?" Nate asked as he moved to drop onto the couch. Warren looked him up and down. He wasn't wearing a shirt yet.

"Are those supposed to be shorts?" Warren asked.

"No." Nate answered, "They're boxers. You know, underwear, what I sleep in. I figure you can hang out all day in what you sleep in, so can I."

Warren let his head back on the couch. "It's too soon to call anyone my boyfriend." Warren said.

"Close enough."

"I can't even say we're dating." He added.

"Ok."

Warren got his head back up and looked at the kid. "There is some point to you mimicking me?" he asked.

"Whatever is cool." Nate said shrugging.

"So in having a problem with me about it, you think what you're doing is going to come back at me the same way?"

"Maybe." He said. Warren smiled.

"I fail to see a point in it. They look like shorts to me. The only real difference is you're not wearing a shirt. The same as I. In the real world men very often are not required to wear one. Like the beach."

"We're not on the beach."

"I know. I'm in my own home." Warren said. "There's no difference to me."

“Would you answer the door like that?” Nate asked. Warren sighed. He’d fallen into the conversation by his own hand.

“No.”

“Than you’re not dressed to be with anyone else.” Nate said.

“I thought we cleared this up. Your demonstration is not really making any kind of real statement.” Warren said.

“My shorts come down past my knees.” Nate said.

“What I’m wearing goes all the way to my ankles. Why are we making any comparison at all?” Warren asked. Nate turned his head away.

“I told you, what your wearing makes me uncomfortable.” Nate said.

“Why?” Warren finally asked. Nate turned his head back towards him, still scrunched in the corner of the couch.

“You really want to know?”

“I am asking you.” Warren admitted.

“I can see you.” Nate said. Warren narrowed his eyes at him not yet getting his meaning. In his mind he could see the kid, too. “All of you.” Nate added. Warren finally looked down at himself at the loose hanging night pants he was wearing.

He took a deep breath, set his coffee cup down and got up off the couch. He headed to his room. He didn’t come back out until he was fully dressed. At that point he returned to the couch and sat down, taking a cooler sip from his coffee. He finally looked back at Nate who was glaring at him.

“You want to talk about this?” Warren asked.

“About what?” Nate asked.

“My attire failed to be of any concern to you the last time you were here. In my mind the only difference between then and now is you. You’re older and you’re aware of what sex is and you taking a lead from my appearance as part of some meaning about it.

“I can surmise its part of what you said last week.”

“Even if he hadn’t said something.” Nate said, “I think anybody would be concerned.”

“What are you going to do when you face the locker room and nobody is wearing anything?”

“That’s different. It me and guys my own age, not some old guy.” Nate said, “I don’t want to see that.”

“I’m not that old.”

“You’re a grown up.” Nate insisted.

“You have been known to have sat in my lap on numerous occasions where that was all I was wearing not to mention time spent in the bathroom together.” Warren said.

“I don’t remember any of it.” Nate claimed, “And that was then. I’m not a little kid any more who doesn’t know any better.”

“I’m still hearing an insinuation about it.” Warren said, “I’m fully dressed now, what’s the problem?”

“Yea shirt and tie.” Nate said. Warren ignored that and went to refill his coffee cup. As he returned he realized that Nate wasn’t having a problem with what he was wearing himself. It only lessened the impact of the argument.

Warren set his coffee down on the end table and slowly came around sitting down. “Would you like to have a serious conversation about sex?”

“Not with you.”

“Who then?” Warren asked. “Your mother?” Nate’s face turned red for a moment. “Okay, that only leaves you with what your friends know. I’m sure they know less about it than I do. I’m still concerned that your issue with me is based on what you don’t know. Why not ask me?”

“Because you like guys.” Nate said.

“I suppose this is now the basis of your flawed interpretation of me.” Warren said. Nate shrugged. “Allow me to clarify a point, Nathaniel. It’s only been a recent discovery for me that I am just as interested in men as woman. Not boys, men.”

“How would I know?” Nate asked looking away.

“Because I’m telling you.”

“That’s got nothing to do with me.” Nate said.

“That would be my point.” Warren explained.

“I mean, just because you don’t care doesn’t mean I want to hear about it.”

“I am actually more familiar with the pursuit of woman as a man. In either case I am opening the floor to a conversation about it.” Warren said, “I’m not specifying the specific of the topic, you ask the questions.”

“I probably know more than you do.” Nate claimed. Warren smiled and shook his head.

“There is no teacher like experience. All of what you know is still limited to the scope of a boy.”

Nate sat there staring at the TV screen which was off. Warren slowly relaxed again against the silence. It took a while for him start up again, but he did.

“I thought you said you’d wear whatever you wanted no matter what I said?” Nate asked. Warren looked at him.

“You think this is me giving in to your demands?”

“Maybe.”

“I thought maybe I’d allow myself the chance to accommodate you just a little bit more than I had intended. Especially if it’s such a cause for debate. I’m not even sure what the problem is yet. You’re relying on some farce of information from an unreliable source and the state of my appearance where as I have yet to do anything towards you to back up your claim. You seeing me is you looking. I don’t really care if you’re looking or if you’re seeing me. But I hadn’t intentionally put myself on display either.

“But the truth is, that was me being comfortable in my own home. Now you should be comfortable because I’m not doing that now.”

Nate looked away and slammed the couch arm with his hand.

“There’s something to this.”

“No there isn’t.” Nate said.

“Maybe the part about me saying experience is your teacher went right over your head.”

“What?” Nate asked looking back at him.

“Where do you get this from?” Warren asked, “You don’t just stumble on an idea like it on your own.”

“TV.” Nate said.

“A piss poor way to spend your time at any length.” Warren added. “I’m asking you a question, I’d like an answer.”

“I don’t know what to tell you.” Nate said.

“I’ll be patient in waiting for an answer, especially if it means you’re silent while you contemplate it.” Warren said. He went back to his coffee and his own thoughts for a while. He was just laying his head back when Nate came back to it.

“You don’t care that I’m sitting here in my underwear?” Nate asked.

“They look like shorts to me.” Warren said, “And what I was wearing, however loose they are, look like pants. I’m not bothered by your attire. You’re sufficiently covered. So was I.”

Nate sat still for a while again. Warren was lost from his thoughts as he waited for the kid to edge closer to what ever it was he was dealing with.

“Please tell me nothing like that happened to you?” Warren finally asked. Nate took a deep breath and looked back at his uncle.

“What do you mean?” he asked.

“What you’re going on about. Whether it’s me that you’re focused on for the moment to expound your feelings on about it. It’s definitely not me. It clearly has something to do with sex and a man. Is it something real?”

“Are you asking me if some older guy ever messed with me?” Nate asked.

“Yes.” Warren said, “It would explain your discomfort. Your attitude about it. To me...it shouldn’t matter to you how

I appeared. In my mind you'd have no cause to be looking that hard. And seeing me...well it's just part of the way I am. You're getting all agitated about it means something, what?"

"Nobody messed with me." Nate answered.

"Then what the hell is this all about?" Warren asked. Nate's answer was to get up and go to his room. Warren laid his head back again. No longer able to recapture his moments from the night before, they'd all been run over by a disturbed kid.

Nate came back out with shorts and a shirt on. He sat back down on the couch and relaxed a little. "I don't know what to ask." He said.

"Well then I'll leave the floor open." Warren said, "When you actually have a question, then ask it. Appropriately not in mixed company."

"Ok." Nate said.

Silence resumed and Warren glanced at the time on the entertainment center, it wasn't even eleven o'clock yet and it looked like it was going to be a long day at the rate they were going. He then looked at the window to see rain splashing down and that eliminated the chance that Nate would wander off for a while. Next up would be lunch. He thought about making it into something more formal for Sunday over any other day and was contemplating that when Nate finally came back to conversation.

"How can you just tell me about it?" he asked.

"Tell you about what?" Warren asked.

"You liking guys."

"I really didn't have much room not to. Although I am in no way intending to keep myself a secret from anybody. I was still discovering this about myself when you placed the idea in my head that I might actually be going out on a date with a man." Nate took a deep breath.

"Don't you know what could happen?"

"What?"

“All I have to do is tell someone you touched me. And you being gay, they would just take you away just like that.” Nate answered.

“I don’t think so.” Warren said.

“Just because you live under a rock and don’t watch TV, doesn’t mean it isn’t true.” Nate explained, “All anyone need know is your gay and have me say one thing about it, hell if anyone says anything about it and your gone.”

“You are obsessed with this idea.” Warren said.

“You think it’s just me?”

“Yes.”

“And the guy upstairs, what he said? You don’t think anyone might just think the same? Some single guy with a boy staying with him?” Nate asked.

“Did you not hear the rest of the man’s conversation? He has dream dates with famous actors and he wasn’t quite sure if he had the brain capacity to figure something out.” Warren said.

“It’s what anyone might think.” Nate said.

“Why do you care what anyone thinks?”

“I don’t want anyone to think that.” Nate said getting louder, “Not anyone.”

“This is it.” Warren said, “It’s not specifically me. It’s the idea that someone might think that about you?” Nate turned his head away again. Warren got up again and refilled his coffee, deciding it would be his last cup. He came back to the couch slower this time. Eventually he sat back down. “Am I wrong?”

“What do you know?”

“Be more specific than that.” Warren said. “This just bothers you.”

“Yes.”

“Your behavior is remarkable.” Warren said, “Because I could have sworn when the idea first came out of your mouth you went and loaned me your shirt to impress the guy. What do I make of that?”

“It’s fine for you, ok?” Nate said.

“And?”

“And what?”

“The rest, Nate.” Warren said, “The getting bent out of shape last week before this idea was presented to you right up to this week where we encounter the same problem with just a new emphasis.”

Nate looked at him. “You just look like the kind of guy who would.” He finally said.

“Unbelievable.” Warren said, “There is no pleasing you. I went out of my way to change my clothes to adhere to your sense of discomfort. I’ve clarified all of the points on the issue. I’ve made statements to the contrary and you’re still looking at me under the same light. What do I have to do now?”

“Take off the stupid tie.” Nate answered.

“What does that have to do with anything?” Warren asked. “And why is it coming back to what I’m wearing?”

“Why do you think I gave you the shirt?” Nate asked. This time Warren glared at him. He realized the boy had a point and was almost to making it.

“Just say it Nate.”

“You look like you’re dressed for work. Are you going anywhere at all?” Nate asked.

“No.”

“Then take off the stupid tie.” Nate said.

For some reason the stupidity of it bounced through Warren’s head against a few things Ba’mosa had said. It was the idea about a kid imitating an adult. And the conclusion he finally came to was that Nate somehow felt what Warren was dressed like represented himself somehow.

There was definitely no logic to it. But Nate’s opinion might be the same as another kid his age. Warren leaned forward and undid his tie. He pulled it off and laid it over the back of the couch.

“Better?” Warren asked.

“Now the top two or three buttons.”

“I fail to see the point in this.” Warren said.

“You button them up just for the tie. Without it, it looks like the shirt is choking you.” Nate said. Once again logic went out the window with the idea and Warren’s mood was going back towards being unaccommodating again. He went ahead with the top three buttons. He then sat back against the couch, feeling sloppy.

Nate moved on the couch and leaned some towards him holding out his left arm and touching his wrist with his right hand.

“Unbutton these.” Nate said.

“My cuffs?” Warren asked.

“Yes, unbutton the stupid cuffs.” Nate said.

“No.” Warren answered.

“Just do it.”

“No Nate, there will be no end to this, whatever it is.” Warren stated, “With you making demands and me giving into them. Far beyond there being a logical reason or explanation, it’s you getting what you want. No.”

“That’s it.” Nate said, “Unbutton the cuffs, roll up your stupid sleeves and I’m done asking.”

Warren studied him. “What does this accomplish?”

“Just do it already.” He said. Warren slapped at his wrists, flung out the buttons and rolled up his sleeves. After which Nate finally relaxed. He fell back against the couch squishing his head against the back.

“Better?” Warren asked.

“Yes, you look almost human to me now.” He answered. Warren shook his head.

“That’s it? All of this fuss today because you don’t like the way I look?”

“Yup.” Nate said.

“And what I was wearing before? This is just on the off chance that someone might come to the door and I’ll answer it that way?”

“Yes.” Nate agreed, “I don’t even want anyone to know I could see that much of you.”

“It’s not an invitation, is that clear?” Warren asked.

“What do you mean?”

“I mean what I’ve said already, Nate. Whatever it is that’s going through your head about it. It’s not coming from me. I’m not even close to your idea in my actions.”

“Fine.”

“Good.” Warren said, “Because I can tell you that I don’t expect company on Sunday. All the people I know wouldn’t come to my door today. This is my day to myself.”

“What if I have company then?” Nate asked.

“I think we covered that last week. At this point, there should be no unexpected company from either of us and in the future I don’t want you having company stop by before noon on Sunday, ok?”

“Ok.”

“And other than that? For the way you presented it, was I really making you that uncomfortable personally?” Warren asked. Nate turned his head away this time centering on his own door.

“I guess not.” He said. Then he looked back and spoke with more curiosity. “Does it really get that big?”

“Everything gets bigger as you get older, Nate.” Warren answered, “That’s just one part of you, you waist gets wider, you shoulders broader. This is what marks the difference between me being a man and me still seeing you as a boy. Without ever knowing a person’s actual age the first impression is from your size. In your case you could pass as a sixteen year old already.”

“It’s not that big.” Nate said.

“There’s still time for that to change, you are still only fourteen.” Warren said. Nate looked at him with an expression Warren hadn’t seen yet. The idea that Warren was getting from him was Nate deciding whether or not he

could trust his uncle. At this point Warren smiled. "I'm sure you're perfectly normal."

"Is it always that big?" Nate asked. Warren leaned back.

"I wasn't really focused in on it consciously Nate." Warren explained, "So maybe not."

"It supposed to get bigger right?" Nate asked, "Then not be?"

"You know nothing about this, do you?" Warren asked. Nate's face turned red again. "It's okay to admit that."

"I know stuff." Nate defended, "I know how to do it. I know about protection and what it takes for her to get pregnant."

"That's great Nate, but wherever you're getting this information from, it's not covering all the basis. If you choose to find answers with me, it's also not an invitation. It's a discussion. There's nothing to worry about. Just ask."

"Do you have to be in love for it to happen?" Nate asked.

"No." Warren said.

"And my other question?"

"Yes, it's called an erection. It's normal to respond sometimes by touch, or even in reaction to your own thoughts about it."

"And if it doesn't?" Nate asked. Warren stumbled on that one. Looking at the kid's size made it difficult to believe he wasn't active yet.

"There is still time, even at your age, before that happens." Warren said, "You might just be what is referred to as a late bloomer."

"I mean it works, already." Nate said clarifying that.

"Then I'm not clear." Warren said.

"Well, it gets stiff and it works, it just doesn't get any bigger." He explained.

"In regards to that, it may still be part of your growth all the way around. There's still room for that to improve."

“You don’t think that’s weird?”

“In my understanding there is a size increase when you have an erection.” Warren said, “It may sound a little strange, but you’re not necessarily finished developing.”

“It’s not any where near as big as you.”

“Same thing, Nate. That’s part of my growth. I think I have a decade on you already. I wish I could say I had two.” Warren said.

“If you look at it, could you tell if it was normal?”

“I don’t think we need to do that.” Warren replied, “When you’re older, if you’re not seeing a difference by then, then you might see a doctor who knows more about it. Right now, I don’t think it’s something you need to worry about at great length. Just relax, ok?”

Nate’s look became suspicious, like Warren was holding something back from him.

“Next question.” Warren offered.

“I don’t know.” Nate said.

“Okay, should you have another, we’ll go from there.” Warren asked.

“You don’t feel weird talking about it?”

“If your life was more like other peoples, you’d have this conversation with your father.” Warren said, “At this point I’m the closest thing you have to one. So I need to be able to do that.”

“For me?”

“Yes.”

“I thought you didn’t care?”

“Which stresses a point. I’m going way out of my way here.” Warren said, “After all your accusations, this may be the only way to clear the air. I’m thinking part of your issues with you thinking all that about me is because you just don’t have anyone to talk to about it. So I’d prefer a normal conversation about this over you getting all worked up again.”

“How hard is it to fall in love?” Nate asked.

“Sometimes it’s not hard at all.” Warren answered.

“And you should do that first?”

“You want an honest opinion or some scripted talk on the subject?”

“Honest.” Nate requested.

“Most people assess their compatibility with one another sexually before they give into the idea about being in love.” He answered.

“Wow, that’s not what anyone else says.” Nate said.

“The Hollywood fairy tale telling of young love is another farce. As creatures owing up to our natures, the desire to get together and pursue pleasure far out weighs our more sophisticated notion of love. Very often young people get it in their head that when they have successfully encountered someone who meets their needs sexually, that they are in fact in love. This is probably not the case for the most part. A lot of people dive right into it then. Get happy about having someone to do that with and decide its time to get married. Other people don’t use protection, thinking they know what they are doing according to nature, get pregnant and adopt marriage as a suitable out come after the fact. In either case it’s not the best course of action.

“You want my untainted advice from a person who does not follow a spiritual doctrine. Always use protection, experience what you can with the person your with. Then worry about loving them.”

“That’s weird.” Nate said, “They always fall in love first.”

“How many Disney movies have you seen Nathaniel?” Warren asked. Nate’s face scrunched up. “You want to know about the real world or make believe?”

“Real.”

“The temptation to just have sex is going to send you into a hundred different unfavorable circumstances. You should always use your head. It’s not always going to be a success. You’ll stumble, you hurt someone’s feelings.

Someone will hurt your feelings. You'll mix love and sex up the first time. Everyone does it that way the first time. You'll be overwhelmed by it. Eventually, if you don't get entrenched by any particular relationship too soon, you'll be old enough to find someone to love and possibly be happy with for your basic needs."

"You make it sound impossible."

"I'm your example." Warren said, "At this point I've given up twice in just trying. I'm now mixed up with a man who thinks he's in love with me before anything else happens and he doesn't even want to do that."

"Huh?"

"Okay maybe that's too much information." Warren decided.

"What do you mean though?" Nate asked.

"There is not set formulae. I've hit you with a few worst scenarios. I'd consider it a fluke if you actually fell in love with someone before having sex. The idea is fostered by churches with their ancient dictations of love, marriage and then sex only for reproduction. Nothing could be further from the real world than that, but it can happen that way. I'll use Athena as my example on that."

"And this guy?" Nate asked.

"If I figure it out any more than I have to this point I'll tell you. As of right now, just getting that kiss seemed to take all of his effort in getting past the obvious."

"What's that?"

"Possibly the idea he was actually doing it to another man." Warren answered, "He admitted it was new for him, too."

"Oh."

"Next question?"

"How soon before you know you're in love?"

"There's no set time limit." Warren said, "I fell in love with Athena after only a few weeks. I allowed myself to do that for all the same things I'm talking negatively about like

falling in love first. Had I even bothered to talk to her at the outset before these feelings developed I'd have known she already had a boyfriend. I didn't stand a chance, but I made my attempt. At some point I found out that she had a boyfriend already and my feelings got hurt. She told me after I'd expressed all my feelings and offered me friendship instead. Nothing kills you more than that, 'Let's just be friends.' I didn't hear her. Not until she was showing me her engagement ring did I understand I was out.

"All I was left with was to accept that friendship offer or I'd never see her again."

"Oh." Nate said.

"She took some of the blame for me, but not much." Warren said.

"And this guy?"

"I'm not feeling it that strongly yet, but it's all potential." Warren answered, "It could happen, I can look forward to it, but I'm not allowing it to happen yet. The last time I got close to someone. I held off my emotions for the duration. She came and went and a year had past.

"I look back and see myself not ever loving her, but we had companionship and compassion...and sex."

"You would have married Athena if you could have?"

"In a heartbeat." Warren admitted, "But I'm letting that go now. Trying to be better about knowing her as part of a family and being friends with her family and not just her. In order to do that I need to let go of the idea of me loving her solely. This means I can maybe love someone else."

"Did you get the guy's name?" Nate asked.

"I'm calling him Chief for the time being." Warren answered.

"Ok."

"You getting hungry?"

"I think I was born that way." Nate answered. Warren smiled and got up off the couch and headed into the kitchen.

“I’m thinking a decent meal.” Warren said. Nate came as far as the table and sat down.

“Are you sure it will get bigger?” Nate asked. Warren took a moment to get back to the relevance of the question.

“I’m sure it’s not even small.” He answered, “Especially if you’re only using me as a basis for your comparison.”

“Well.” Nate said sounding off, “Who else?”

“Other boys maybe?”

“Oh, uhm, no. You don’t look.” Nate said.

“Why does that sound like something hard to do? Go out of your way not to look?”

“You just do, unless you want someone to think you’re looking.”

“And from there to here, what happened?” Warren asked.

“What do you mean?”

“You looked at me, why?” Warren asked while he got things out to make a meal with. He didn’t get an immediate answer. He was almost afraid it would come back to the damaged view Nate was talking about. He finally stopped to look at the kid. He was busy staring at the table. “I’m sure it is nothing of great concern. I was just asking against what you said about not looking.” Warren added. Nate slowly looked up and looked over at his uncle. He didn’t look happy again.

Warren turned back around and went back to what he was doing. He let the kid take his time. He even allowed for the possibility that he might never answer. He decided he didn’t need to push him that far on any given question along the same lines.

“Well, this shouldn’t take too long to make.” Warren finally spoke giving him an out to talk about something else.

“You’re not another boy.” Nate finally said.

“I’m clear on that.” Warren said.

“I was wondering what it was going to look like.” Nate said, “And when I saw...I didn’t stop looking.”

“That’s ok, Nate.” Warren said, “That sounds like healthy curiosity. It wouldn’t be any different to me than looking at a guy with a mustache and wondering if you could have one when you were older. You’re probably sitting there thinking you shouldn’t have done it. All that shit your father said flashed through your mind and you tried to push it on me so you wouldn’t feel guilty, right?”

“I guess.”

“I think without all this modern concern over how men and boys relate. For instance me and you, or a father and son, without all that suspicion you’ve succumbed to in thinking I’d do something. Without all that interjecting then it might just be more natural to have had opportunity to look. And no one would make a big deal out of it and you wouldn’t have to feel mixed up or guilty about it. But since you do, I want you to know I wasn’t showing you on purpose.”

“You said that.”

“Good.”

“What if you did?”

Warren stopped what he was doing. For a moment to consider it. “Without anything preempting it?”

“What does that mean?”

“Like you in the locker room with the other boys.” Warren said, “To me, that would be an opportunity to see what other boys look like versus yourself. Perhaps that might make you more self conscious. I know I was.”

“You were?” Nate asked.

“Yes.” Warren answered, “Since we all develop at our own pace I felt like they were all normal and I wasn’t. Trust me, at this point it’s not a concern with me anymore. Some that looked challenging to me then, they were just ahead of me. Maybe even didn’t get any further along and I passed them at some point.”

“By when?”

“During High School.” He answered.

“So how would that happen with us?” Nate asked.

“I wasn’t suggesting it would.” Warren said.

“Yea but you said if things were different.”

“Right, but if I say it my way, it’s not going to be hard for you to see it through that same twisted idea.”

“Try me.” Nate said. Warren looked at him again to see him looking at the table.

“I can’t say for sure.” Warren went on, “I know I didn’t have this much communication with my father...”

“You didn’t?” Nate asked.

“No.” Warren answered, “This is a generation gap thing, too.”

“I thought you said your Dad was suppose to tell you all this?”

“He did, but not like I’m talking to you. He was nervous. He talked around all my questions, not answering me directly. He covered the basic facts and he kept wiping his forehead against his sweat. I stopped asking him questions. I couldn’t stand to see him go through all that.”

“Oh.” Nate said, after a long pause he asked, “How did you find out stuff?”

“Kit.” Warren answered.

“How did he find out?”

“Two older brothers, one already out of the house and headed towards marriage. He actually sat us both down for a Q & A at one point.”

“Really?”

“Yes.” Warren answered, “Kit told him I was ignorant, so when he tried to educate Kit, he went ahead and included me. It was a lot easier than watching my father struggle with it.”

“Why is it easy for you now?”

“Who says it is?” Warren asked coming to a stand still again.

“I don’t know, because your not doing it like your dad did maybe?”

“That’s a good response, Nate.”

“Okay, but you’re avoiding something now, too.” Nate decided.

“Alright.” Warren said. He set everything so it wouldn’t burn and turned to face Nate leaning against the counter. Nate finally looked right at him. “I think it’s pretty clear to me that mothers and daughters don’t have a problem with this. What I think is that in a family relationship, son and father, that they would be able to be intimate and not have external concerns about it. It wouldn’t be anyone else’s business. But in today’s society it’s always something the public can pick apart and say that it’s sexual child abuse, even if it’s not.”

Nate just stared at him and Warren could see how it played off his fears.

“You think I mean something by that according to what you’ve said?” Warren asked.

“Huh?”

“What I just said, in your mind it’s what your father was talking about. It’s what you are so concerned about from seeing the spillage from the crap that comes to your mind through the TV. That it’s a sick thing.”

Nate got even more concerned.

“Well?”

“Yes.” He answered.

“That’s why it doesn’t happen anymore.” Warren said.

“You’re talking about having sex with a kid.” Nate said.

“That’s what you heard, that is not what I said. But any police investigation would conclude the same. No one is left knowing the difference anymore and some part of what could be cannot be.”

“Well what then?” Nate asked.

“Like you getting into the shower with me.” Warren answered, “You use to do that all the time.”

“No I didn’t.”

“Yes you did. Very often at your mother’s request that I get you cleaned up. There was nothing sexual about it. It’s not something you’d do with just anybody though. So it is therefore considered intimate according to the relationship.

“In a real relationship between a father and son, society makes it well known that when the boy starts to become a man, he becomes sexual that your supposed to just drop that intimacy altogether, very often leaving a boy in a confused state about it.

“So that when you’re most curious you no longer have a connection to the person who should be showing you the way of it. You still need emotional training. Given the lack of that you often immediately seek out a connection that’s been lost in finding someone else and it promotes relationships in young people who are far from ready for it.”

Nate still looked baffled. Warren went ahead and served the food and began bringing it to the table. Nate watched him the whole time. Possibly now judging him from what Warren had said.

Warren sat down. “When it comes to woman and their daughters they very often do not loss that connection.” He continued. “If a boy your age was to constantly hug a guy my age all eyes would be on us wondering what that full grown man is doing with that boy. But if I were a woman and you were a girl, nothing would ever be said about it.”

“You’re saying I’d be able to touch you though, right?” Nate asked.

“We don’t touch each other now so the chance for that ever happening is Nil.”

“And before?” Nate asked.

“You touched me all the time, curious little hands, grabbing my nose, my ears, and so on.”

“But...” Nate faltered and focused on his food. They both ate some before he spoke again, “But did I ever touch you?”

“Yes.”

Nate sat up straight and stared again.

“See.” Warren said, “At this point in your state of mind it can be nothing but sex. You think it was sex for you then?” The kid couldn’t answer. “You think it was to me?”

“I don’t know.”

“It was intimate, but it most definitely wasn’t sex.” Warren finished. “To me the only potential for that to happen is when the man is geared towards it. In which case society as well as myself would shun him with good reason.”

“How are you supposed to know the difference?” Nate asked.

“Good question.” Warren said. They ate for a while again.

“Well?” Nate finally asked. Warren finished his bit of food and wiped his mouth with his napkin.

“Everyone would have a different view about it. My idea about it is considered illegal in most states.” Warren answered, “With that said, I’d say that touching would be fine as long as it is with your hands even if the man was maintaining an erection. I wouldn’t consider a man allowing explorations with one’s lips or mouth looking for taste as acceptable, but maybe someone else would. To me that’s over the line. And left with just touching, being able to do that while your exploring from normal healthy curiosity, at some point you would be sated from it and wouldn’t feel the need to keep doing it.

“From that learning, maintaining intimacy like that, eventually the boy is going to come away from the man with healthy regards to relationships with other men. Where as our society doesn’t prompt intimate contact between men.”

“That’s being gay.” Nate suggested.

“To the naked eye of anyone else, it’s sure to be seen that way. But I’m still not talking about actually having sex. Just being close. Loving a person and allowing your emotions to pass from one to another. That’s another thing we fail to do as a whole, because we think that should be reserved for only people who are having sex with one another.”

“But woman do that.” Nate said.

“You are listening.” Warren said.

“Is that all your doing with that guy?” Nate asked. Warren smiled.

“For the time being.” He replied, “But that’s something that would definitely be gay, even to me. Especially after that kiss.”

“Is there a guy who you’re just close with?” Nate asked.

“Along the lines I’m talking about, no. I don’t even know if there’s another person out there who would share my point of view. I considered this because of you.”

“Me?”

“Yes.” Warren answered, “And with that as my reason I discovered that what I’m telling you was not uncommon at some point. Society brings fourth all these new and wonderful concepts which trample over old ways. The basis for the way we relate is convoluted now that while we wish to show the pristine face of purity. Mom, Dad and three kids, nothing wrong here. Only having sex because they are married and nothing more could ever happen there, while on the other end of that lie are all the people buying and pushing sex to the masses in the way of adult entertainment, so everyone can sedate every curiosity they ever have about it. Some of it is extremely offensive.

“This need to revile in sex over something that’s more natural to us, is fostered by the media in saying we should all do things one way when no one wants to do it all one way.”

“I don’t understand everything you just said.”

“I’m rambling.” Warren said.

“But you said it was me.” Nate said.

“The idea that as a man and how I related to you. I didn’t understand any of it. So I investigated. What I ended up with is my own opinion about it. If I’d been your father and if you hadn’t been tainted by society then there would be a relationship between us along those lines.”

“And you’d kiss me?” Nate asked. Warren smiled.

“Why do you say that like its horrible?”

“I didn’t mean to, I’m asking.”

“How many times have you seen woman who were just friends kiss?”

“I don’t know, a couple.” Nate answered.

“And a parent kissing a child, your Mom to you?”

“My head somewhere.”

“Your lips?”

“No.” Nate answered.

“She used to, so did I.” Warren said. Nate sat up straight again. “Once again, that kind of intimate contact can only be reserved for those truly in love and engaged in a relationship involving sex. When it comes right down to it, everything that’s missing here, to me, is something that can be seen in children who have yet to know sex as we do. In which case if you were to come over and kiss me, it would be right on my lips. But it wouldn’t be passionate like lovers, but still, intimate. Am I making sense to you?”

“Yes, some.” Nate answered.

“So we can’t have that anymore. At this point just being able to talk is a struggle here.” Warren said, “You have as yet to even shake my hand since you been here.”

“Do you want to?”

“That would have worked when you first arrived.” Warren said, “Kind of late for that now.”

“And Kit?” Nate asked.

“What about him?”

“How do you...relate?”

“In the way of his expression emotions towards me he’s overly concerned about my well being, which I find to be a negative way of dealing with his emotions towards me. Other than that he promotes humor. That’s his way of sending a good feeling from him to me. From me to him, I help him with his work. His reliance on me to be able to do that and do it consistently reminds him that I do in fact care about him.” Warren explained.

“Do you love each other?”

“We are best friends, Nate.” Warren answered, “I think that defines it correctly.”

Nate finished his meal. Warren started cleaning up. The conversation petered off and Warren was sure the kid was trying to process everything he’d heard. He moved into doing the dishes and Warren went over to his chair to start in on his Sunday paper. He’d have had most of read already, for what of he did read, if he hadn’t been giving over so much attention to the kid.

When Nate finished his chore he came over and sat in the companion chair, but didn’t say anything. Warren stopped to glance over at him several times and he’d look back. At this point Warren had no idea what he might be thinking.

“Did I really kiss you on the lips?” Nate asked.

“Yes you did.” Warren answered, “You were very affectionate. Over time you withdrew according to your father’s increase of aggression towards you as well an increase of the frequency of it. Your mother had the gall to say it was normal. I told her that was bullshit and she needed to open her damn eyes to the fact that there was a problem.”

“You hate my Mom?” Nate asked.

“I have been known to state that out loud on occasion, right now I’ll just say I cannot find a way to stop being angry at her for the things she allowed to happen to herself and you.”

“I don’t remember.” Nate said.

“Some can remember as early as being one or two years of age, according to your mother she remembers when she was that young. Someone like you has a reason to put things out of your mind and that causes you to forget everything, both good and bad.” Warren said.

Nate sat there quietly for taking another hit against what Warren was speaking about his mother. He sighed a few times, which Warren decided was him trying to keep any argumentative retort to himself.

“Well.” Warren said after a time.

“What?” Nate asked.

“Now you know that what you thought about me just for looking at me is in fact true.” Warren said, “At some point your father’s observance of the way I was with you, affectionate and loving, where as he could not find the means to relate to you at all far beyond aggression, allowed him to reveal this to you. In my mind it is not abuse, abuse is taking something from someone without their consent. Your father has done nothing but abuse you in regards to him smacking you up side the head whenever the need for him to relate to you occurred. He also found it easy to use your mother as a punching bag, which she sat for without protest for years.”

Nate got off the chair and moved to the couch where he sank down into it out of sight and eventually turned the TV on at a low volume. That set the pace for the rest of the day which allowed Warren to finish his newspaper and have a silent dinner.

3

Warren was on his way to the coffee shop. His Monday was packed with a few different things he needed to get done. Including meeting up with Kit in the afternoon to clear the air about the project he was on that Warren had done the proposal for. The project investor was watching the whole thing too closely and was starting to breathe readily

down Kit's neck about almost everything. Warren could straighten the whole thing out, but it was more of a favor to Kit than anything else.

He also had his own dealings and his meeting the following day with Garner and his people and it was going to require a lot of preparation. With all of that on his mind he'd completely forgotten about anyone watching him. So it startled him when he reached the coffee shop to see the redheaded guy behind the newspaper again.

If only he could believe what the man had said, he was merely waiting for a ride. At this point he'd come all the way back to being directly across the street. It might have been a move based on laziness if Warren was to believe he lived right there and had only walked as far as necessary to get his ride.

Warren headed into the coffee shop and found David sitting in there. He glanced once at Warren then went back to his coffee. Warren walked up and paid for his own. He then moved to sit opposite David, knowing full well he didn't have time for it.

"It's ok." David said, "You don't have to keep apologizing for him."

"He would have showed up if I hadn't pissed him off." Warren said, "He did agree to meet you, didn't he?"

"Yes, but...he seemed hesitant about it."

"Again, it's my fault. So I'm not really apologizing for him so much as myself." Warren said.

"When you said he wouldn't call, I should have known then that he wasn't interested in me."

"He said you wanted him to meet you just so you wouldn't be alone. Since his only reason for talking to you was out of his concern for me, I think he would have done that. Things lined up in such a way that I had him so riled up and pissed off, he couldn't deal with anything else at the time."

"Uhm..."

“What?” Warren asked.

“It was supposed to be a date.” David said.

“I’m sure the voicing of the agreement got...mixed up with his sense of humor and his way of being friendly with people he doesn’t know.”

“No.” David said shaking his head from side to side, “I asked him out on a date and he accepted.”

Warren sat there for a moment trying to ponder it out. “He got it in his head that it was joke that his other friend and I were setting him up with. I’m sorry David that you got mixed up with it. You seem like a nice guy to me. If he agreed to it then it was only along those lines.”

“Well” David said, “I’m not going back there.”

“I’m sorry about that, too. It’s a great place. Should you get over feeling bad about this, I’m sure you could return and Kit would not do anything unkind towards you in the future.”

“Uhm, thanks for trying, what’s your name?”

“Warren.”

“Well thanks for trying Warren.” David said.

“Have a good day.” Warren offered and got up. He was just making it out the door when he saw the redheaded guy, first looking at Warren and then at a car coming down the street. Warren was thinking this was it. That was his expected ride and he’d witness that and that would be the end of him thinking people were watching him when all the others seemed to have gone away.

It was the red headed guy’s look of fear, dropping his newspaper into the street and taking off down the street that changed Warren’s mind.

The car was obviously after him and caught up well enough to go right up on the sidewalk in an attempt to run the guy over. With no where else to go the redheaded guy bolted across the street. Then in taking advantage of the car facing in the opposite direction he was coming right down the sidewalk headed straight towards Warren.

The guy in the car stopped and climbed out. He was swinging around a gun and started shooting at the redheaded guy. While Warren was still just trying to absorb everything that was happening, again in an altered sense of time the redheaded guy flew past Warren with bullet's trailing and missing him and one went into Warren's left shoulder. He was thrown back against the coffee shop door and sunk down to the sidewalk. As he was falling he turned to see the redheaded guy dart down the nearest alley, unhit. His head slowly rolled back to the guy shooting, wearing all black, head covering and dark glasses and appearing like he could be anybody to Warren. He got back into his car after missing his mark and hitting someone else. He then drove off at a high speed in the direction he was headed.

At this point things were already getting blurry for Warren. He felt the door being pushed open against him and he slid down to where he was laying on the sidewalk. He could just make out David standing over him looking him over. He had something near his mouth that Warren couldn't quite make out.

"The rabbit's been hit." David said, "Yea I know man, get an ambulance." He appeared to be talking to the thin air to Warren's blurry vision. "Yes he's in shock at this point. No man it was that moron, Dudley. I told him to stay off of this. That I had this post. He's already been made. I saw that with my own eyes. He just wanted back in....No man nothing to do with this. It's probably drug related knowing his sorry ass. As far as I'm concerned if I see him again I'll shoot my damn self."

Warren slowly began to slip away after that.

"Yes, you know who is going to be pissed."

4

Warren could just make out the shape of a man's face with glasses on it. "Your going to be okay Mr. Keith." He

heard as if in auditorium, “We got the bullet out, right now your heavily sedated. Don’t try and wake up, just get some rest.” Warren didn’t have a problem with that and closed his eyes.

5

He opened his eyes slowly and realized his head was in a very uncomfortable position of being turned to the left while he was flat on his back. He blinked a few times before the room came into focus. The kid was sitting on the chair next to him and looked at him.

“What are you doing here, Nate?” Warren asked.

“Just checking in on you.” He replied.

“How long have I been here?”

“Yesterday.”

Warren watched as the kid went back to something in his hands. He decided it was his own PDA the kid was messing with. He looked back at his uncle.

“This thing has games on it you know?”

“That’s a tool for work, Nate. I’d appreciate it if you didn’t reduce it to a game boy and run down the batteries.” Warren requested.

Nate put the stylus back into it and closed it up returning it to the drawer next to the bed. He took a deep breath.

“Been here a while?”

“Yes, bored.” Nate said. Warren closed his eyes for a moment and slowly moved his head to look forward and every muscle on his left side twitched in reaction to it. He drew breath through his teeth before he got moved. “Hurt a lot?” Nate asked.

“I don’t feel a thing.” Warren said.

“Yea right.”

“What time is it?”

“I don’t know, nine maybe.”

“I’m hungry.” Warren decided.

“They got you on that bottle, you should be ok.” Nate advised. Warren looked back at him just in moving his eyes.

“You spend the night alone?”

“Hell no.” Nate said coming through with his apparent aggravation. “You never told me Kit had a key.”

“Only for emergencies and he doesn’t have one for my room.” Warren said.

“Which explains why he slept on the couch.” Nate added sounding annoyed.

“Now what Nate?”

“Well let’s see, he showed up drunk. When I got up to go the bathroom I came out and he was sleeping on the couch naked.”

“Did you throw a blanket over him?”

“I couldn’t find one.”

Warren smiled at the idea that he looked. “You all disturbed again?”

“Well...I wasn’t expecting to see that. Hanging all off the couch like that.” Nate said.

“He was toast.” Warren decided.

“Uhm, I...”

“What Nate?”

“I took a look.” He said.

“That’s fine. You need to stop stressing about it.”

“What about you?” Nate asked.

“What do you mean?”

“You got shot Uncle Warren, that makes me stressed...out.” Nate said.

“It was an accident. Wrong place at the wrong time. I don’t really remember much past the guy being shot at crossing my path and the bullet hitting me instead.”

“Why didn’t you get out the way?” Nate asked.

“I wasn’t quite believing what I was seeing. It was much like watching it on TV. You’re perfectly safe on the one

side of the screen. I didn't catch up to the reality of it until the bullet actually hit me."

"That hurt?"

"Like hell." Warren answered.

"The nurse said you would be okay. Just to expect you to be grumpy a lot, but that's not new." Nate said. Warren smiled, just suppressing a laugh that was sure to hurt.

"One thing is for sure I won't ever go back to that coffee shop."

"Why?"

"Barnes might say it was a hot spot for negative activity." Warren said, "That's also where that girl took my wallet." Nate frowned at the reminder of her.

"She gave it back, right?"

"Yes." Warren admitted.

"She's not that bad."

"Have you talked to her again?" Warren asked. Nate hesitated in answering looking around the room.

"We said hey." He admitted.

"Nate." Warren started, but he didn't have the energy to really argue. Instead he just frowned.

"Can't she like apologize?"

"No Nate, I really don't want you to be involved with her. What she did, in the guise of a game or not, it's a real crime." He said.

"Fine." He said.

"How did you find out I was here? Did Kit tell you?"

"Yea right." Nate said.

"Well?"

"I heard it on the answering machine. Your lady at work, she called and was like 'Nate, honey, pick up the phone.' Then she just said I should know you were in the hospital. I didn't know where it was. So...I just stayed put not knowing anything for hours."

"Why didn't you call Leigh back?"

"I don't know."

“And then?”

“Kit showed up drunk, scared the crap out of me when he just opened the door. Couldn’t remember what he looked like. I almost ran and hid in my room until he started saying my name. Then he said what she said. He tried to say you’d be okay, but it was all messed.”

“What do you mean?”

“Uhm...he’s drunk right?”

“You’re telling me that.” Warren said.

“Okay, I don’t know how he is when he’s drunk, you guys drink too much anyway...”

“We know go on.”

“Well...he was crying.” Nate said. Warren squeezed his eyes shut for moment. “I went into my room and did lock the door. He...wanted to hug me.”

“Jesus Nate.”

“What? I don’t know him.” Nate said.

“Alright fine.” Warren said, “He was drunk, ok?”

“Ok.”

“I’m going to close my eyes now, Nate, ok?”

“Ok.”

6

When Warren opened his eyes again it was dark. He couldn’t ever remember sleeping so much before. He blamed it on the drugs and decided he might just be awake for part of the night. He turned his head to look out the window and realized someone was sitting on the chair to his right. He had his left knee up with his foot on the chair.

“Chief?”

“Yes.” He said leaning forward to look at Warren. He then moved the chair closer to the bed. “How are you?”

“They say I’ll be fine.” Warren replied. The other man grabbed up Warren’s right hand between both of his own and put his lips on it for a moment.

"I'm sorry you got shot."

"It's not your fault." Warren suggested.

"Well...I know, but I just don't like the idea of anyone I care about getting hurt." Chief said.

"I can see that in your eyes." Warren said.

"I'm...I'm not really crying here." He said pulling his right hand away and wiping at his face with the back of his hand. Warren moved to grip his remaining left hand more firmly with his own. He smiled at his friend.

"I believe you." Warren said.

"About?"

"When you tell me you love me, Chief. No matter the fact that I don't know anything else about you, I believe you." Warren said. This time it wasn't just tears he started crying. "Stop." Warren requested.

"The idea...that I might have lost you." He said, "When I only just found you. It's having an effect on me."

"I know, but I'm fine." Warren said. The other man nodded and stayed his emotion some, still gripping Warren's hand he went back to covering it with his right.

"My timing is really bad." Chief said, "Because I should stay here with you and watch you get well. But I can't. I have to leave Seattle. I'm not sure how long I'll be gone."

"I'll be here when you get back." Warren said. He nodded.

"It's hard to even agree to go. You worry me with this getting shot business. I'm afraid if I leave something else will happen."

"It was a fluke. It's like lighting, Chief. It never strikes the same place twice."

"I wish I could believe that."

"You'll have to take my word for it." Warren said.

"I can't do that, either, Warren." He said. He pulled the chair slap up against the bed and ran their joined hands across his face. He was essentially wiping away his tears and

Warren smiled at that. Chief finally smiled back. "This isn't going to get you down?"

"No." Warren said, "How could I be down looking at you anyway?" The other man laughed.

"I really like hearing that from you."

"Still not gay?"

"At the moment, I don't care anymore. You need to interpret me in your own way right now. As long as you don't reject me...I can lean a little in your way about it. I've done nothing but run it through my head thinking if I were you, how would I take my advances? Your reaction is perfectly normal."

"Good." Warren said, "That sounds like your dealing with it better yourself."

"If there was room, I'd crawl in bed with you to hold you in my arms." Chief said. Warren looked to his side.

"I can maybe move over." Warren said.

"No, it's best you don't move as much as possible."

"I think it would be worth it." Warren said.

"It's the thought that counts, ok?"

"Yea, it is." Warren agreed.

"And I'll say it again, I love you."

Warren almost said it right back to him, but he lacked any basis for it. No matter how much of it was coming from the other man. He couldn't allow himself to just automatically feel the same way. Instead he said, "Prove it." and smiled.

"How?"

"Take me back to the other night where you were kissing me and I...I was in my own heaven" Warren said. Chief smiled and removed his hand again to push back on his hair.

"You flatter me." He said, "But can we pass that this time?"

"No." Warren said, "Especially if you're leaving for a while. And I am laid up here, give me something."

Chief came up off the chair and kissed Warren softly on his forehead. He then moved back just a bit to look at Warren in his face.

“You have to do better than that.” Warren said and smiled, squeezing his hand.

“Alright, but I want you to hear me right now, ok?”

“Listening.” Warren said.

“I don’t want you to wait on me for this. I don’t want you to think it has to be me. If for some reason while I’m gone someone else becomes apparent to you, man or woman. Don’t stand back because of me. I want you to keep living your own life. Very often you get all caught up in one thing with someone and right smack in the middle of it someone else is there, usually someone right under your nose. Don’t say no to that because of me. I’m not going to love you any less.”

“I want it to be you.” Warren said. Chief closed his eyes for a moment and then opened them.

“I know.” He said, “But maybe it’s not going to be. And no matter what you do in your life, there will always be an us, you and me. Always, nothing would ever change that, someday you’re going to understand what I mean by it. I’m not just showing up to leave and never come back. I will be back. But...don’t wait on me, ok?”

“Ok.”

“Promise me you won’t.” Chief said smiling. Warren closed his eyes. He didn’t want to make a promise out of it. If he didn’t he wouldn’t have a problem waiting. In his head it wasn’t like someone else was there anyway. How long had it taken for him to show up? He also just wanted that kiss more than anything.

“I promise.” Warren said. Chief’s lips came down onto his soft and slow and then Warren, already medicated to be sleepy, was easily swept away by it. He got his hand away from Chief’s and grabbed the back of his head getting a fist full of that black hair and he wanted more.

Chief pulled away, not giving Warren a choice about the contact considering he really couldn't move. "Better?"

"Yes." Warren agreed.

"And the idea that I feel guilty about it?"

"I don't know why." Warren said.

"Just hear me when I say I do. And its partly because its...I like it too."

"Stay with me tonight." Warren said.

"I want to, but I already have a scheduled flight." He replied as he pulled out of Warren's hands, completely disengaging. Warren felt the warmth go with him when he did.

"Those red eyes are hell." Warren said. Chief smiled.

"I'll be fine for it. I actually enjoying flying more than most. No fear of heights and I love being up in the air." He admitted. Warren smiled at the idea of the man flying around all on his own.

"I'll miss you." Warren managed to get out. Chief took it as another emotional hit and put his head down for where he was standing.

"Me too." He managed to say, "And stay out of trouble while I'm gone, ok?"

"Yes Dad." Warren said sarcastically and smiled at him. Chief smiled back and it got really big and even with the short distance between them, Warren could feel his warmth coming from that smile right into him.

"What the hell." He finally said and came back in for one more kiss. He stayed there much longer and Warren's experience being limited might be tainted by this one man for the way he did it. He was getting a feel for the technical of it and returned the same intensity. Chief responded to it and right in the middle of all that warmth Warren realized his lips were just no longer there.

He opened his eyes and Chief was just gone. He half considered he'd only just woken up from a dream about him for the suddenness of his absence. He looked at the door

which someone had closed for him and it wasn't moving like he would expect a swinging hospital room door might when pushed open and left to swing after the person was gone.

It was only his sense of smell that reassured him it wasn't just a dream. He hadn't even been focused on it during the kiss, but the man had his own scent about him and when Warren breathed in only through his nose he could still smell him on himself. He closed his eyes and went to sleep with all of that emotion he'd been left with.

7

Kit came into the room looking suspicious in his movements. He glanced back out into the hall and then closed the door. He turned to smile at Warren as he approached and pulled a brown bag out of his jacket.

"I brought you a beer." He explained as he came close and offered it. Warren looked at it and then him.

"You know I can't drink that, I'm on pain killers here." Warren said.

"Oh well, no biggie." Kit said as he twisted off the top of the bottle and drank some of it while keeping an eye on the door. He then moved to sit down in the chair and tucked the beer under his arm. "Hey." He said.

"Hi Kit, what is up with you showing up drunk at my place during this?" Warren asked.

"You know it's the damndest thing, Warren." Kit said looking at him sideways about to tell him about some great discovery. "After all these years of trying to keep my thumb on your wereabouts at all times and worrying my ass off when your missing. This time, the one time something actually fucking happened. I just blew it off. You weren't there. I lost the project, he pulled some fucking clause out of his ass about it and said to shut the fucking place down.

"So instead of worrying about you just then. I got pissed as shit, tore out of there at top speed and fucking

drowned myself in as many beers as I could lift to my lips. So now here I am sufficiently drunk. Not a care in the world and who shows up at the bar, looking for me? Leigh, I guess she'd called and heard I was there, but I wouldn't answer the phone saying something like, 'let the fucker rot in hell.' She comes up to me and I'm thinking has she ever been in the place before? She was all nervous and she said she couldn't get Nate on the damn phone. I'm like why the hell would she need to do that. And it hits me just then like a fucking train that your ass is in a sling somewhere. I jumped to my feet so fast I startled her and three other people. 'Where the hell is Warren?'"

Kit stopped to have some more of his smuggled beer. He looked at Warren's expecting face.

"She said they said you'd be ok, but you were in the hospital. I'm thinking car wreck or something. So she's looking for Nate because she doesn't know if he's home, if he knows what happened to you. I'm thinking I got to go see the kid. Before I get going she's rattling off the details of the operation, all I heard was, he got shot.

"What the hell?" Kit asked.

"You want an answer to that right now?"

"No, I've heard some guy was shooting at some other guy and you came out of that damn coffee shop just in time to get one of his bullets. You just can't be more careful?"

"I'm fine now Kit. What happened next?" Warren questioned.

"So I'm stumbling drunk. Hadn't lost my eyesight. But I'm way overreacting because I was so careless. Why I didn't start tracking you down this time, Jesus I don't know. I'm being punished for something and I'm feeling like hell for that. I get the damn door open and the kid is just sitting there on the floor rocking back and fourth."

"Jesus." Warren moaned.

"So he starts looking up at me as I'm approaching him. He totally flips out, starts scrambling to get away from

me and I'm saying, 'Nate, Nate, Nate!' he stops scrambling and stops looking at me like I'm Freddy fucking Krueger. 'It's me Kit, you know who I am.' He just stares at me and I say he's going to be okay, just calm down. Then I try and get close again and he's all jumpy. Of course I didn't look my best just then either, but I was trying to you know, give him a hug, or let him hug me if he wanted to. He finally just ran into the spare room, locking the door.

"I pounded on that for a while trying to get him to come out and talk to me. But I must have sounded like some insane mad man just then slurring my words and shit. I finally give up and sat down on the couch. Forgetting where I was and why I start thinking it's time for bed so I get ready for bed and went to sleep."

"Naked." Warren checked.

"That is the way I sleep." He said.

"And he saw you."

"He didn't say anything, thought I was up before him." Kit said.

"He came out eventually while you were out." Warren said.

"Oops. Hope I didn't scar him for life." Kit said, "You know how many times my old man passed out drunk naked on the living room floor?"

"I've seen it myself." Warren said.

"Scar you?"

"No, but you know Nate has problems."

"You don't have to tell me." Kit said, "I can't get anywhere near him. I try to give him a bonus on the back and just cringes like..."

"You're going to hit him." Warren finished.

"Oh man, I keep forgetting about all that shit." Kit said.

"You didn't live through it like we did." Warren said, "That's not your fault."

"I wouldn't hurt him."

“I know that.”

“Oh and he doesn’t like my cooking either.”

“How much Tabasco sauce did you use?” Warren asked. Kit held out his hand indicating a pinch with his finger and thumb.

“Just a little.”

“He’s not used to it.” Warren said. He took a deep breath. “How was he today?”

“Hadn’t seen him yet. Doesn’t leave a note either.” Kit replied.

“His schedule at the apartment is between ten PM and seven AM. Other than that he’s suppose to be around for dinner.”

“Ok.” Kit said.

“Take my keys and sleep in my room, alright?”

“Yes, because last night I slept in my clothes. Then I went into the bathroom this morning to shower and change feeling disgusting. Have you been in there? You know the one that you don’t use? He has it all tore up.” Kit said.

“I’ll investigate that when I get home.”

“Which should be soon, doc says your healing right up. Just from yesterday to today he says he’s never seen anyone heal that fast from a gunshot wound.” Kit said.

“You talked to my doctor?” Warren asked.

“Yea, had to thump on someone around here to get info.”

“And the private room?” Warren asked. Kit took another dink from the beer. “Please put that damn beer away, you’re driving me crazy because I can’t have it.”

“Sorry.” Kit said shuffling it off once and for all. He looked guiltily at Warren. “I didn’t want anyone bothering you while you recovered from this shit.”

“Thank you.”

“The least I could do.” Kit said sounding exasperated all of a sudden. “Here I was thinking you’d let me down and crying into my stinking beer. As it turns out I’m the one who

let you down. I should have known better. I should have looked for you. You would never do that to me on purpose. I don't know why I thought you had. I'm sorry."

"It's okay Kit. The minute you knew you were there for me. And you're taking care of Nate?"

"The kid doesn't like me." Kit said. "Hardly talks at all."

"Don't take it personally, he doesn't like me either." Warren said. Kit gave him a strange look indicating he found that hard to believe. "You come to see me yesterday?" Warren asked.

"Yea, you were out though." Kit said, "Sat around for a while, said some things you didn't hear, and then left. The kid got to talk to you, more important than me. And you're okay today so...it's cool."

"What did you say?"

"Hangover talk." Kit said and smiled.

"You were here before Nate?"

"No."

"Than maybe not so hung over." Warren said.

"Well, doesn't matter I was still beating myself up. Can't seem to do enough of that lately where as you're concerned."

"Why do you say that?" Warren asked.

"I've just been a total asshole since last week." Kit said, "I should have said it all differently. I'm sorry."

"I shocked you." Warren suggested.

"Doesn't matter, I got Barnes pissed at me, too."

"I'm not pissed at you Kit. If you thought that was why I didn't show..."

"Stop." Kit said.

"You did didn't you?" Warren asked. Kit stared at the floor. Warren sighed. "Let's write it all off, right now, ok?"

"Hard to do." Kit said, "Feel like shit."

“I am so glad you are here right now.” Warren said. Kit finally looked up at him. “I’m glad you can be there for Nate when I can’t. You are right there for me, ok?”

“I...”

“It’s fine Kit. We’re ok.” Warren said.

“I need to make it up to you somehow.”

“Okay do me a favor.”

“Anything.” Kit said.

“Don’t cook for the kid. Buy a nice cooked meal, have it delivered or whatever.” Warren said. Kit slowly smiled.

“Ok.”

“Someone else came to see me.”

“Yea, who?” Kit asked.

“Chief.” Warren answered.

“Uhm, when?”

“Late last night sometime.” Warren answered.

“He snuck in?”

“I guess.” Warren answered.

“Oh.”

“He was upset, too.”

“He cares about you?” Kit asked.

“Yes, more than I thought.” Warren answered.

“Sounds like you got something started there.” Kit said.

“Maybe.” Warren said, “But he left.”

“What you mean?”

“I mean he’s gone. He came to say goodbye. Don’t know when he’ll be back.”

“Well that doesn’t sound promising.” Kit said.

“He also said not to wait around for him. That we didn’t need all that for him to care about me the way he does.”

“Okay that’s weird.”

“I believe him.” Warren said.

“I guess, being Superman and all that he had to fly off to save someone else on you.” Kit said. He was smiling at

Warren, but stopped when he saw Warren's expression, "What?"

"I think maybe he did." Warren said, "He left here to fly off to somewhere else, didn't seem too happy about leaving me with the way I am, but he had to go. So maybe he is like that."

"Ok."

"He said he wasn't with the Seattle police, but he was trained to be an officer. So whatever it is he does, I can picture that."

"You ok about that?" Kit asked. Warren slowly broke into a smile remembering the kiss. "Ok."

"I think he left on good terms, Kit." Warren decided. "And unless Miss Clarkson shows up again, I'm sure I won't get involved with anyone else while he's gone."

"She hit you hard." Kit said, "You just keep bringing her back up." He smiled and Warren could tell by it he was getting past all the trauma of it. He sighed inwardly.

"Like a brick." Warren agreed.

"So." Kit said, "With this new way of seeing things. Can you tell how good looking a guy is the same as a girl?"

"Hadn't really thought that much about it." Warren admitted, "But I suppose if I can see a man as good looking, I should be able to do that."

"Well, like most any guy looking at other guys, you know, it's just a bunch of guys you're looking at who cares? But maybe you could do that and say whether or not he was attractive because...you might be attracted to him, right?"

"Sure Kit." Warren said.

"What about me?" Kit asked. Warren turned his head as much as he could to see all of him. Kit smiled and then looked down at the floor.

"You want honesty?"

"Not when you ask like that." Kit answered.

"I have never ventured the thought before Kit. It's like you said, I look at you and see a guy."

“Well if you can’t do it, that’s fine.”

“I’m doing it.” Warren said. Kit smiled again and Warren smiled right back at him. “With your reckless behavior I think you would know.”

“What do you mean?” Kit asked.

“You always think someone is liking the way you look, you don’t need me to echo that do you?”

“Yes.” Kit said, “Do you, with this new idea you have, think I’m a good looking guy.”

“You are very attractive.” Warren answered.

“Why?” Kit asked and they both started laughing.

“That was my honest answer.” Warren said, “What about me?”

“Huh?”

“I said something for you, what about me? What do you think?”

Kit laughed and leaned back in the chair. He then leaned forward again. “Jesus, Warren I thought you knew this. You’re fucking gorgeous. Why more people don’t pick you out of a crowd and bow down at your feet I’ll never know.”

Warren started laughing and then squinted his eyes. “Shut up.” He said, “Don’t make me laugh right now, it still hurts.”

“Sorry.” Kit said, “I do prefer you laughing, though.”

“I know.”

“You should get some more rest. You only got a few more days here.” Kit said as he got up and hid the beer back in his jacket. “I’ll buy the kid some good food, ok?”

“Alright Kit. You’re right on target here, ok?”

“Yea. You get well, Buddy.” Kit said and grabbed Warren’s hand for a moment and then left. Warren was already closing his eyes before Kit finished getting out the door. He opened them again when Kit came back for his keys. Trying, but failing, to open the drawer quietly. Warren smiled and went back to sleep.

8

Warren had finally gotten a hold of a paper. For some reason the book cart didn't come his way yet. Either that or he was under a do not disturb sign of some kind. He not only had one paper he had all his papers from Monday on through Thursday.

He'd be out for the weekend. He was already going through his mind trying to figure out ways to make up for the lost time, calling Leigh and begging her to bring him his damn briefcase. In the end she agreed to just bring his newspapers, knowing how much of a junkie he was of them. Since he wasn't likely to see his brief case or even his laptop until the following week, he'd see that at home at that point, he accepted just the newspaper. Leigh looked weepy for a moment. Warren killed that by rattling off questions which put her back into work mode. When push came to shove she admitted that vicariously, from the doctor, through Kit she was not suppose to engage him any work related talk.

He talked her right back into it stressing his job needed to be on track for her to have her job and she would be looking at a bonus if she could pull something together for him that he would normally have to handle himself. That included getting Kit's project back. She'd have to pull that out of her ass though. Making up some story might have been hard so he said use the truth. If the man had no sympathy about a guy getting shot, then maybe none of them should be doing business with him because he was just an asshole.

Leigh remarked that he was grumpy. He smiled and asked her how she'd feel after getting a bullet in her shoulder. She said she wouldn't deal with it as well as he was and was impressed. He finally let her go, sucking up the newspapers and feeling like any addict who was jonesing finally getting a hit, grinning through each page.

“Hey you.”

Warren dropped the paper. “Ba’mosa.” Warren said.

“Elected representative of the clan here.” He said smiling and coming in with a basket full of something or other under saran wrap. He set that down on the nearest available surface. “Athena wanted to come, but she decided I could represent us this time and there might be a few less tears. We were actually here the other day while we were waiting to find out all the details, which took some time. Once it was established you were not in fact dieing or even close to that she calmed down and next thing you know. We are back in or our work week and didn’t want you to already be out without stopping by.”

“It’s good to see you.” Warren said.

“I am babbling.” Ba’mosa said and smiled.

“Actually I didn’t know you had been here. All of you guys keep missing each other in the hall or something.” Warren decided.

“Okay then. I was also not to come empty handed. I’m sure you’ll be thrilled over whatever all that stuff is in the basket. I lamely bought it in the in-house gift shop.”

“Any food?” Warren asked.

“Yes.” Ba’mosa said, “Maybe something to snack on.”

“Please.” Warren said eyeing him and the basket. Ba’mosa smiled and brought it over towards him. Warren looked over the contents. “Okay that doesn’t look bad, worth opening it for that. In which case you’re my second hero for today.” Warren explained as he got past the saran to get at the food. “Hospital meals, the word health is just not synonymous with that here.”

“And your first?” he asked. Warren began unburying himself from all the newspaper.

“Leigh brought me all my papers. I slept a few days, but another day like yesterday with nothing to read. You don’t want to know.” Warren said.

“Uhm, Warren where’s that thing your supposed to be wearing?” Ba’mosa asked.

“You mean the damn johnny?” Warren asked.

“Yea that’s what they call that.”

“The moment I figured out how to get it off, it came off. And they will not try and talk me back into it. The word sue came out of my mouth once and they all scattered like rats on a sinking ship.”

“Ok.” Ba’mosa said laughing some, “But didn’t they take your...the rest of your clothing?”

“Oh yea.” Warren said and nodded, “I woke up with the indignity of that flimsy thing being the only thing on. I was rescued from that already.” Warren flipped up the blanket showing the scrubs he was wearing.

“Okay then.” Ba’mosa said, “As long as you’re not cold.”

“Starting to feel like a holiday.” Warren said as he managed a hunk of cheese and a cracker, “Want some?”

“No, thanks Bro.”

“Sit already.” Warren said. Ba’mosa moved the chair around and sat down.

“What’s your prognosis?”

“I’ll be fine, no loss of movement. No infection, no ill effects.” Warren answered, “A few more days of feeling stiffness and stinging and all that fun stuff. Then I’ll be good as new. Aside from the scar you wouldn’t even know I took a bullet.”

“You’re medicated?”

“Yes.”

“I can tell.” Ba’mosa said.

“Happy?”

“Some.”

“Ha ha.” Warren said falling back against the bed that was tilted up. “You don’t quite understand my habit here, do you?”

“Uhm no.”

“Newspapers, nothing since Monday. It’s like giving a heroine addict some juice after a week of abstinence. I’ll mellow out and reclaim my cool after a while.”

“Good, I’m glad you’re ok. I’ll report back home your in good spirits.”

“I can even say it’s been a pretty good week.” Warren said, “I can claim to have had worse ones.”

“Ok.”

“Here, look at this.” Warren said moving papers around until he found the article he was looking for. He did that between two bites of food and was still managing with just his right hand while favoring his left for the least amount of motion of his shoulder as possible.

Warren pushed the article near Ba’mosa. He picked up the paper. “Who is this?”

“The poor bastard who was running from the gun man. I got shot when he passed me. Looks like whoever was after him got him. Details are that its drug related. They found a stash on him. But ask me this. If you were the killer looking for your revenge on a guy over drugs, would you leave the drugs on him?”

“Not my line of thinking.” Ba’mosa said.

“I just don’t trust that’s all there was to it.”

“Why not?”

“Because that guy had been hanging around the coffee shop all week last week, and nothing before the previous Friday. My first conclusion was that he was watching me.”

“Why?”

“Because I was getting the sense that he wasn’t the only one doing it.” Warren answered, “He had accomplices. This of course caused problems with me insisting it to Kit and Barnes. One guy’s excuse was he...well he was lusting after Kit and I just happen to be in the way.”

“Ok.”

“There was a woman, we just ran her off altogether seeing how she’d react to a friendly offer of a drink. Ba’mosa

she hid her face as she left. That sticks in my head. If she was only just disgruntled, why would she feel the need? It's like the people who get caught doing something and they hide their faces in and out of the court house."

"Anyone else?"

"Bit parts." Warren answered, "A guy near my office getting a close up doing a job he wasn't hired to do. A woman, oh she was a looker, Ba'mosa. I...I was suppose to be meeting her for work but from the moment I laid eyes on her, work became the furthest thing from my mind." Ba'mosa smiled.

"I don't think I've heard you mention another woman past the last one."

"She's forgettable." Warren said and Ba'mosa laughed, "Miss Clarkson is not. Seems all she wanted was some of my blood and she's gone."

"Your blood?" he asked. Warren smiled again after finishing off the last bite of food.

"Barnes' theory, based on the fact that she accidentally pricked me with her broach. Other than just getting that close to me, she had no real reason to bother me. Now that I think about it. Distract a guy with the most beautiful woman you can find just long enough to prick him and get his blood. It almost seems logical."

"But why?"

"I guess I don't watch enough movies, because I couldn't figure that out on my own." Warren answered, "Barnes was at a loss after her input so I called someone. His idea, DNA matching. And when I asked him what the hell for the first thing that came to his mind was a paternity test."

"You got a kid Warren?" Ba'mosa asked grinning. Warren let him get away with it for a while and even joined him in it.

"No, it's not possible." Warren said.

"How can you be so sure?" Ba'mosa asked. Warren looked out the window.

“You remember Beth?” Warren asked.

“You just said she was not worth mentioning.” He replied.

“Again, that’s probably best. But just to get my point out there. She pulled something on me.” Warren said and looked back at him.

“What?”

“Said she was pregnant, so we needed to get married.” Warren explained.

“Oh, you think...?”

“I think she was full of shit is what I think.” Warren said.

“What Warren?”

“I have yet to tell anyone this.” Warren said.

“And you’re picking me over Kit?”

“If he finds out, I’d rather he was left with the impression he were the only one who knew.” Warren decided.

“That doesn’t sound like a good way to stay honest with your best guy.” Ba’mosa said.

“If I thought he wouldn’t go all over board about it on me. I would tell him first. Right now I just need to tell someone, especially in accordance with this.” Warren said, “This would be...our first real sign of friendship for me to trust you with this.”

“But, Athena.” Ba’mosa stumbled, “We talk about everything.”

“Not everything.” Warren said, “Here’s your chance to hold one over on her about me.”

“Sounds sticky.”

“Alright. I don’t want to put you in awkward position. But if you choose to tell her, do it with some kind of tact. I don’t want her blubbering on me if possible. Ok?”

“Alright.” Ba’mosa said.

“I can’t have kids.” Warren said.

“Not at all?”

“No.” he clarified. “And when Beth insisted she was pregnant with our child. I let her know it wasn’t possible. They suspected it right along, but I got retested again. Something I was putting off because I wasn’t to happy about knowing for sure. But that prompted that. Test is pretty accurate. I’m sterile. When she found that out her whole story changed.”

“I’m sorry Warren.”

“Here’s where I don’t want anyone to make a big deal out of it.” he said, “And part of the reason...or better yet, one of the reasons I consol myself about losing Athena to you is that you can give her that and I can’t. And it makes her so happy.”

Ba’mosa looked at the floor. Warren thought he’d gone too far in speaking so freely about how he felt about Athena again. But when the other man looked back at him, he realized he’d finally made contact with him. “It’s between you and me Warren, until you feel you can tell her.” He said.

“Good.” Warren said, “Because I know I’d regret telling you so you could tell over me telling her first the moment you walked out of here, you know?”

“Yes.” He said.

“That just leaves matching me to a scene of a crime, or planting evidence of me being at the scene. Well, not that a pin prick seems incriminating.” Warren went on, “Or we can go with Barnes’ last theory. That I’m the child in this scenario.”

“As in?” Ba’mosa asked, “Your Dad isn’t your dad?”

“I just don’t see Mom doing that.” Warren said, “But Juliana once told me we were both adopted and our parents were not our real parents. I of course told her she’d gone insane. And asked her to kindly explain how it was that we so happened to look just like our parents then?”

“They were pretty rich?”

“They were, yes, not anymore.” Warren answered.

“You know, with money, you could probably do just about anything in this country. I probably do watch too many movies, W. But, the idea that if they couldn’t have kids, maybe they went out of their way to find some that would be very similar in looks so they could pass them off as their own? And they might have been willing to pay for that.”

“That’s a new one on me.” Warren said.

“And I’m out of ideas about it.” Ba’mosa admitted.

“Yes, because I don’t see any reason why someone would come looking for me as their lost child.” Warren said.

“Well, maybe I can say something about that.” Ba’mosa said, “From the moment you have a kid, you’re bonded to them. There are other people out there who might miss that, but not me. If one of my kids was gone...I wouldn’t stop looking for them until I found them.”

“You’re not suggesting we were robbed from our real parents are you?” Warren asked.

“That’s possible, too.”

“Okay, but when I think of Mom and Dad. The idea that they’d pay someone to steal us away from someone else. It fails to stick.”

“Maybe they didn’t know.”

“You’re getting right into this now.” Warren accused.

“It does kind of sound devilish.” Ba’mosa admitted, “But maybe their request was met and they didn’t ask for details. When money is involved, you know? Maybe they didn’t do it themselves. Maybe they thought they were getting something upfront, straight from an orphanage. You get me?”

“Yes.” Warren replied, “And the people who found us to be looking just like them stole us. Gone without a trace. Okay.” Warren smiled, “But since nothing has come of it, maybe they have already disqualified me by doing a DNA match.”

“They still watching you?”

“The guy here in the paper, he was the last.” Warren admitted.

“Then maybe it’s over?” Ba’mosa suggested, “They found you, got curious. Got close, took lots of pictures you don’t know...”

“I never even thought of pictures or cameras. That just makes it even stranger to have more than one person watching me at various places. Once you see what I look like...”

“They were trying to figure out how to get close, first.” Ba’mosa suggested. “Once they had that, where you go, what places they at?”

“Coffee shop, work and the bar. Thankfully not at home that I could see.” Warren said.

“Right, see. They got want they wanted, you ain’t him, so they have moved on already.”

“Okay.” Warren said, “So what? I’m now officially a movie of the week?”

“Yea Warren, after you get shot you get your own movie.” They both laughed at that and Warren had to force himself to stop from the sudden stinging. “Sorry man.” Ba’mosa added.

“I’m fine.” He answered.

“You need to talk about anything else?”

“Ah no. I’ve got all my papers here to read if you need to get going.” Warren said.

“Actually I should get going.” Ba’mosa said as he got up. He shot his right hand out and Warren went to shake it. “Fingers around the base.” He instructed moving their grip so their fingers wrapped around each other’s thumbs. Ba’mosa brought his left hand over and covered the other side of Warren’s hand. “You take it easy my man.”

“Thanks for stopping by, the food, the conversation...the friendship.”

“I’m glad we got to this point too.” Ba’mosa said. He let Warren’s hand go and headed out the door. Warren went back to his papers.

9

Kit picked him up in his truck coming back into town from work. By Friday Warren was overly concerned about Nate, who’d only visited him twice during the week. Kit assured him that the kid was fine, just being lazy about it. But Warren was left with thinking there was more to it. Especially after the way Kit found him right after hearing Warren was in the hospital.

“I hate driving in here.” Kit groaned.

“How was your day?” Warren asked.

“My whole week was shot because someone wasn’t at lunch with me the whole time.”

“And Barnes?”

“A recluse at this point.” Kit said.

“She even know what happened to me?”

“Yes I ran her down at the church to tell her. She just...stared at me like I was mental or something.”

“I have to say I’m surprised she didn’t come see me.” Warren said.

“No stress.” Kit said, “By the time I updated her I made it sound like a scratch and you were fine. I think she’s one of those people who just doesn’t like the hospital, you know?”

“Maybe, but she didn’t even send word.”

“Are you upset about this?” Kit asked.

“Concerned.”

“I’m sure we’ll make light of it next week.”

“I just don’t know why she wouldn’t say anything to you, like get well or something.” Warren said.

“You know, she might have and I just forgot to pass it along.”

“Kit.”

“Okay, she didn’t say jack about it. When I told her, I’m telling you she just looked at me like I was talking...in Spanish.” He finished and laughed.

“Let’s swing by the church.”

“You’re kidding me right, I’m halfway there.” Kit said.

“Please.”

“Oh man, only for you.” Kit complained as he made an aggressive move in traffic to change directions. They were quiet right up until they got to the church. Kit pulled the truck right up onto the sidewalk as if he was about to do some work there. “Habit.” Kit said when Warren looked at him.

They both got out of the truck and headed towards the door. “You have any problem getting in here?” Warren asked.

“Nope, I know the routine. Had to learn it when I first came here. Old wives tale if you ask me, but what the hell. What do I know about curses anyway?”

“Who told you it?” Warren asked.

“I don’t remember. Someone local maybe. It was raining like crazy and I wasn’t having a good day, walked right up to the door and barfed. So I step back and there’s this guy standing there looking at me. I say I never barf unless I’ve had oodles to drink.

“He says you have to be nice to the man and left. I’m like okay I’ll be nice. I walk back up to the door and I’m like okay I’ve got the flu, that’s my problem, but when I step back I’m fine. So I’m looking for a man to be nice to and there’s that guy.” Kit pointed to the saint who had the cup in his left hand. “So I say hey there buddy, what you got in that cup? I laughed headed towards the door and walked right in.”

“You ever look back at him?” Warren asked.

“Why?” Kit asked.

“Oh no reason.” Warren said.

“Didn’t seem that hard to do. I definitely don’t want to barf again. Shawn came over here once. Got all freaked out by the place and swore he’d never come back.”

“He leave the toolbox?” Warren asked.

“Well that explains that!” Kit threw up his hands, “Trying to tell me he lost all his tools but didn’t know where. I said replace ‘em. Been waiting for that to happen still.”

“How come you didn’t tell me about all that?”

“Oh I forgot.” Kit said.

“And Barnes?”

“She laughed at me. She apologized after she’d been here though. I told her it wasn’t my stupid curse, what do I know? Sorry if I didn’t tell you. I figured you just laugh too.”

“Not laughing anymore.” Warren agreed. Kit stepped forward.

“Hey man, enjoy whatever you got in that cup. I’ll be right behind you later.” Kit said and then headed towards the door. He opened it and looked back at Warren waiting for him. Warren was still looking at the stain glass and the cup hadn’t moved. He figured it out, even if he never looked back, the lock was still turned. He followed Kit inside.

They approached Barnes as she pulled away from her work.

“Hey Barnes.” Kit said.

“Kit.” She greeted and then looked at Warren. She looked more feminine to him just then in being upset. “I’m sorry I couldn’t tell you, that you would get shot.”

“You saw that?” Warren asked.

“Well that explains your reactions when I told you he did.” Kit said.

“Why couldn’t you tell me?” Warren asked. She put both her hands up to the sides of her face with her palms facing them.

“It’s complicated.” She answered.

“I don’t know about all the premonitions you’ve been having.” Kit said, “You didn’t have this many when you were in LA.”

“I know.” She said.

“You knew about that?” Warren asked. Kit turned to look at him.

“Yes, trust me, it’s something you need to find out from her. I’ve seen how they work. And the coolest thing, you can change what’s going to happen.” Kit said. Warren looked back at Barnes.

“You didn’t want me to change it.” Warren said.

“This is why I’ve been avoiding you guys.” Barnes said, “I knew you’d be mad at me.”

“Not mad.” Kit said, “We’re friends here. We’ll work it out, but Barnes, come on, if we could have prevented it. You need to have a damn good reason to have allowed Warren to get shot.”

“I knew he’d be ok.” She said, “I’m sure it wasn’t fun. I feel totally guilty in not telling you. And I haven’t found the words yet to explain why I wouldn’t tell you.”

“Well try.” Kit said. She took a deep breath.

“I saw more than just that. Something else to happen that would only happen because of this.” She said.

“How can you be sure?” Kit asked, “Maybe one doesn’t have anything to do with the other?”

“The other thing isn’t bad?” Warren asked.

“No.” she said, “And it’s important. I think it needs to happen. I’m sorry Warren. I feel so bad.”

“Come here Barnes.” Warren said. She closed the gap and stopped in front him. “Over to me.” She glanced at Kit and the got right in front of Warren. He got his right arm around her and hugged her. She went to hug him back and Kit grabbed her arm.

“Watch the shoulder.” He said.

“I trust you to do what you think is right.” Warren said to her while she was close. She backed away and

nodded. Then she looked at him. "If the rest is not bad can you tell me?" he asked.

"How do they relate?" Kit asked.

"Because in the second vision." Barnes explained, "He looked like he does now, favoring his wound. I'm sorry Warren. I don't even know if we could stop it."

"I know who the girl is." Warren said.

"I know." She said.

"You do?" Warren asked.

"Yes, are you keeping her away from him?"

"As best I can." Warren agreed, "I can't control his every move though. He had her in the apartment."

Barnes' hand moved to cover her mouth. "Now what?" Kit asked.

"And?" she asked.

"I've told him to stay away from her with good logical reasons backing my request. But he knows as well as I do that once he's out the door he's his own person."

"Don't let her back inside, ok?" Barnes said.

"I forbid him to have her over." Warren said.

"What girl?" Kit asked.

"The one who took my wallet." Warren explained.

"With Nate?" Kit asked.

"Yes, according to her they just happened to meet."

"Oh shit." Kit said taking a step to the side. Warren turned on him. "What does she look like?"

"Brown..." Barnes and Warren started to say the same time. They stopped and looked at each other. Barnes nodded at Warren.

"Brown auburn hair, hazel eyes. Looks like she fell out of a movie for kids, wearing too much eye shadow." Warren said.

"Really petite?" Kit asked.

"She's a girl Kit." Warren said.

"I know, but there are fat little girls. She's not tall and lanky, she's petite." Kit said.

“Okay yes.” Warren said. Kit’s jaw slid to the left. “Just say it.”

“I let her in.” Kit said. “Made the kid happy for a while.”

Warren looked at Barnes.

“I didn’t know. He acted like it was cool.” Kit said.

“That’s why he hadn’t come back to the hospital.” Warren figured out. “Wednesday right?”

“Yup. We all ate together.” Kit agreed.

“I need to sit down.” Warren said. Kit came around to his right side and lent him shoulder. He wasn’t really leaning on him that hard, but Kit took him over to the dais and eased Warren to sit.

“Barnes.” Kit said, “Can you like request an update on how bad it is now?”

She just looked at him for a while and then back at Warren. “I need to figure out how to handle this with Nate without casing more grief.” Warren said.

“He didn’t specifically ask me not to tell you.” Kit said.

“He’s sly that way.” Warren said, “If he had done that what would you have done?”

“Told you.” Kit said.

“And before just now?”

“Lost track of it.” Kit said. Warren nodded.

“He’s smart kid.” Warren said. Both men looked at Barnes expectantly. She took in a deep breath.

“I don’t know.” She finally said.

“There has to more from your vision to go on.” Warren requested.

“There together. I’m guessing inside by the way I’m seeing it. They get to close...and I get a really bad vibe.”

Kit burst out laughing startling the other two. On any other day it would have been his check point to break their serious mood anyway. “What?” he asked when they both looked at him.

“What are laughing about?” Barnes asked.

“Whatever you’re leading into.” Kit said, “What’s the obvious thing here?”

“I don’t know.” Barnes said.

“Okay no offense guys, but maybe being gay drops you out of seeing this like I do. Boy meets girl. They kiss, the make out, they get naked...” Kit said.

“He might be right.” Barnes said, “That might be it.”

“They didn’t do anything while I was there.” Kit said.

“Unless he decides to break my no company rule when he’s alone.” Warren said.

“Do you think he would?” Kit asked. Warren turned towards Kit with a disapproving look.

“He had her over after I told him no.” Warren said.

“That’s not like your saying though.” Kit said, “I don’t think he was exactly expecting her. So when she showed up, I let her in. Then he just acted cool about it.”

“Because he didn’t want her to leave.” Warren said, “After everything else, she is up to something.”

“Aside from just getting a boy’s attention?” Kit asked.

“Yes.” Warren agreed.

“But related.” Barnes said.

“When I confronted her, he got...over protective pretty quick.” Warren said.

“Like he thinks she’s his girlfriend.” Kit suggested.

“Just me against him over something he wanted.” Warren said. “I need to figure out how to handle this.”

“Alright, while you do that, where’s the toolbox?” Kit asked, “I’ll go ahead and get that in my truck and look over some paper work, alright?”

“Sure Kit.” Warren said, “Under the bench out front.”

“Cool, right here if you need me for anything.” Kit said as he headed towards the front. Barnes moved to sit down next Warren. Warren turned up a smile at her.

“I got something figured out.” He said.

“What?” she asked.

“The paternity thing.” He said, “As far as I can tell that’s over. That’s why the watchers went away. I wasn’t the person they were looking for.”

“Ok.” She said and sat up straight for a moment and then slumped. “You don’t hate me?”

“Never.” Warren replied.

“I let you get shot.”

“In my rational mind, there is no way to pin that on you even if I believe you. You’re telling me after the fact.” Warren said.

“Ok.”

“And this other thing you saw happening, definitely good?”

“Yes.”

“Worth getting shot for?” he asked.

“I’d don’t think anything is worth getting shot for. That’s not how I made my decision. I just think maybe the positive feeling I got from that part of my vision outweighed knowing you’d be shot first.” She explained.

“Can’t tell me what?”

“Well it’s personal. I don’t think you’ll come back to me about it. I don’t want to influence how you act by knowing anything about it.”

“You seeing more details?” he asked.

“In regards to this last vision yes.” She agreed.

“A drawing?” he asked. She leaned back and didn’t answer. “I gather yes.”

“It’s only showing me a part of it anyway.” She admitted. They both looked up as Kit came back.

“Ok.” He said. “Did either of you guys know that the dude swings his cup around?”

They both looked at each other and laughed. “Yes.” They responded together.

“Ok.” Kit said.

“When’s the last time you had a house guest?” Warren asked.

“Aside from my ex-wife?” he asked.

“Yes.” Warren answered.

“A long time, why you going to come hang with me?”
Kit asked.

“No, Nate is.” Warren answered.

10

Warren opened the door and Kit followed him in. Nate jumped up from the couch and stood there watching them. “Hello.” Warren said.

“Uhm, Welcome home Uncle Warren.” Nate said.

“Come here Nate.” Warren said as Kit managed the door behind them and moved what they had brought in with them out of the way. When he was done he came to stand beside Warren as Nate approached. Warren eyed him and the kid was already getting jumpy from it.

“What?” Nate asked.

“One question.” Warren said, “I want your honest answer. If for some reason I feel your lying, it all over.” The kid nervously glanced at Kit to see how he’d react to that and then looked back at his uncle.

“Ok.”

“Did you invite her?”

“Oh man.” Nate complained and gave Kit a hateful look.

“Did you?”

“No I didn’t.” Nate said, “Kit let her in.”

“And what?” Warren asked.

Nate shrugged.

“You know that she was not allowed in here. Even if you didn’t invite her here you should have had her leave.”

“I didn’t want to be embarrassed again.” Nate said.

“I’ve been in the hospital Nate.” Warren said. The kid looked at the floor. “While I was gone you broke two rules. One, no company when I’m not here.”

“Kit let her in.” he said again.

“You know the rule. He’s not me and if he let her in you should have told him she wasn’t allowed in here when I’m not home. The second rule was letting her stay here knowing that I expressly forbid her from being here at all. You took advantage of the situation. While I was laid up from being shot, for all your concern about me, you let her stay. You disrespected me.” Warren said. Nate was still looking at the floor. “You’re out.”

Nate’s head snapped up and looked at him. “Huh?”

“You’re out Nate. I told you I would not stand for your bullshit. You are not going to walk all over me. Give me your key.”

“You’re kidding right?” Nate asked.

“No, hand over the key to my apartment that I gave you as a person who was only staying here.” Warren said. Nate’s hand actually started to shake as he pulled the key out and handed it over. “Go pack your bag.”

“Where am I going?” Nate asked exasperated. Warren turned to look at Kit.

“You’re going with Kit for the weekend. During which time I’m going to be here considering whether or not I’m even going to let you back in here at all. Go get packed.”

“I’ve been with him all week.” Nate said.

“We are so concerned about how you felt during my stay in the hospital.” Warren added. Nate relaxed some, because he’d been expecting the boot to the street. He finally turned and headed towards his room.

“Can I take the X-Box?” he asked.

“No.” Warren answered, “Kit’s got a house. There are lots of things to be done, you’ll be busy. And Nate?”

“What?” Nate asked looking back.

“You need to be on your best behavior. I expect him to work you.” Warren said.

“Oh man.” Nate moaned and went into his room.

“You should see the bathroom.” Kit said.

“Maybe later.” Warren said, “I’m going to need the time alone anyway to rest.”

“Alright buddy. I’ll be brutal to him for you.” Kit said. Warren looked at him. “I mean make sure he stays busy the whole time. You weren’t kidding I got tons of things I’ve been putting off. Can’t get a person over to help me to save my life.”

“You know you can ask me.” Warren said.

“I do and we start drinking and the work gets left aside while we get our game on, right?” Kit asked.

“Yea that happens.” Warren agreed.

“I won’t be drinking with the kid. A sober weekend will be good for me, too.”

“Thanks Kit.”

“Anything for you Warren, anything.” Kit said.

“You don’t have to be dramatic.” Warren said. Kit smiled at him and winked.

Nate came out of his room and met Kit at the door. “I got good news for you kid.” Kit said.

“What?”

“In my world, you can swear all you want, by the time the weekend is over, you’ll be cussing up a storm.” Kit said and smiled. Nate looked back at his uncle and they said nothing while Kit followed the kid out the door. Warren went over to it and locked it.

Brandon helped put all the groceries away after finding out Warren was only just out of the hospital from a gun shot wound. When he asked after Nate, Warren said he was staying with a friend for the time being. After that Warren could just relax and enjoy the silence of having his place back to himself for a while.

He fell asleep in his chair though from the meds.

Warren was looking over the assortment of things on the counter. He turned to look at Juliana who was busy running a brush through her hair while three other girls

sitting together pointed at her and giggled. Juliana didn't seem to even know they were there.

Warren turned back to the toys presented and looked at the boy who came to stand next to him now doing the same. Warren turned to look around the room. He only saw one other kid with dark skin and his was even darker. He knew that kid was known as being black. He didn't know what to make of the one standing beside him just then. He wasn't that dark of color.

"Hi." Warren said. The other kid glanced at him a moment. Warren half thought he was going to speak some other language as if from another country.

"Hi, what's your name?" he asked.

"Warren."

The other kid laughed like it was the funniest thing he'd ever heard in his life.

"Are you nervous because you don't look like anybody else?" Warren asked. The kid's mouth slammed shut. They looked at each other, but he didn't answer. "What's your name?"

"Uhm...Kit, yea that's my name, Kit." He answered. Warren's eyes looked back at one of the toys. A plastic toy that said 'Tool Kit' right on it was front and center. Warren finally reached for the bucket of plastic bricks he'd been eyeing for a while. He dragged them over towards him slowly.

Kit watched him do it. "You know how to use these?" Warren asked.

"Maybe." Kit answered.

"Come on, I'll show you." Warren offered. The other kid grabbed the bucket away from Warren and they both went and sat at a table.

Warren was strict on how they were going to put things together. At first the other kid looked doubtful, but as their construction began to become formed he seemed well pleased by it. When they were done they had built a house to

scale with windows even all the way around, a fancy front entrance, interior walls, and a stair case that went up, but didn't go anywhere yet. Warren thought they could do the second floor the following day.

Warren woke up still in the chair. He dragged himself out of it, ignoring any sense of time. He downed some pain relievers and headed to bed.

He spent Saturday catching up on as much work as possible between his brief case and his laptop. He couldn't really use his left arm and was frustrated by it often. Rolling it until he went into actual pain and realized he was pushing too hard too fast.

He still managed to get something done, but on Sunday he was in no mood to work even if he was still considering a half of day's work on Monday. He needed to make contact with that and the people he'd left on hold the previous week. Leigh had already gotten back to him. Garner was willing to wait on him, but the guy over Kit's recent project was not.

He spent the morning listening to music completely relaxed on the couch and the afternoon reading the paper, finding new ways to hold it up in one hand for a while and eventually settling for reading it as it lay on the table.

The doorbell rang in the early evening. Warren went and opened the door to see Kit standing behind Nathaniel. The moment the kid saw what Warren was wearing he turned his head and groaned. Kit picked up on it immediately.

"Well look at you." Kit said, "What *are* you wearing? Or should I say *not* wearing? You look hot."

Warren laughed and was relieved he could do that without being stung just then. Kit smiled at him while Nate continued to try and roll his head away so he didn't have to look at his uncle.

“We should take you out like that sometime.” Kit said. Warren laughed some more, “We’re sure to get a lot of attention.” Warren finished up with a smile and Kit came back to him with a serious tone. “Well do you want him? I could maybe drop him off somewhere for you on my way home.”

Warren stood there waiting for Nate to finally look back at him. When he did Warren leaned against the door frame waiting for him to speak without being prompted. “I’m sorry.” Nate started off. “I’m sorry I disrespected you. I’m sorry I broke the rules. I should have told Kit, that was...it was my responsibility because...you were hurt and he didn’t know.”

“And?” Warren asked when he stopped.

“What?” Nate asked.

“The girl.”

“I’m sorry I let the girl stay.”

“And?”

“And what?” Nate asked.

“Nate I want you to promise me, you will not have anything more to do with that girl at all.” Warren said. Nate gasped. “I told you she would not be put off so easily. In knowing that and being right, you need to hear me when I say she’s trouble for you.”

“You...you’re trying to control my life.” Nate said. Warren was disappointed in the return to the argumentative tone before the kid even got through the door.

“There’s the hallway.” Warren said, “Down that you’ll find the stairs. They lead to the front door. Out beyond it is the rest of the world. If that girl you don’t even know means that much to you already, be my guest and go right on ahead.”

Nate looked down the hall and then back at his uncle’s serious expression. Warren stood there and waited. Nate heaved his shoulders. “I won’t see her.” he said in a low volume.

“I promise what?” Warren asked.

“I promise I won’t see her.” Nate said getting louder.

“Who?”

“Mindy, ok? I promise I won’t see Mindy anymore. I won’t have anything more to do with her, ok?”

“Come in.” Warren said stepping out of the way. Nate sighed once he got through the door. He then dropped his pack, dragged it along the floor and stopped. He pulled his pack back up and went to his room passing the front of the couch.

“Where’s the X-Box?” he asked.

“What X-Box?” Warren called back.

“Oh man.” Nate moaned and went into his room closing the door. Warren turned back to Kit who was smiling.

“I mean it, really, Warren, you’re hot.” Kit said. Warren laughed.

“Stop, you want to come in?”

“Yes.” Kit said coming in the door. Warren closed it behind him and locked it. He then took a deep breath. “He talks.” Warren smiled at him. “After being quiet all week, he’s none stop.” Kit further explained, “Pissing and moaning. Complaining about his horrible poor me poor me life. And with the liberty I allowed every third word was a swear. I don’t even think I could swear that much in one weekend.”

“He’s too angry.” Warren said.

“Well, that gave him a chance to vent anyway.”

“He did everything you ask him to?”

“Oh yea, he knew he needed to get stuff done. With him helping we stayed busy.” Kit said.

“And the apology?”

“Didn’t say a word.” Kit said, “He figured that one out on his own I think.”

“Alright, good.” Warren said.

“You got any beer?” Kit asked.

“Hadn’t restocked yet and with the kid here I’m not sure if he’d get into it or not even though he doesn’t agree with drinking on the surface.”

“Why?” Kit asked. Warren looked at him until Kit’s expression changed. “Right, his Dad.” Warren nodded.

“Something else?” Warren asked.

“No, I’m good, but you know what?”

“What?” Warren asked.

“With the way you look, it kind of makes me think of an ice cream cone. Your pants there being the cone with the top half of you exposed looking like ice cream and I’m just standing here trying to decide where I’m going to take my first lick.” Kit said. Warren started laughing.

“You need to stop.” He said.

“It’s good to see you laugh.” Kit said, “I knew Barnes had it wrong. After laughing at all the same things all these years, I knew you take it all in good humor.”

“I don’t see a reason to get bent up about it as long as I know your joking, its fine Kit.” Warren said.

“Well...I got a lot to do tomorrow at work.” Kit said, “Since there’s no beer and I can’t have any ice cream, I’m going to get going.”

“Alright.”

Kit went back over to the door and got it unlocked. “I feel a lot better Warren, just in knowing you trust me with the kid like that.”

“Of course I trust you Kit.” Warren said.

“But you don’t trust anyone like that. You let me in your room.” Kit said.

“I know.” Warren said.

“Think you’ll make lunch?”

“Not sure if I’ll make it out the door yet.” Warren said, “So if I’m not there, I’ll be here...you can call to check on me if you want.” Kit looked guilty for a moment. “I’d expect that.”

“Sure warren. Have a good night.” Kit said and left. Warren locked him out. He didn’t see the kid again at all that night.

11

Warren came out of his room fully dressed. He hadn’t planned on going right out the door just then though. But he wanted to be ready if the mood struck him well enough to go into his office. As he came out he could see smoke and steam rolling up from the stove. He moved his gaze down to see Nate attempting to cook something on the stove.

Warren walked over and Nate was moaning and making disgruntled noises. “You know what your doing?” Warren asked.

“I’ve burned three eggs already.” Nate said, “I’m cooking.”

“And this comes from?”

“You said I could cook if I wanted to.” He replied. “You cook, Kit cooks, maybe I should too.”

Warren moved in and took the frying pan off the stove. “These eggs are done...well done already. Get a plate.” Nate scrambled to get a plate. Warren slid the eggs on to it. He then set the pan down to see where the smoke was coming from, the toaster. He’d had it perfectly gauged to lightly brown bread and Nate had slammed the crank all the way to the right and somehow managed to cook them past that so they were charcoal.

“I should throw those out, too.” Nate said looking at the eggs.

“What are you boiling water for?”

“I don’t know.” Nate answered. Warren fell into a chuckle about it and Nate glared at him.

“Can you crack an egg without getting the shell in it?”

“Well yea.” Nate said.

“Drop a few in the boiling water.” Warren suggested. Nate looked at him curiously. “Just do it.” Nate dropped a few eggs into the boiling water. Warren yanked out the burned toast and put them in the sink to go down the garbage disposal. He put some fresh bread into it and clicked it down. “Lightly browned.” He said.

“That didn’t look cooked.” Nate said.

“It’s toasted Nate, not cooked.” Warren explained. “I don’t understand, with all the intelligence you’ve inherited from your mother and although she lacks all common sense, she’s brilliant, how you could just try to do this like this.”

“Well.” Nate moaned.

“You’re just jumping into it. In any given venue you need to learn how to do it. You can’t pretend. If all else fails you could just ask me. How long does it take to cook an egg?”

“I don’t know.” Nate answered. Warren started laughing again. Nate sighed heavily.

“Are you watching the eggs here?” Warren asked pointing to the boiling water. Nate stuck his face over it and got blasted with steam

“Hot.” He complained and wiped at his face.

“Yes it is.” Warren agreed. “Now crack a few eggs and put them into the frying pan.”

“You got some in the water now.”

“Just a few.” Warren said. Nate cracked a few into the pan and they sizzled quickly. “Turn that down, you don’t always have to cook everything on high, that’s why you’re able to adjust the temperature.” Nate turned the dial moving the temperature down. “Now, can you get the spatula under them to flip them without breaking them?”

“You have to flip them?” Nate asked.

“That’s a regular fried egg. Otherwise it’s called sunny side up.” Warren explained. Nate looked at the eggs.

“That’s what that means?”

“Yes.”

Nate ran the egg around the pan trying to get it under the slippery egg. He'd had the pan filled with oil which was already splattered all over the place. Warren moved the good pieces of toast onto the plate and tried to butter them up with his one hand. Nate watched him fail and stopped trying to flip the egg. "I can do that, you do this." He suggested.

They switched places and Warren flipped the eggs easily while Nate buttered the toast. Warren then grabbed the ladle and scooped out the eggs from the boiling water. He put them on the toast. "Dropped eggs on toast." He explained. Nate looked at that and the two eggs still frying. Warren switched the ladle for the spatula and flipped the eggs out of the frying pan onto the plate. "Fried egg." He said.

"You made that look so easy." Nate said. Warren didn't hear a complaint that time.

"Well, once you understand what you're doing, it does still take practice." He explained. "More toast."

Nate dropped more toast into the toaster and Warren turned towards the coffee pot to get that going. There was already steam coming out of it. And when he looked he realized that coffee within was dark. He looked back at the kid.

"That can be that hard." Nate said. Warren filled his coffee cup half full and added water to finish it off.

"Two scoops." Warren said, "Otherwise your officially drugging me." He smiled and Nate for just a moment then turned back to the food. "You have the dropped eggs, I'll eat the rest."

"These aren't any good." Nate said pointing at his first two eggs.

"The smell good to me, I'll eat them." Warren promised. Nate moved the plates to the table. Warren followed him with his coffee. He went back for the last of the toast, running them on the spatula and put them on his plate. He ate them unbuttered.

He looked back at the stove when he realized the frying pan was still sizzling and the water still boiling. He looked at Nate and the kid got up. He went and turned them off.

“How’s the coffee?” Nate asked as he sat back down.

“Not bad.” Warren lied. He was just barely sipping it and comparing each sip to a half a cup of regular coffee. Nate nodded and they ate the food quickly.

“I got the table.” Nate said jumping up.

“I’m fine to do my part.” Warren said, “And since you’re the cook, I should clean.”

“No I got it...Uncle Warren.” Nate said. As Warren watched him he figured out what the kid was really up to. He was trying to help out against Warren’s current condition. And as far as Warren could tell he had no ulterior motive, as if in making up for what he’d been doing wrong.

“I’m going to get a paper, I’ll be right back.” Warren said as he headed towards the door.

“Ok.” Nate said. Warren shot out the door without his coat and went outside. The sky looked threatening and the air was moist, but there was no actual rainfall. As he headed for the corner market he looked to the far right and saw the girl standing on the corner. She wasn’t looking his way, but he could sense what she was doing. She was waiting to see if Nate was going to come out.

As he got close to the stand she spotted Warren and took off down the street at a sprint. Warren clenched his teeth about it and gave the paper vendor the idea he wasn’t happy with him.

“Alright?” the old guy asked. Warren looked at him.

“You see that girl?”

“Aye.” He answered.

“She her a lot?” Warren asked.

“Aye.”

Warren shuffled his Wallet out and opened with the one hand and managed to get a twenty out. He resorted to

lifting his left to hold on and it caused his expression to show his pain.

“You ok?” the old guy asked.

“I got shot, but I’ll be fine.” Warren said he held out a twenty to the old guy.

“Smaller?” he asked.

“That’s for you.” Warren said. “Same thing next week. All I want to know is if you see a boy coming from my direction, looks a bit like me, whether or not he talks to that girl. Can you do that?”

“Sure I can.” He agreed taking the twenty. “He done something wrong eh?”

“Yes.” Warren agreed, “He’s not allowed to talk to her, at all.”

“I hear ya mista.” The guy said, “You don’t keep an eye on ‘em and they got kids of their own before you know it.”

“Exactly.” Warren agreed getting his paper and then paying for it, too. “Thank you.”

“Your welcome.” He said. Warren headed back up into the apartment.

As he stepped in Nate was standing in the middle of the place looking at him. He’d finished cleaning up. “You going out today Nate?” Warren asked.

“Maybe.” Nate answered. Warren walked over to him and reached into his pocket.

“You’ll need your key then.” He said as he handed it towards him. Nate took it from him and kept looking at him strangely. Warren inclined his head questioning him.

“Can I use your laptop to send Mom an e-mail?” he asked.

“Would that make it appear as if it had come from me?” Warren asked.

“No, I can do my own e-mail.” He replied.

“That’s fine Nate. Just compose your message before hand and only get online long enough to send it.” Warren agreed.

Nate went over to the laptop and booted it up as Warren got settled into his chair with his paper. "You going to work today?" Nate asked.

"I'm not sure yet." Warren answered, "I might make it there."

"You need to log in for me." Nate said when the screen came up. Warren got up and went over to the computer and turned it away from Nate and punched in his password. He then turned it back to the kid when the screen was filling up with icons. "You got a lot of junk here." Nate added.

"Don't paw through my things, Nate. Do you know how to get a document going long enough to write what you want?"

"Of course." Nate answered.

"Just do that. All of the rest is my work and it's very important."

"I know, do you back it up?"

"Once a week." Warren agreed.

"So this can burn?"

"Yes."

"Wow, I thought you just had something older." Nate said.

"It's work, Nate." Warren said, "You need to be able to do things with computers just to get by."

"I know." Nate said. He got quiet after that and Warren listened to the key strokes as the only background noise while he got into his newspaper.

He looked over when Nate got up looked around. "What?"

"Phone cord." Nate said. Warren got up and got it out of the bag and gave it to him. Nate strung it over to the phone jack.

"Back of the phone." Warren said, "Says data." Nate got up and looked at the back of the phone base and raised his eyebrows as he stuck the jack into it.

“Not use to this old stuff.” He said. Warren shook his head back and fourth.

“It’s new to me.” Warren said. Warren heard it dial out. After a few more minutes Nate spoke.

“You want to check your mail while I have it hooked up?”

“No, just go ahead and shut it down.”

“Ok.” Nate said. Warren watched as he hit the power button.

“What did you just do?”

“I turned it off.” Nate said.

“You know.” Warren said as he got up from his chair. “I had it my head that all kids knew more about computers than the rest of us. But for some reason I seem to know you ask it to shut itself down, you don’t just hit power.”

“It’s the same thing Uncle Warren.” Nate said, “If you just hit the power it goes through all of that by itself.”

“Oh.” Warren said. Nate laughed and shook his head.

“I use Mom’s computer all the time.” He said, “Hers doesn’t burn though.”

“I’m sorry Nate. You just get use to doing it the way you know is right. I just thought you did it wrong.”

“That’s ok.” Nate said. He flipped it closed. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.” Warren said since he was up he went ahead and sat down at the table with him. He was considering going to work, but he hadn’t yet figure out how he was going to carry both his laptop and his briefcase. “I think I need your help.” He finally said.

“With what?” Nate asked.

“I need you to come to work with me, carry the laptop for me.” He explained.

“Ok.” Nate said.

Of course he couldn’t go anywhere without his skate board. And while he was carrying both while Warren managed just his brief case, Nate started groaning.

“Why do we have to walk?” he asked.

“The advantage of working within walking distance to my office is to save on cab fair.” Warren said.

“And the coffee shop?” Nate asked.

“Down that way.” Warren pointed out. “I’m going to have to figure something else out about that.”

“If you just got a cab.” Nate said, “I mean just while you’re like you are. You could have done it on your own.”

“I appreciate your help Nate.” Warren said.

“Fine.” Nate said, “If you’d just let me roll on my board here.”

“I’d rather you didn’t spill and crack open my laptop.”

“I could handle it.” Nate said, “You haven’t seen me skate.”

“I’m sure you’re a pro.” Warren said. Nate groaned a few more times before they approached Warren’s office.

“Finally.” Nate said. Warren led the way but let Nate get the door. They headed down the hall and Warren pushed into his office.

“Warren.” Leigh said surprised.

“Good Morning.” Warren said.

“I...didn’t think you’d be here.” She said.

“I work here don’t I?”

“I thought you’d take a few days more of rest.”

“No, I’m fine to handle phone calls.” Warren said, “And I need to get a few out of the way. You remember my nephew Nathaniel?”

“Yes.” Leigh said, “Hi.”

“Hi.” He said. Warren dropped his briefcase to unlock his door. “You lock that, too?” Nate asked.

“Nothing like having good habits.” Warren said.

“Ok.” Nate said. Warren let them in and let Nate get his laptop back onto his desk. “Anything else?”

“No.” Warren said.

“I’m headed.” Nate said.

“I’ll see you at dinner.” Warren said. Nate looked back and gave him a curious look. Then he headed out the door without saying anything else.

“Welcome back.” Leigh said standing in the doorway.

“Thank you, how are we with just talking to Mr. Ponsetter?”

“He’s...he’s kind of an asshole.” Leigh said.

“Okay, I’ll see what I can’t do. I’d really like to see Kit get that back. Otherwise he’s in the hole here and I’ve already made my money on it. It doesn’t make me look good.” Warren said.

“He said he was completely disappointed in Kit Construction and the work was unsatisfactory.” She explained.

“To watch his crew work that closely, it can look like something it’s not.” Warren said, “They hardly ever fail inspection.”

“Ok.”

“See if he’ll talk to me today. I want that ball rolling.” Warren said.

“Garner isn’t expecting you in at all this week.” She added.

“Good, set up a meeting for this week, that’ll cheer him up about this delay.” Warren said.

“Okay.” She said.

Warren got to work.

12

Warren came home to find Nate in the kitchen with all kinds of things going. He turned to refer to something on the counter and then went back to what he was doing. Warren set his briefcase down and headed over to the counter looking at powder on the edge of it.

He scanned everything across the counter and Nate finally looked at him. “Hello Nate.”

“Hey.” Nate said.

“What in the hell are you doing?”

“What does it look like?”

“It has a faint resemblance to some form of alchemy, but must admit I’m no expert.” Warren said.

“I’m making dinner.”

“Aside from the fact that I’m not late and it’s still early, why?”

“I wanted to make sure I had time to figure out how.” Nate said. Warren moved to reach for the book on the counter he was referring to. He flipped it over to look at the cover.

“Betty Crocker.” He read and then looked at the page Nate was on. He watched as Nate opened the oven and smoke rolled out of it. “I somehow doubt that what’s actually contained there is going to end up being edible.”

“Oh man.” Nate said holding both off his hands up. “I did everything it said.”

“Yea, it looks to me like you found the most complicated thing to make here.” Warren said, “You’re attempting to fly before you even know how to walk.”

“I know how to walk.”

“My meaning.” Warren said, “You need to work on rudimentary cooking skills before you endeavourer to become a chef.”

“It can’t be this hard.” Nate said, “I read it three times and am doing everything it says to do.”

“Unfortunately, even the best recipes do not give you the skill required to instantly cook. It’s not just about doing it as prescribed. There’s a certain amount of training and adaptation. Like for instance, did you pre-heat the oven?”

“I wasn’t sure what that meant.” Nate answered.

“What that means is before you put anything inside the oven to cook you set the temperature and wait for the oven to reach that temperature first.”

“How do you know when?” Nate asked. Warren came around to the oven. The first thing he did was turn the oven off. Nate watched him do that.

“Now, let’s get that, whatever it’s become, something alien at this point, out of the oven.” Warren said. Nate groaned and reached for the pan. Warren snatched his hand and pulled it away. Nate looked at him with a sudden rush of fear. The image of Nate’s father yanking him around in much the same way flashed through Warren’s mind. “It’s ok.” Warren said. Nate relaxed some. “You really don’t want to just touch that without oven mitts, do you?”

“Shit.” Nate complained.

“Okay, just calm down.” Warren said as he got the oven mitts and handed them to him. Nate looked totally out of sorts then. He put them on slowly.

“I thought they were just for girls.”

“Oh come on Nate.” Warren said, “Have some sense here. The oven is hot. The pan in the oven is now hot from being in the oven. That heat is what causes the food in the pan to cook. If it’s hot enough to do that, it’s going to burn your hands.”

“Fine.” Nate said as he pulled the pan out and headed towards the counter top with it.

“Nope nope.” Warren said. Nate looked at him. “Stove top.” But Warren could see he had that covered with the clutter of the hundred different things he’d attempted to do while Warren was at work. “Hang on.” Warren said as he moved things around and managed to fish out a hot plate. Nate followed his lead and set it on that.

Warren took one of the pot holders and opened the pan to look to see what had burned in it. There wasn’t a lot to look at. He couldn’t decipher what Nate had done, but he could guess he might have substituted a few ingredients to replace the ones that were not on hand.

Warren closed the oven door facing away from it with his foot. "Alright let's clean this up and we'll make something simple here. Ok?"

"Ok." Nate agreed. They started to clean up. Warren found himself putting things into the trash he normally didn't throw away. "I just wanted to do it myself." Nate finally said.

"And your thinking is what?"

"You said I needed to learn how." Nate said, "I thought the book would tell me. It didn't seem impossible like it ended up being."

"I appreciate what you're attempting to do here." Warren said, "But I assure you, even with one hand I can still cook here."

"You said I could cook if I wanted to." Nate said.

"And you can, but you need to learn how first. Once again I am looking back and thinking I should have been more clear. In this case what you can do is take a lesson or two from me. Get the basics down. Now I'm no great cook myself, so once you know all I know, then you can go back to that book and try it again. I wouldn't even use that recipe." Warren explained.

"I want it to be good."

"And that your idea would be, that was from looking at the picture provided with the recipe?"

"Yes." Nate agreed.

"Another pristine perception of reality. They prefer to show you the best possible outcome causing you to think you can do this, too. The odds are not in your favor, especially your first time trying to cook anything. Eventually, with a few failures behind you at best, then maybe you can get close to that."

"Why do they do that?" Nate asked.

"It's a guide Nate." Warren said, "You use it as a guide and then you go from there. The potential is there in the way

it's presented. If you use all the ingredients the expected outcome is still possible. Understand?"

"I guess."

"And the book came from?" Warren asked. He was pretty sure he didn't own it.

"The library." Nate answered. Warren smiled at him and held it until Nate glanced at him to see it.

"I'm sure this experience doesn't have to be all bad. You made a plan and attempted to enact it with a good reason." Warren said, "There were a few flaws to your plan, but the effort and forethought is still impressive." Nate finally smiled at him.

Warren stepped him threw a simple meal involving meat and vegetables. He let the kid do all the work and just kept an eye on him the whole time making sure he was paying it enough attention. The out come was much better.

"I thought your cooking was bad." Nate said between bites, "I was wrong."

"It's not that bad." Warren said, "There just a lot of little adjustments to the process along the way. Once you get the feel for it, taste, smell, appearance. They guide you almost unconsciously on when and where to make adjustments, like lowering the heat at some point."

"Oh."

"I'd say you recovered the evening meal well enough."

"Thanks." Nate said.

"Thank you." Warren said. Warren attempted to clean up, but Nate kept getting in his way and Warren finally let him handle all of that alone. He retired to his chair.

He was sitting there relaxing when he noticed Nate looking at him nervous about something. Warren ignored it three times, thinking he'd either say something or he wouldn't.

"Ok what?" Warren asked on the fourth time.

"I got another book from the library." Nate said sounding nervous.

“Okay.” Warren said.

“For you.” He added, “Uhm, thought maybe you...maybe you needed...you might...”

“I might want to read it?”

“Yea.”

“Ok.” Warren said.

“You don’t have to if you don’t want to.”

“In order to make a final decision you would need to show it to me.” Warren said. Nate ran into his room. He came out slow, holding the book down. Then he finally handed it to his uncle.

“I didn’t mean you don’t know anything.” Nate said. Warren quickly discovered the topic of the book. It was a non fiction book about sexuality, namely bisexuality. “But maybe you have questions, too.”

“I’ll look it over.”

“I read a little bit.” Nate said.

“They let you check this out?” Warren asked as he flipped through the book and noticed that there were pencil sketches in it.

“Yes.” He answered, “He didn’t even say anything. Flipped it over and scanned it in.”

“Ok.” Warren said. Nate slowly backed away and then turned and headed for the couch. He sat down and turned on the TV. Warren flipped through the book, giving his left hand a little more action for just holding one end of the book while he flipped through it. He came back to the beginning and started to read it. The kid wasn’t exactly wrong. He still had a few questions about it.

He lost track of time while reading it. At some point he felt really tired and looked up. He realized he’d gotten pretty engulfed in the book.

“Did you get as far as page fifty-three?” Warren suddenly asked. Nate slowly come up on the couch and looked at him. “No?” Warren asked.

“I read the whole thing.” Nate admitted.

“Today?” Warren asked.

“No.” Nate answered, “I read it last week. I got it on Monday before you...you know.”

“I got shot.” Warren reminded him.

“Yea.”

“You read this because of me?” Warren asked.

“Well yea, not for me.” He said.

“That’s commendable Nate.” Warren said as he got up and set the book down, “Just in not choosing to be ignorant about things you don’t know anything about. I am impressed. Good night Nate.”

“Night.”

13

Warren’s day went pretty good. Kit seemed extremely happy about having him back at the bar for lunch. Barnes was still sporting a guilty expression, but Kit lightened up both their moods before they left. His meeting with Garner went off without a hitch and Warren was just getting home when he was reminded that his arm was still not all up to par.

He switched his bag to his left hand to manage the lock and was suddenly twitching from the reminder. He dropped the bag on the floor for the moment and then went back to the door and got it unlocked.

As he got through the door he was hit with a smell. What was surprising was that it wasn’t bad, well not exactly. He got the door closed and got all the way in to see Nate in the kitchen again. The smell was some form of baking chocolate.

He went over to the counter and saw the kid looking through the glass into the oven. “We’re not getting obsessed are we?” Warren asked. Nate turned around and stood up.

“You had brownie stuff way back in the cupboard.” Nate said.

“I’m guessing this is the results of your boredom over the loss of your game?” Warren asked. Nate’s almost happy face went right back to unhappy. “It smells good.” Warren added.

“Yea I guess.” Nate answered.

“Have you been watching it the whole time?” Warren asked.

“I don’t want it to burn.” Nate answered.

“You figure out how to use the timer?”

“Uhm, no.” he answered. Warren came around and showed him how to set the timer. Nate experimented with it. He then set a time and seemed to relax.

“Smells like it’s almost done.” Warren said knocking off some of the time Nate set. “Check it again when that goes off.”

“Ok.”

Warren went back around the counter towards his room and started taking off his tie. Once he had that off he rolled up his sleeves.

“Why are you doing that?” Nate asked. Warren looked back at him before taking his tie into his room.

“It didn’t seem like a totally bad idea.” Warren said.

“I’m sorry.” Nate said.

“For what?” Warren asked. Nate looked down at the floor and then ran along it to look at the oven. He eventually looked back at Warren.

“It was my problem, not yours.” Nate said.

“That’s an interesting statement.” Warren said, “However, let’s clarify the state of my attire. This is still preferred?”

“It wasn’t my business.” Nate said.

“In some regards, yes.” Warren said, “But given more thought, I’m not the one who is looking at me the most at this point. I’m home, which when compared with work, being fully dressed is not required. So, that just leaves you to see me. Is this acceptable?”

“Uhm, yea. You look ok.” Nate said.

“Good.” Warren said and took his tie into his room. He came back out and went for the book while Nate managed his baking.

At some point he took the brownies out and the smell permeated the place. Warren looked up over at him. He smiled which indicated they came out okay.

“I’ll get dinner.” Warren said.

“I can do it.”

“I know, Nate.” Warren said, “I’m getting a lot of use back in my arm. I’ll be fine.”

“Ok.” Nate agreed. He then went to settle down on the couch in front of the TV for a while. Warren continued to read until he got up to make dinner. He took his time and had to stop a few times to let his feeling in his shoulder even back out against his use of it.

He managed to get dinner all the way to the table and was grateful he wouldn’t have to clean up afterwards. Nate was quiet through dinner and Warren decided he was being contemplative. Aside from that Warren was telling himself that things were better than before.

He went back to his chair and the book while Nate cleaned up. When Nate was done he came over and sat in the chair next to Warren. At this point Warren was now associating the move to him wanting to talk.

“Yes Nate?” he asked without looking at him.

“You get to page one forty-four yet?” Nate asked.

“I’m past it.” Warren answered. He flipped back to the page and looked at the drawing on the page beside it. He looked at Nate. “This sticks out in your mind?” Warren asked.

“I wanted...I wanted to know what you thought of it.” Nate said.

“I admit the image first appears unusual.” Warren said, “I’d consider this a less likely encounter for anyone not

specifically seeking it. If they were, I'm sure they could find some place to find someone of like mind to do this with."

"That's two guys and a girl." Nate said.

"I see that."

"Is that what it means?" Nate asked, "You're supposed to have both?"

"I don't see me doing this Nate." Warren said, "So I'd find it hard to conclude that it is the summation of the term bisexual."

"Oh, could you?"

"No." Warren decided, "I think my attention would be too divided. Some people have and want more than other people. I'd say that's not really me. This is one idea about it. Not all of them."

"I know, I read more." Nate said.

"Anything else?"

"The guy says he was with a girl first." Nate said, "Have you...been with a girl?"

"Yes Nate."

"Oh."

"It's kind of hard to get to be my age and not have something happen along those lines." Warren said, "You're not thinking just because I'm alone now that that it's always been the case?"

"You said you dated a girl." Nate said, "I didn't know if that meant the same thing."

"It's best to specify." Warren said.

"When?"

"When what?"

"When did you...first do it with a girl?"

"Not until college actually." Warren answered, "My girlfriend in High School, that was about working on the details of the relationship. It was more work than I ever imagined. So I wasn't really past that to find out, like other people did at that time."

"What happened?"

“Going back on me being an example of worst case scenario?”

“Uhm, ok.” Nate said.

“This of course was Kit’s doing.” Warren said already smiling about it. He then looked at the page again, “Might be the closest I’ve ever gotten to this.” He said and indicted the page. “Anyway. His hyper awareness of all things about me was driving him crazy that I’d dared to make it all the way to college and still claimed to be a virgin. At the rate I was going after my high school girlfriend he thought I’d never even have an experience.

“I was fine for it. But he wasn’t. It was a point of dispute actually as more time passed...”

“You went to college?” Nate asked.

“For a semester.” Warren answered, “That fell apart according to the requirements of the needs of your family.”

“Oh.” Nate said. Warren could tell he didn’t want to hear more about that.

“So he started off getting me drunk. This has probably set the course of our interaction in doing that to date. Before that, believe it or not, we maintained sobriety and didn’t make a habit of breaking the law until then.

“At some point I lost track of everything that had happened. When I awoke to where I can remember since, I was in my bed in my dorm room and there was in fact a woman next to me. My movement of being startled woke her up. She then informed me that I was no longer a virgin.

“Since I couldn’t remember for myself, all I had for evidence was the condom I was wearing. I then asked her to leave. Considering my unremembered voicing of consent I wasn’t really happy about it. And then, when I got up off the bed, still suffering from the lingering effects of my true first night drinking so much I stumbled over Kit. He was lying across the floor, half under the bed with his legs and feet. I wouldn’t have noticed him just for looking because he dragged down all the blankets from the bed over himself.

“So he was present. I can’t remember the specifics of the encounter but I can gather we took turns.”

Nate sat there for a while taking it all in. He opened his mouth to say something and then stopped.

“Go ahead.” Warren encouraged.

“He paid for her?” Nate asked.

“Yes.” Warren said taking in a deep breath. “At some point guys with guy friends who’ve had an experience falter by pushing the same thing onto their friends. It should have been by my own choosing. I should have remembered it.”

“You don’t look mad, you’re kind of smiling.” Nate said.

“I know, it’s the source of something that comes up between us. In his way of making things funny.”

“I don’t think he’s funny.” Nate said.

“Well, sometimes his delivery is such that you hear him talking serious when he is not. You get used to it and you realize it’s all in jest.” Warren said, “No matter how wrong I think his actions are, it’s still a genuine example of our friendship in him wanting me to have everything he’s had.”

“That sounds weird, even to me.” Nate said. Warren laughed.

“Let’s just say I forgave him. And once I was past that it was a little easier for me to have my next experience, which I do remember and I did enjoy. And it didn’t seem that difficult for not having to have to say it was my first time.”

“Ok.” Nate said.

“Anything else?” Warren asked. Nate turned and looked forward for a while.

“You mean everything you say?” Nate asked.

“Yes.”

“Ok.” Nate said getting up. “I’m done.”

“Alright.” Warren said. He went back to his book and it kept him busy until he went off to bed only stopping long enough to have a brownie.

14

Warren was just getting his head under the shower for a rinse. The sliding glass shower door moved. As Warren brought his head up to try and figure out why, his heart started pounding in his chest.

The door opened all the way and Nate stepped through the opening and closed the door, suddenly crowding Warren's immediate space. "What do you think your doing?" Warren asked. His voice was even loud to himself in the small space, but he was perfectly startled. Anything unexpected was sure to do that to him for the time being after so recently getting shot.

"I'm getting in the shower with you." Nate explained.

"No Nate!" Warren said, "This is not available to you. I was perfectly clear by preempting my conversation about this to you that it was not an invitation."

Nate's face collapsed and he suddenly reacted to what he done badly, struggling to get the door back open and jumping out too quick and falling forward as he went, but he stayed on his feet. Warren stepped out after him.

"Nate, wait." He called, as the kid got all the way to the doorway. "Stop!" Nate grabbed the last part of the counter and stopped, dropping his head down.

Warren was still trying to recover from being startled at this point. While he did that he considered the idea that the kid must have come all the way from his room undressed before he got there.

"Alright." Warren said slowly as he recovered, "I'm not mad at you. You got this idea from me. I personally don't think there is anything wrong with you wanting to do this. Your only real mistake is in not hearing my point that this could not happen."

"Why not?" Nate asked without turning around. His shoulders shucked once at this point.

“First of all, society shuns this as a whole. I’d effectively be committing a crime here by allowing it.” Warren said, “I made that point as well, but even if we got past that. There’s still the matter at hand. We don’t have the connection I was talking about, Nate. Whatever you think you are reaching for in my general direction is not there. When I left, I shut off all my emotions about it. I had to do that to survive. I didn’t want to leave you, but I couldn’t stay. I couldn’t stand to watch it anymore. It was affecting me badly as well as you. And in doing that, I let all of it go, including what I felt for you. Whatever we had is gone. I can’t begin to think of what you’d want from me now.”

Nate turned around head coming up and Warren saw the tears coming out of his eyes and down his cheeks. “I remembered.” He claimed, “I remember you use to love me. I want you to love me again.”

“Oh Nate.” Warren said as his pushed his hand through his wet hair getting it out of his eyes. “You can’t just go from where you were standing about it to this. It’s a one hundred and eighty degree turn around. We...we can’t just create the intimacy I was talking about. You can’t go from hardly standing one another’s presence to that connection without ever so much as touching each other in the interim.

“It’s just not going to happen.”

“But we can try.” Nate said, sounding hopeful.

“No Nate, we shouldn’t. At this point we can’t fit back into the way it was, we’ve both changed. I was filling a void your father created and I was not prepared for any of that. Not when I spent half my time in your defense and all I got for it was being ignored. Even you stood against me in the end.”

“No I didn’t.” Nate said shaking his head in the negative.

“I’m sorry Nate, but you did. When I finally took action on my own and called the police to have them come

put a stop to it. All three of you denied it. Making me out to look like a damn fool and a liar.”

“No.” Nate said.

“I’m sorry Nate, but that hurt too much. That broke all my trust about it. I still hear it in my worst dreams, coming out of your mouth, ‘My daddy doesn’t hit me, Sir.’” Warren said.

“I’m sorry.” Nate cried out, all of his pain coming through his voice. “I didn’t mean it. I was scared. I didn’t know what to do.”

“I told you what to do.” Warren said, “You, right along side your mother chose not to listen.”

The kid started sobbing at this point and Warren took a break from the exchange just keeping himself in check, telling himself that the emotion from the kid couldn’t touch him. He had closed it all off.

“I’m doing what I can for you here, Nate. Stop asking for more.” He finally said. Nate finally got moving again and left. Once he was sure the kid was gone Warren curled both his arms around his head, ignoring the pain from his shoulder and wondering over and over again why his door hadn’t been locked.

