

Lovers

Kit picked up on Warren's mood immediately after he'd sat down. He didn't say anything right away, still looking for Barnes. Warren was flapping his paper more than usual and even he was aware he was doing it.

"What?" Kit finally asked after they got their drinks.

"Kid." Warren answered.

"Need me to take him again?"

"I'll let you know."

"Something tells me this time it was bad." Kit suggested.

"The problem is always the same, Kit. No matter how much sanity I try and foster he always drags us back to the past." Warren answered.

"It's all his fault?"

Warren dropped his newspaper to look at him. There was still no sign of Barnes yet. "I can't feel this bad for not having some part in it." Warren answered. Kit nodded.

Barnes finally came in and Kit had a drink waiting for her, guessing what she might want. She failed to make a statement to the contrary and took a sip. "Weather is crazy here." She said.

"Hi Barnes." Kit said smiling at her. She smiled back.

"Hi Kit, Warren."

"How are you?" Warren asked.

"Okay someone's depressed." She replied.

"You?" Kit asked.

"No." she answered leaning her head towards Warren.

"I'm that obvious?" Warren asked.

"I do sense emotions without even looking at someone sometimes." Barnes said, "The closer I got to the table the more I could feel it."

“I’m working it out.” Warren said bringing his paper back up.

“Hopefully soon.” She said. She placed an order with their server after that. She then finally got out of her jacket. “It was all nice and warm yesterday, now it’s pouring and cold.”

“Welcome to Seattle.” Warren said.

“I guess.” She said. “I thought maybe we were about to see summer, I was fooled.”

“You miss LA, don’t you?” Kit asked.

“For the weather, yes, but not much else.” She answered. Warren gave up on the paper. She was closer to right. He couldn’t even sneak some pleasure out of his habit at that point. He had to make things right somehow.

He leaned on to the table and looked at his drink. “You give him his game back yet?” Kit asked.

“No, I was waiting for him to do something worth while first.” Warren said.

“And he’s worse?” Kit asked.

“There’s just no even with him.” Warren decided, “One minute he’s doing something with some tact and fore thought and the next he’s screwing up badly.”

“So no worse no better.” Kit said.

“I guess.” Warren said, “He just keeps dragging me down with him. This is why I walked away from it to begin with.”

Kit didn’t say anything to that. Warren decided he’d said enough about it back when it was happening. Not seeing it first hand, Warren’s explanation failed to put it under the right light. And when Juliana insisted Warren was off about it, Kit tended to step back from the subject. It wasn’t until after, it wasn’t until Nate’s father ended up in prison for the same things Warren kept telling him about, that Kit came back all apologetic and saying he just didn’t get it before.

By then Warren’s opinion of the three of them was so low Kit just went mute and let him talk about it. Admitting

with silence that even as crazy as his family got from time to time, he had no comprehension of what Warren felt.

The lunch was mostly quiet. Warren picked at his food even with as much as he often despised seeing others do the same. As he stopped to think about that he consoled himself that at least his thumbnail wasn't sticking into his mouth.

He leaned back not finishing it and slowly turned towards Kit. "What?" Kit asked seeing light coming from Warren's eyes.

"You like to shop for electronics, don't you?" Warren asked. Kit smiled at him.

2

Warren came into the apartment. Nate was curled up on the couch. Without the TV on Warren actually had to look over the back of it to see if he was sleeping. He wasn't, he had to turn his head to look up at his uncle, but he was awake. Warren moved away without saying anything.

On first unlocking his own door, Warren was steadily trying to remind himself to never leave it unlocked again. That alone was driving him crazy with him always moving in and out of rooms and managing the lock. He could only think that the meds had somehow affected his memory about it. He just didn't know. He also didn't know how many days had gone on without him locking himself in his own room for the night. His routine didn't have him unlocking the door until he came out.

He went back to the couch, setting the game console with all the games on the back of it when he got there. Nate looked up at him and all of that. "This is yours, Nate." Warren said, "I want you to have it. I won't ever take it from you again. Ok?"

"You know what your doing?" Nate asked, his voice sounding raw to Warren's ears. He understood why. He'd either been crying too hard or yelling himself hoarse when he thought he was alone in the apartment. Warren was just glad

he hadn't gotten to the point where all of that was accompanied by breaking things.

"What Nate?"

"You feel guilty so you're giving me something to make yourself feel better." Nate said.

"Your assessment is accurate." Warren agreed, "Do you want it?"

"You're really never going to take it away again?" Nate asked coming up some from where he was curled into the couch.

"That's right. It's yours and I want you to take it into your room." Warren explained.

"I don't have a TV in my room." Nate complained.

"You will." Warren said. Nate sat all the way up getting his feet on the floor. He took the game consol and all of the games into his room. When he came back out Warren had settled on the couch. Nate slid down into the corner.

"You must really feel guilty."

"I hadn't really given it to you." Warren said, "I'm doing that now. But it's rather useless to you without a TV and I thought it would be a little quieter around here if you played that in your room. You might also want to have a friend over sometime to play it with you. At that point you might prefer me not being right in sight when you do."

"What friend?" Nate asked.

"You have a friend, don't you?"

"Jake." Nate said, "But he lives too far away to just come over."

"Well, you work out the details and I'll take you to go pick him up. He can stay the weekend or something."

"He's gone for now." Nate said.

"Oh."

"Maybe when he gets back."

"That would be fine." Warren agreed. He went and got up and was on his way to his chair when the doorbell rang. He turned that way and opened the door.

Standing on the other side was Kit with a large box sitting on a hand truck. Nate came around to get that all in his view. "Mom always says have the right tool for the right job." Kit said.

"You sure that wasn't your dad?" Warren asked.

"You know, I'm not even sure which one was mom and which one was dad anymore." Kit said smiling. Warren laughed and let him roll the whole thing inside.

Nate moved around to get a look at the box. "Hi." He finally said when Kit stared at him.

"Something tells me this is some kind of bribe." Kit said. Nate shrugged, but at least he looked happier. "Is your room in any better shape than the bathroom?"

"Uhm." Nate said, "Hold on. I need to get stuff off the spot where that will fit."

"I got the one with the built in DVD player." Kit said, "Let me know if you want to tap my porn collection."

Nate started to laugh but stopped when he saw his uncle's expression. "Kit please." Warren said. "He's only fourteen."

"Oh man, I was watching all that when I was twelve and I'm ok."

"You're making my point." Warren said and Kit started laughing.

"Well go." Kit said looking back at Nate. Nate went into his room. "Almost decided he didn't know how to laugh."

"He's happy for the moment." Warren said, "That might buy me one or two days of sanity at best."

"Ok." Kit said, "This is to make you feel better though."

"Just to ease up on him, yes." Warren agreed, "It makes me feel a little better."

"Good, because once I tell you how much I spent, you're going to need that."

"I'm sure you bought something on sale."

“Uhm...yea.” Kit said, “On sale, I hear ya.”

“How much?”

“I’m not even going to say it out loud.” Kit said. He shuffled around in his pockets and handed Warren a receipt. Warren took a deep breath looking at it.

“You need a check for this now?” Warren asked.

“No.” Kit answered, “Just start putting some aside for it though.”

“I can afford this right now.” Warren said.

“You think I went broke over that project?” Kit asked looking at him.

“I’d be concerned to the point where I wouldn’t pick now to borrow money from you.” Warren answered.

“It’s fine Warren.” Kit said mimicking his friend’s way with words.

“Alright.”

“Something more for me to hold over your head.”

“I’ll go make out a check.” Warren said and Kit started laughing. Warren went into his room and made Kit out a check for the full amount. The problem wasn’t really the money. It was getting Kit to take it from his hand. He decided to avoid the scene and went right up to Kit and grabbed his shirt pocket and stuffed it into it.

“Cool, was starting to wonder where my dinner was going to come from.” Kit said.

“You can get it here tonight if you like.” Warren offered.

“I would, except it’s highly likely that my ex-wife will stop by tonight.” Kit said, “It’s been a few days, so...no offense, ok?”

“Sure Kit.” Warren agreed.

“Cool, alright what’s taking him so long.” Kit said as he began to roll the TV towards the door. He looked inside Nate’s room. “Oh my God!” he cried just before pulling the box inside.

Warren let Kit hook it all up with Nate while he started dinner. He tried once more to get Kit to stay. "It's almost done, maybe twenty minutes off your time." Warren said.

"What do I get after that?" Kit asked.

"Nothing." Warren said.

"That'll just slow me down then." Kit explained, "You can buy lunch tomorrow."

"It's my turn tomorrow." Warren said.

"And the next day." Kit said heading for the door, "And the next and the next..." He trailed off as he headed out the door waving at Warren and closed the door behind him. Warren went over and locked it.

He then sat down to dinner facing Nate whose mood had been much improved. Warren let them get through most of it before talking again.

"Okay Nate." He started.

"Yes?"

"My intention is not to bring up the whole ordeal again." Warren said, "But I need to ask you about something. I keep running it through my head and I keep telling myself I remember locking my door just like I always do."

"I'm sorry I went into your room Uncle Warren, I broke a rule." Nate said.

"I think my wording on that was I won't go in yours if you don't go in mine. I accept your apology, but let's not go over all that ok?"

"Ok."

"My door? Was it just unlocked?" Warren asked. The kid's face scrunched up again. Warren took a deep breath. "I'm not going to be mad at you, ok?"

"I didn't break it if that's what you think." Nate said.

"It's not broken, Nate." Warren said. "So unless it was unlocked..."

"It was maybe locked." Nate said.

"Explain that better." Warren said.

“How about I show you?” Nate asked.

“What do you mean?”

“Is it locked now?”

“No, I’m only just over here, no need. But you know that I lock it at night when I go to bed.”

“I guess.” Nate said, “Honest, it’s the only time I went in there and I’m sorry.”

“Apology accepted Nate, what aren’t you telling me?”

“Come lock it.” Nate said getting up. Warren got up from the table as well and followed him to his own bedroom door. Nate stood there waiting. “Lock it.” Nate said again. Warren brought out his keys and locked the door. It was a simple door knob lock, but he’d always thought it was good enough. “Can you open it?” Nate asked.

Warren tried the knob, twisting it for a bit and rattling it and it was secure. “It’s locked.” Warren said.

“I don’t know why ok?” Nate said. Warren just looked at him, “Ok?”

“Ok Nate.” Warren agreed. Nate took in a deep breath, reached out to the door knob, turned it and the door opened easily.

“Jesus.” Warren said.

“It just opens when I want it to.”

Warren was busy checking the lock to see that it was now unlocked. He then closed the door and locked it again. This time he yanked, pulled and rattled the thing like crazy. Then he stepped back, sure now without a doubt that it would not just open like it just had. “Do it again.”

Nate took in another deep breath and opened the door easy. Warren just looked at it. “How the hell?”

“I don’t know ok?”

“Can you do that with the front door?” Warren asked.

“No, it has a dead bolt.” Nate said.

“And this?”

“It’s just a stupid door knob. Like I said, it opens if I want it to.” Nate said. Warren took a minute to digest the

phenomenon. When he decided to accept it, even though he had no logical reason, requesting entrance to get into a church came to mind, he spoke again.

“Nate part of my reaction this morning is because you startled me.” Warren said, “The door should have been locked I had no reason to expect you to come in there even if you wanted to.”

“I’m sorry.” Nate said.

“I’m just telling you why.” Warren said, “And...I went overboard about it. I’m sorry Nate. We need to stop dragging each other back into the past. This one...it’s my fault.”

“Hence the TV.” Nate said.

“Yea well.” Warren said.

“And you know how I felt when Kit just came right in and scared me.”

“I’m sorry about that too.” Warren said, “At the time I believe I was in surgery.”

“Well you didn’t say sorry until now.”

“Let’s just try not to startle each other again.” Warren suggested.

“Ok.” Nate agreed. Warren closed and locked the door again.

“One more time.” He requested. Nate smiled and turned the knob one more time, opening the door.

“I promise I won’t go in your room again.” Nate said, “But you could get a dead bolt if you really didn’t want me in there for sure.”

“You do have me questioning the security of the lock, Nate.” Warren said, “But I don’t think anyone else could just do that.”

“Probably.”

“How long have you been able to?” Warren asked. Nate shrugged. “I tell you what. Although it’s a habit as well, my reasons for leaving this locked is to keep other people out. The cleaning service comes right in here. If someone else were to be inside, they’d have to contend with this as well.”

“Nate...” Warren looked at the floor for a moment and then looked up at the kid. “Since you can do this. I’m going to trust you not to go in there.”

“I never did before.” Nate said, “And I could have to get the games.”

“I know.” Warren said, “You’ve established that much trust with me. And you only went in there when I was in there. So I’m allowing you to keep my trust on that. The other thing I am trusting you to do is not have any more to do with that girl.”

“Ok.”

“You understand what this means?” Warren asked.

“Uhm.” Nate said and stopped.

“We can go from here.” Warren said, “Do you want to?”

“You mean...” Nate said, “Like start new?”

“Yes.”

Nate’s eyes scanned Warren’s for a moment. He looked around at nothing in particular and then came back to his uncle. “Ok.”

“Good.” Warren said. He reached out and put his right hand on Nate’s left arm and held it for a moment. Then he pulled away and went back to start cleaning up.

3

“Now what?” Kit asked as Warren sat at the table contemplating things.

“Its fine, Kit.” Warren said, “Just thinking hard.”

“Am I getting that project back?” Kit asked.

“I don’t know about that. I still can’t get him on the phone.” Warren said. Kit frowned.

“I got half relatives asking me why their husbands aren’t working this week.” Kit complained.

“I’m sorry.” Warren said.

“No blame on you man.” Kit said, “I know you’d have been there. I just...you know expected that to still be going and I’m trying to find a filler, but I got nothing for them.”

“What about you?”

“Oh I’m fine.” Kit said, “You were way over reacting last night. And if this TV deal was a trick to put some of my credit into cash, it wasn’t necessary.”

“Well, I hadn’t thought of that at first, but if it helps, then great.” Warren said.

“Nah, I got reserves. I just don’t like using them. So all I’m left with is disgruntled workers.”

“You asking around to see if anyone’s got anything?”

“Nope.” Kit said, “I got tons coming my way soon enough, so begging for it now, I could get over loaded in no time.”

“Alright.”

“It’s also the idea that the work is just sitting there going unfinished.”

“It makes me look bad, too.” Warren said.

“He’s an asshole.” Kit decided.

Warren looked at Barnes’ empty seat. She’d actually called Kit this time, said she had something to do, but their banter often required her input now that they had gotten accustomed to her being there. So they often came around to pausing, as if it were her turn to speak. Warren and Kit looked at each other at the same time and broke out into a smile.

“Yup.” Kit said, “We can feel her not here.”

“So how did last night go?”

“It didn’t.”

“So you could have stayed?”

“Thought about it, but I figured you needed to ride out the recoil of whatever happened. How is that now?”

“Better.” Warren said, “I might actually think there’s hope.”

“That would be a first, Warren.” Kit said.

“I’m not going to allow myself to get swept away by it yet, though. Damn as sure as I do she’ll come back for him and undo everything I’ve managed with him.”

“It can’t be that bad.” Kit said. Warren’s face told him he thought it could.

“I don’t even think I’m qualified here.” Warren said, “Maybe talking about her to him, maybe it just makes it worse. I just want him to...maybe think for himself more. Have his own opinion about things. He talks so much like her at times it just grinds into me.”

“I know.” Kit said.

“Okay I’m rambling.”

“No, it’s okay man. I spent a whole week with the kid, that’s what I mean by I know. Once he did start talking I was getting that feeling, too. He’s not become someone himself yet. So he’s...like you said too angry. And when he’s not that he’s her. You’re not wrong there.”

Warren sighed.

“But I believe you can help.”

“You wouldn’t think that if I told you what happened.”

“Up to you. Kid’s your deal.” Kit said.

“I’m just afraid I’ll be wrong.” Warren decided.

“I have faith in you about it.” Kit said, “Even if I don’t know what you’re actually talking about.”

“I’m emotionally involved and I can’t be objective.” Warren said. Kit smiled.

“I think emotions are part of it.” Kit said, “I’m no expert with no kids myself, but I remember being a kid. I remember how mad mom used to get at me. Loud as thunder yelling at me.”

“You sure that wasn’t your dad?”

“It might have been dad.” Kit agreed and they both laughed. “Thing is, if your yelling, getting irate, it still shows you care even if you feel bad about it.”

“I still keep thinking I should have taken it all over a long time ago, gotten him away from the both of them.”

“You weren’t ready for that either.” Kit said, “Last thing you needed on top of everything else crushing you, was a war with her about it.”

“Yea, but I hate that I gave up and left.”

“She left right after you did.” Kit reminded him. He didn’t need to say anymore. It was all on replay in Warren’s head. He hit pause and focused in on Kit more. Kit was looking off at the rest of the bar at the moment and Warren was using him to drown out his thoughts. When Kit looked back he laughed and turned in his chair to face Warren. “Are you checking me out?”

“Yes.” Warren said laughing with him, “I was doing that. Your profile actually.”

“You liking it?”

“Yea.” Warren agreed.

“You’re just missing Superman, that’s all. I’m just chump change compared to all of that.”

“No you’re not.”

“Say it so I can believe you.” Kit requested.

“Tell me how.”

“No, you do your thing. You think I’m going to be whispering all the right things in your ear when the next guy comes along?”

“What if it’s a girl?”

“Your own your own then anyway.” Kit assured him, “I think you can handle that.”

“Ok.”

“You give up?”

“I guess.” Warren said.

“Hmm.” Kit said. “You know I come up with the whole ice cream thing. You gotta have something for me.”

“Oh we’re back to that again.”

“Yup.” Kit said, “Warren flavored ice cream, yum.”

Warren started laughing again and Kit joined him.

“Come on. Come on.”

“Show me your profile again.” Warren requested. Kit looked right back to where he was looking before. He studied it for a while until Kit started chuckling.

“I feel like I’m on display.” He said without looking at Warren.

“I’m just not clever that way about it.” Warren said.

“Well, just be you then. How’d you do it with Superman?”

“I wasn’t worried too much about words. Just making physical contact, that seemed easier.”

“Well try that.”

“In the bar?” Warren asked. Kit turned in his chair again to look at him.

“Isn’t this where you did that with him?”

“Yea I guess.” Warren said, “But that might just be more than our usual banter.”

“I’m game, what you got?”

“I got you mixed up with a guy who thought you might like him.” Warren said, “I do this and someone else might think the same.”

“Nobody here worth a damn anyway. I’d reject every last one of them.” Kit said.

“Alright, turn your head again.” Warren said. Kit went back to looking away. Warren pulled his chair over and saw Kit smile.

“You don’t have the guts.” Kit said and laughed.

“You asked for this.” Warren said. He reached over and ran his hand along the side of Kit’s face. Then he pushed his hair showing down past his hat towards the back of his head. Kit slowly turned towards him and smiled.

“Maybe you do.”

“I need to get back to work now.” Warren said.

“I wish I could say the same.”

“I’ll see you tomorrow.” Warren said as he got up. Kit eyed him as he did. Warren smiled at him and got the other

side of his face for a moment, running his hand down along his chin.

“Not bad.” Kit said, “Not bad at all.”

“Not making you nervous?”

“Like crazy, Warren, but I asked right?”

“Yea.”

“Go.” Kit said. Warren stepped away pulling up his newspaper and trench coat as he went. He then headed out to grab a cab. It didn’t take him long to get back to his office.

After being back in it for a while, working through stuff Warren took a call. When he came back to the laptop it had shut down. He booted it back up and tried to find what he had been working on.

“No no.” Warren complained, “You stupid machine.” He hit intercom. “Leigh.”

She got up from her chair and came to the open door. “Yes?”

“Can you do that thing again, where you get something back?” Warren asked.

“From the recycle bin?”

“No, I don’t think I hit save yet and the stupid thing shut down and it didn’t come back up. You fixed it last time, think you can do it again?” Warren asked.

“I can try.” She said. She came in to kneel beside him, turning the computer towards her where he could still see the screen.

She maneuvered through several windows. Once she had the one she wanted she did something else. Suddenly the nearly empty window had a lot more icons. Warren took in a deep breath. “Why do they hide those things?” he asked.

“Because.” She said evenly, even with him knowing she’d explained it before, “They are suppose to be temporary. And when you’re done working on your document they go away. When your laptop shuts down it very often forgets to reclaim them.”

“Right, can you find it?” he asked.

“There’s a lot here.” She said, “I wish they’d date these things. Okay I just keep opening them until you can tell me I found it.”

“Thank you.” He said. She went through a few that Warren recognized but knew he’d dealt with already.

“Dear Mom?” she asked and looked at him.

“Looks like Nate’s e-mail to his mother. I definitely shouldn’t read it and I’m sure I don’t want to. Close it.”

“Ok.” She agreed. Then she pulled up the next one. “Hey Mindy.”

“Wait.” Warren said and pulled the laptop more to face himself. “I think I should read that one.”

“Another of Nate’s e-mails?” she asked.

“Yes.”

“You realize he doesn’t know you’d end up looking at it.” she said.

“I know, but this shouldn’t be here, nor should it be on my laptop.” Warren said, “Something tells me his e-mail to his mother seemed like a good chance to do another.”

“Your call.” She said and smiled. Warren began reading the e-mail, or the document he’d written the message in before sending it out.

Hey Mindy,

Sorry. I can’t see you this weekend. My stupid uncle is still spazzing about what you did, you know? He’s such a basketcase, I don’t know how he does anything at all, tripping over his own two feet.

I got totally busted about you being here. Man I thought that would slide. That’s why I didn’t say anything, that ugly guy said something, I know he did. How else would he know? You remember him. Anyway, I hate to say this, but I got too much to worry about right now. I can’t talk to you any more. I’m sorry, really, it’s not you. It’s HIM. He’s driving me crazy! I hate him.

Maybe later, maybe not. Definitely not right now. So like, don't just come over again like that. I don't need the grief, ok? I really like you, but maybe when Mom comes back? That won't be too much longer, hopefully. I don't know. She never said, because we went together and must have forgot when I left. Maybe she doesn't even know. I think I hate her, too. She's a spazz, just as bad as him. Did I tell you they are twins? You can see it in their eyes. They both look, dazed somehow. I don't know. Well I better hurry up, I'm hijacking as it is to get this out. Better days, ok? They should be coming. Stay sweet.

Oh yea, since I don't have to face you for a while. You're hot! :P

*Laterz
Nate*

“Did you just read that?” Warren asked.

“Well, I am right here.” Leigh said and winked at him. “He’s just not happy.”

“Yes, but I am.” Warren said and smiled, “He’s doing something right here. If I hadn’t already spent all my money this month on him, I’d buy him something else.”

“That’s it?” she asked, “Just buy him something?”

“Yes, why?” he asked.

“No.” she said, “If you want my advice you’d ask me.”

“Go ahead.”

“How old is he?”

“Fourteen.” He reminded her.

“You know what, your probably right, just buy him something.” She said and smiled.

“Okay get rid of that, no evidence. And see if you can find my work now.” He said. She took the computer back and continued to parse through documents until she found the one he was working on. She scrolled down and there was nothing missing. “Thank you so much.” Warren said.

“That’s what I’m here for.” She said. The phone rang in as she came up on her feet. She went ahead and answered it off his desk. “Warren Keith’s office.” She answered. She paused a moment while Warren was busy saving his work on his computer. “Hold please, yes only a moment.” She hit the hold button. She smiled at Warren. “Mr. Ponsetter on hold.”

Warren waved her out of the office and hit speaker phone. “Warren Keith.” He answered.

“Yes, good afternoon Mr. Keith. It has just completely come to my attention as to why I never saw you last week when Mr. Kit assured me you’d explain things to me. It seems you were actually shot?”

“Yes Mr. Ponsetter.” Warren said, “I’m still a little handicapped from that, but I am back to work now.”

“Well I’m sorry to hear that. That’s not something that happens everyday. But on to business. The thing is when you didn’t show Mr. Kit really didn’t impress me with his talk. I yanked the go ahead on the next phase. I have that in writing. I need this worked out. I can’t sit on an investment this large for long. What can you tell me?”

“I am still not clear on the details. I was expecting to get that from you when I failed to show. The best I can gather is that you’re unhappy about some things that are being done on the site.”

“Actually, I said as much right after Mr. Kit’s loss of composure, Mr. Keith. I had no patience after that. But the truth is, the bottom line here. He’s just uncooperative. I succinctly requested that changes be made along the way. He was unaccommodating. He told me that he needed plans to go by. That’s how he worked, once he had plans he could do whatever was on them. I understand that due to your part in this that’s in fact where the plans come from? Your office?”

“I’m not the architect, but the initial qualifications of what they should look like do in fact come from me as part of my proposal, which I’m to understand you approved.”

“I did.” He agreed, “But as I see this going up. There’s just no way as is. These changes are not that difficult, what has to be done to make them?”

“Well, as far as Mr. Kit’s concern. I’m sure he’s completely capable of doing the work on any changes you require. Going directly to him he’s worried about several things in regards to it. In making changes arbitrarily, he needs to make sure that everything being done is up to code. That’s not something he can do without plans. So your changes cannot pass directly into his hands. What can be done, what I’ll be happy to do is go over those changes with him as I am qualified to author changes according to code and make sure he stays above board. If you like we can do that immediately if not sooner. This will require altered blue prints. We would need to know you’re behind it in acquiring those.”

“You mean I pay for them.” He said.

“As the way of it goes, yes.” Warren agreed, “I understand your position, especially in marketing to the sales department. Very often these things do fall short when they go up. I’m banking on a decade of experience when I set that to you. But in the end your money is on the line so we would definitely want to make sure it meets with your approval.”

“And if I sign off on the funds, how soon can I see the altered plans? This is costing me already to sit on it. I’d prefer not to deal with Mr. Kit directly again. Could I refer all my inquiries through your office from here on out?”

“Aside from this one particular item which I had agreed to, my office does its own billing. Would that be favorable?”

“If you can do this that this quickly, absolutely. I don’t even want to crunch numbers with you. I saw your bill Mr. Keith, you are fair and reasonable man who is probably under selling himself. I’ll be happy to work with you from here on out. Show me what you got.”

"I'll have the altered plans in your office come Monday."

"I'll be looking for them, you have good weekend."

"You too Mr. Ponsetter." Warren said. He heard the click and then cut the line. He let out all of his breath after that. Then he smiled.

He hit speed dial to Kit's cell. "Kit." He answered.

"Are you still at the bar?" Warren asked.

"Uhm, yes."

"Well, you need to go locate the blue prints of your project. Then, please tell me you weren't so upset as to destroy the changes. I'm guessing drawn in scribble like a child's drawing?"

"You know it, Warren." Kit said, "And I'm just not that demented to burn them or anything. I have no idea what to do with them though. It's all looks Greek to me before it's in blue."

"Alright, I'd prefer to do this on the site tomorrow." Warren said, "Push comes to shove we can do it in the bar if you got pictures."

"I do." Kit agreed.

"Well we can back over going out there if needs be." Warren said, "So pictures, all of them. Current blue prints, alterations. Well get that all done and we'll have Henry work up new plans on Saturday, he owes us one."

"Yes he does." Kit agreed.

"You get him on the ball after you talk to me. I recommend doing that in person and being your usual self."

"Easy." Kit agreed.

"I may run late coming from here to there tomorrow. I'm still backed up and I'm cramming. But by then I'll be yours until we get this done."

"Warren, you're awesome. You rock." Kit said.

"Bye."

"See you." Kit said.

4

Warren finished dinner and brought it to the table. At this point he was already getting upset. The night before had him in good spirits about the kid and after he read the e-mail he was really thinking things would work out even more. But now he went right back to doubting it. He sat there for a few minutes staring at his plate and then looking at the door.

He decided he may as well eat his food, why let it cold? Even if Nate's plate was going to be doing that unattended at the other end of the table. He got half finished and his stomach started to get knotted up and couldn't eat any more.

"Damn it." he complained to the empty air holding his fork up. After a few more minutes of waiting he got back up and started to dish the food into some empty containers. He was thinking he knew why the dinner rule was so important. It reset him with the kid on schedule and allowed him not to have to wonder where he was just before he ate, just like he was doing. And wondering was turning into worrying. He didn't need that either. And he swore he could care less where the kid was all day long, or even where he might go in the evening, as long as he checked in.

He then started to think he'd given in way too much and became the good guy again. That had just opened the way for him to get trampled on. He moved all that to his chair and fingered the book. He would have finished it that night if he could have read. The next thing he did was start pacing the floor. That had to be the worst, because it only made the cycles in his mind about everything spin that much faster. The bottom line was he didn't think he needed to have to worry about a kid at all. It wasn't his kid anyway.

He came to a stop and looked around. His thumb was just getting close to his mouth when he yanked it away. Maybe it was time to call the police?

Maybe he just needed to talk to someone? But he didn't want to tie up the line. He still went over to the phone to see again that there were no new messages. Was the phone even working? He picked it up and got a dial tone. He hung it back up and sat down in his chair.

He put his head back, dragged the book into his lap and was trying to stay conscious of his errant thumb, should it get close to his mouth again he might just chop the whole thing right off his hand. That would end it.

Then he heard a key go into the lock. He let out all his breath and leaned forward setting the book aside as the door opened. He was already shouting in his head. Then he saw Nate come into view, holding his left foot suspended in the air while he hopped on his right. It took eighty-percent of the steam out of him.

"Where the hell have you been?" Warren asked and it came out at an amazing low volume.

"Just walking." Nate answered.

"From where?"

"I was a long way from here." He admitted. "I skated down. But then I screwed up my ankle and had to walk back."

"It looks more like hoping to me." Warren decided as Nate got the door closed and locked. He took one more hop and Warren came flying out of the chair and went over towards him. He went to get his arm around him to assist in his movement, but Nate cringed causing him to stop. "Damn it Nate, I have never hit you. Why do you still react like I'm going to when I come this close to you?"

"You're mad." Nate said defensively. Warren went ahead and got his arm around him and his hand up under his arm pit and lifted him some.

"Lean against me." Warren instructed. Nate leaned and Warren helped him to the couch. He moved so they were both positioned to sit and helped him come down while he held his left foot in the air.

Once Nate was down Warren got back up and turned to face him, looking down at him.

“Talk.” Warren said tossing his hand up and forward.

“I told you, I busted my ankle and had to walk.” Nate answered.

“Nathaniel, why didn’t you ride the bus or get a cab?” Warren asked.

“You never gave me any money. I’m broke.” He answered.

“You’re hurt right?”

“Yes.” Nate said like it should have been obvious.

“Why no phone call?” Warren asked, “You’re expected at dinner. Your hurt, you had no money. You have a damn cell phone, why the hell didn’t you call me to come get you?”

“I don’t know.” Nate answered, he then grumbled, “You said don’t call you at work.”

“Unless it’s an emergency, in which case this qualifies Nate.” Warren said. He shook his head in the negative as Nate looked down and away. Warren moved and knelt down to get Nate’s foot over his own knee. He then lightly began to pull the kid’s sock down.

“Owe owe.” Nate said.

“Jesus Nate.” Warren complained. He began getting his high top untied. Then he began to gently and slowly pull it off his foot. Nate groaned during. Then Warren peeled off his sock to look at the amazing discoloration of the bruise growing around Nate’s ankle. He almost said something about the smell of the kid’s foot, but stopped. “Turn.” Warren said as he held his leg higher up near the knee and caused Nate to spin to get his foot up on the couch. He set it down gently and then got up and away. He was already boiling inside, never mind being late and absent. *He should have called.*

Warren got out the ice pack from the freezer and brought it back to the couch with him. He lifted up Nate’s leg just past the knee and set the ice on the couch and then

rested his ankle back on to it. Nate hissed when he did. Warren got back up to look down at him again.

“Let me get this right.” Warren said, now his voice had gone up, “You got hurt, and then you walked all the way home on this busted ankle?”

“Yes.” Nate barked back at him.

“And you didn’t call me because you felt it wasn’t necessary, that this was no big deal?”

“I guess.” He said a little lower.

“You are just like your Mother, Nate. You have no common sense.” Warren said. Nate scrunched up his face. “I can’t believe you would be so dumb as to walk on an injury like this? Your mother is a doctor. You should know something about this after traipsing all over the damn world watching her work.”

Nate dropped his head down and was sulking.

“Admit it.” Warren added, “Whatever happened, you got pissed. You got angry. And the whole time you were pissed you were already halfway home and just kept right on going?” Nate didn’t answer. “You have your cell phone?”

“Yes.”

“Show it to me.” Warren said. Nate reached into his pocket and pulled it out. Warren held his hand out. Nate gave it to him. Warren turned it on. “Hey what do you know it works.” Warren said. “Oh look Nate, is this a speed dial for my cell phone that I put into it the day you came here and I held on to this for you?”

“Yes.” Nate said.

“And you knew it was here.”

“Yes.”

“And you didn’t have a problem figuring out how to call me at work.”

“Yes.” Nate agreed.

“You should have called me.” Warren shouted and Nate cringed from that. Warren handed the phone back, but Nate didn’t take it right away. He was busy looking at the

color of the couch. "Take it." Warren said more calmly. Nate snatched the phone out of his hand. "Where's your skateboard?"

"I tossed it." Nate said, "When I busted my ankle it broke in half. It was old, so I just tossed it."

"Alright, your board, whatever." Warren said. "Are you hungry?"

"No."

"It's pretty late as it is." Warren said. "You can either crash where you are for a while or we can get you into bed."

"I'm fine here." Nate decided.

"I'll be back out here in a couple of hours and see if you've changed your mind about that."

"Why?"

"To see if it gets any worse." Warren explained.

"What do you care?"

"Kit says if I'm yelling like this, somewhere underneath all that it means I care. Ok?" Warren asked. Nate's face slowly turned up towards him, a mix of his own anger about whatever and a bit of curiosity in his uncle's statement. Warren went ahead and went to his room.

When he came back out to check on him Nate had already gone into his room on his own. Warren hesitated at the door thinking he should check on him. He decided that since he'd taken the ice pack with him, he was kind of taking care of it himself. He turned and headed back to his room, shutting down the lights as he went.

5

Warren got up early and started making breakfast. His emphasis was making sure the kid made up for the meal he'd missed the evening before, but he was also hungry himself. He fixed the kid's food first and managed to locate the tray table. He then filled it up and took it over near Nate's bedroom door where he set it down.

He knocked on the door and then cracked it open. "Nate?" he called.

"Yea?"

"Coming in with breakfast, alright?"

"Yup." Nate replied. Warren hefted the tray back up and backed through the door. He had some desire to finish the trip to favor his shoulder before it really started to complain, but he stopped dead once inside looking around the room.

Nate was moving himself on the bed getting ready for the tray. After Warren's initial scan of what used to be a nice room he looked back at Nate to see him actually licking his lips. Warren laughed just a bit and finished bringing the tray down over his lap. He winced while he was doing it because his shoulder was no longer with him. Nate saw that and watched him as he straightened back up and rolled his shoulder working out the kink.

"What did you do to this room?" Warren asked. First off he'd covered the window completely with a poster, making it nearly dark even though the sun was out. He'd moved everything except the bed. His laundry was everywhere, including a shirt hanging from one of the lamps that were on the end tables, which had also been moved away from the bed making some kind of bridge with a shelf going across between the two. The rest of the wall space, nice pictures gone, hidden somewhere, was now covered with a myriad of posters.

"Nothing." Nate answered, but his mouth was full of food and Warren couldn't quite be sure if he hadn't said something else.

"What is that smell?" Warren finally asked. Once the fresh food was away from his face it was all he could smell. He moved all the way around the bed as Nate watched him. Warren knelt down just a bit and could tell it was definitely emanating from the floor in that area. What was there was nothing more than Nate's socks, pulled off and inside out

making the whole room smell like a toxic waste dump to Warren's nose.

Warren had to pull away or he'd gage. When he saw Nate eating happily, he couldn't imagine how. He moved to the end of the bed and started looking over his ankle. He hadn't felt the need to touch it just then. It didn't look much different from the night before. The ice pack he had it rested on was no longer frozen.

"When you're done eating." Warren decided, "I'll get a fresh ice pack."

"You got more?" Nate asked.

"Yes." Warren answered, "You should always have two so there's one cold when you already have one in use to switch out."

"Ok, thanks." Nate said.

"Do you ever wash your socks?" Warren asked.

"A couple times." Nate answered. Warren made a face about it. Then he left without saying much more for the time being. He had to breathe air from elsewhere. It took him a few moments before he got back to wanting to eat after that as well.

He went ahead and cooked himself something and ate it. When he was done he went back for the tray and dishes from Nate. He was already finished, but he hadn't bothered to move the tray yet. "Okay getting the pack." Warren said as he lifted Nate's leg causing him to hiss. Warren pulled out the pack and set his ankle down. He then took that out, rinsing it off liberally and switching it out with the alternate pack in the freezer.

He brought that back to Nate and got him on it.

"Alright, I'm headed to work." Warren said, "I'm coming back before lunch to check on you again. Make sure this doesn't get worse."

"Ok." Nate said.

"Try and stay put if you can." Warren said.

"Ok."

Warren grabbed the tray and headed out, leaving the kid's door hanging open. He set the dishes down and quickly rinsed them off and then headed off to work.

He crammed hard while he was there, but he was also on edge in thinking he should be home watching over the kid. By eleven he couldn't stand the argument in his head about it any longer and settled himself to work on Saturday to finish catching up.

He left and headed home. He felt relief the moment he was through the door. Because he'd become sure that's where he needed to be most. He went over to Nate's still open door.

"Nate I'm home." He called.

"Okay." Nate said. "Come in."

Warren moved through the door and saw Nate had managed to get the controller of his game all the way over to him and was killing things on the TV on his game. "You hungry?"

"Almost." He answered. Warren turned to look at the TV for a moment and there was something blowing up just then. "Yes!" Nate exclaimed throwing his arms up.

"You make it to the bathroom yet?"

"Yup." Nate answered. "I had to sit though."

"You'd rather stand?"

"Yes." He answered "Seemed weird to sit just to pee."

"I can sympathies. It's about an inability to do something you can normally do over anything else." Warren said. At this point he couldn't stand it anymore. The smell was overwhelming. He didn't think he'd be able to just come into the room and talk to him.

Warren headed out and down the hall past his room that ended in the washer and dryer. He grabbed up the basket and took it back into Nate's room. Nate stopped what he was doing as Warren started picking up all his laundry and shoveling it in the basket.

"Are you going to do my clothes?" Nate asked.

“Something has to be done.” Warren answered as he kicked the basket around and kept filling it. “I don’t know how you can stand to be in here like this.”

“Its fine, Uncle Warren.” Nate said. He eyed the kid. It didn’t stop Warren from collecting it all up. “You’re starting to act like a parent.” Nate complained.

“Yea well, when appropriate.” Warren said, “It was bound to happen at some point regardless.”

He started towards the door as Nate stopped looking at his game play and the now cleaner looking room. “Uncle Warren?”

“Yes?”

“Those are all my clothes.”

“That need to be washed.” Warren said.

“Not just that. That’s all I have.” Nate explained, “I’m not even wearing anything. You have everything. What if I have to go to the bathroom?”

“I thought you wore your boxers in bed?” Warren asked.

“Well, not all the time.” He answered.

“Its fine Nate this shouldn’t take to long to clean up.” Warren said. He looked at the basket again considering it some more. “This is all you have? It’s all you brought with you in the large back pack?”

“Yea, it has all kinds of other junk in it, too.” He explained, “Stuff I’d use if I was still in Africa.”

“I’ll grab you a towel if you’re worried about it, Nate. But otherwise it’s fine, just go if you need to.” Warren said. Nate gulped while he was looking at him.

Warren left, dropping the basket on the couch before heading into the adjacent bathroom, the one guests would use that Nate had been using. Once he got into it he realized Kit had been trying to really tell him something. The kid had the whole room trashed. Warren got in the closet and found the last available towel in there.

He headed back into Nate's room. "Did you hear the cleaning service woman in here today?" Warren asked.

"Yup." Nate said continuing his battle.

"Has she ever cleaned your bathroom?"

"Guess not." Nate said.

"It's a disaster, what am I paying them for? And you need to try just a little harder not to be that bad in there. Maybe she just couldn't stand it, especially if she came into this room with the way it smelled."

"She clean your room?" Nate asked.

"No."

"Same thing." Nate explained.

"Did you tell her not to clean in here?"

"Maybe." Nate said.

"Did you say something to piss her off? Upset her? Scare her or anything?"

"I didn't scare anyone." Nate said.

"Then what?"

"I told her to clean up the broken bowl." Nate said. Warren sighed and looked at the ceiling. The room still needed to be aired out. He moved over and took down the poster. "Hey."

"You can put it back up after this place breathes a little." Warren said as he opened the window a little to let air flow through. He checked the temperature and decided it wouldn't be too cold. "Did you yell at her?"

"No." Nate replied. "She doesn't speak English well anyway. She said she didn't get paid for a kid. She wasn't cleaning for me. I said well the bowl was out there she could clean it up. She said no and I said thanks for nothing."

"That's it, no more?"

"Yes."

"Did it ever occur to you that you were being rude?"

"Yes." Nate said dropping the controller and leaning back.

“And you don’t care.” Warren said, “And we now have a guest bathroom that looks like a tornado went through it.” He headed out of the room again. He grabbed the basket and collected the phone on his way back to the washer and dryer. He set the basket down and hit speed dial.

“Warren Keith’s office?”

“Hi Leigh, Warren here.”

“How is he?”

“Grumpy.” Warren answered, “I’m too busy managing damage control to get another look at his ankle just yet. I had as yet to step foot in his room before today. That’s my way of respecting his space. But I had to, and then I went in the bathroom. It’s become apparent to me that the kid has no clothes.”

“He was wearing something when I saw him.” She countered. He favored her a chance to realize what she said before speaking again himself. “Yes, Warren. His clothing is in adequate.”

“Yes and it’s not going through the wash often enough because of this fact. Have you ever smelled the socks of a boy who wasn’t washing them just so he could keep wearing them over and over again?”

“Not to that extreme.” She answered.

“This situation needs to be rectified immediately.” Warren explained, “Since I’ve already settled myself to keep him company from this point on I’d require your assistance in the matter. In reward for such a tedious task, once completed, you would have the rest of the day off. How does that sound?”

“Sounds good.” She said. Warren started loading the washer while he continued.

“Okay I’ve got boxers. Twenty-four to twenty-six? Does that sound right? When compared to my own size, it seems tiny.”

“Yes it does.” She said.

“Several packages of those as many as five if need be.” Warren decided. “Okay I have only shorts here. This kid has no long pants anywhere. Okay size twenty eight. That seems more reasonable.”

“Boxers stretch.” She explained.

“Well if you don’t think they are too tight then go with that. Anyway, a few more shorts and at least two pair long pants. Alright I’m not having much luck on sizing these t-shirts. Can you guess for looking at him?”

“Yes, I got enough of an eye for it from just seeing him the other day I can get that done.” She agreed.

“Excellent. Also plenty of socks, the long tube kind he’s wearing. Then maybe, at least one pair of dress. One pair of slacks and two button up shirts, just incase he might ever need them at this point.”

“I’m writing it all down, Warren.” She said.

“You are the example of a real modern day assistant.” He said. “I’m sure I don’t pay you enough.”

“You turned down my last raise request.” She said.

“Give me another one to go over and we’ll go from there.” He said.

“I can do that.” She said.

“Oh and Leigh?”

“Yes.”

“Within reason, I know I should give you more time, but this is a rush job, ok?”

“I can shop with the best of them.” She said.

“Bring them by for me. I can clear accounts with you here if you like or you can check petty cash.” He said.

“I’m sure we’ll work that out.” She agreed.

“Thank you, I’ll be looking for you at my door in due time.” He said.

“Good bye.” She said. Warren hung up the phone and got the washer spinning, for all Nate had it was only one load. He was giving himself grief for not realizing the kid had been wearing the same clothes over and over again.

He then blamed his mother for not providing for him adequately enough and went on to make lunch. He brought that to Nate. He sat up for it pausing his game. Since he wasn't outwardly complaining just then Warren let him eat before getting back to his injury. He'd had his legs covered under his blanket at the time.

Warren ate something himself while he waited. He stopped to send all Nate's clothing to the dryer and came back to clean up. He was just getting to Nate's room for the tray when the door bell rang. Nate looked at him questioningly, but Warren didn't favor him with any words.

He took the tray out to the coffee table and then got the door. "Hi." Leigh said smiling toting several bags with her.

"Come in." Warren said. She stepped in and glanced around.

"Well." She said handing bags over to him, "I went over a little on what we had on hand, but we can square that come Monday, it wasn't that much."

"You're doing a good job here." Warren said peering into the bags.

"You're starting to get the hang of this parenting thing." She offered.

"If that were the case." Warren said as he set the bags down, "Than it wouldn't have taken me this long to realize he had no clothes." She smiled at him.

"Don't take it hard." She offered, "As with any case it's always a shock to find this out. In my case it's them growing out of the things they have and tossing the old smaller items aside in favor of what still fits. I'd been looking at my son when I finally just asked him if that wasn't really the same shirt he'd had on the day before and the day before that.

"It was, so off we went to restock."

"At least you notice." Warren said.

“It had already been three weeks since he was down to just two shirts.” She said and smiled. Warren smiled back at her.

“Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.” She said, “I’m going to get going and go home and see what I can’t catch my kids doing when they don’t know Mom is coming home so early.”

“You have a good weekend.”

“You too, Warren.” She said and headed back out the door. Warren locked her out and grabbed up all the bags. Nate was leaning off the side of the bed trying to see out the door as Warren went back into his room. Once he saw the bags he moved back to just sitting up.

Warren set one on the end of the bed and started to pull things out starting with packages of boxers. He tossed them out. “Had you not thought to inform me that you needed more clothes at this time?” Warren asked while he continued to empty that bag.

“I just figured you thought I’d buy clothes with the money you gave me.” He answered.

“Not that that isn’t a bad idea, Nate. It appears you found other things to spend your allowance on. In regards to this.” He started on the next bag. “I am still shouldering the responsibility of your basic needs. Food, Shelter *and* clothing.” He pulled out the button up dress shirts next and tossed them out.

“I won’t wear those.” Nate informed him.

“They are now yours. You have them available. If you do not wear them that is your choice. I am not going to tell you what to wear. In regards to the rest here, it was not picked out by me and since it all looks the same as to what I’ve seen you in I don’t think Leigh did anything against your sense of style. She did that all from one glance at you when you were in the office the other day. Should you see her again what might you say to her?” Warren had all the bags empty at this point.

“Thank you.” He offered. Warren smiled and leaned towards him some. “Thank you Uncle Warren.” He added.

“You’re welcome.” Warren said, “How about I look at your ankle now?”

“I’m not even feeling it now.” Nate said.

“Is it still on ice?”

“No.” he answered.

“Allow me.” Warren said. Nate pulled the blanket up off his legs. Warren sucked air in. He had an idea why he wasn’t feeling it just then. His ankle had swollen up. “Did you not notice this since this morning?”

“It stopped hurting real bad.” Nate answered.

“Apparently you’re not going to have any inclination towards the healing arts like your mother. This is worse Nate. I want you to get dressed. I’m going to take you to see a doctor.”

“Ok.” Nate said.

“You have plenty of nice new clean things here to wear.” Warren said, “And at some point do you see that piece of furniture over there?” He pointed and Nate looked.

“Yes.”

“That’s called a dresser. It’s customary to keep your clean clothes in. It’s something to do besides just recycle the ones lying around the floor in need of cleaning. I’ll bring one of the baskets in here as well to see how many articles you can get into it as opposed to everywhere else. Ok?”

“Yes.” Nate said. Warren headed out of his room, closing the door and then he took the tray to the kitchen where he finished cleaning up. He went back and knocked on the door. Nate answered it limping out. He’d had the one sneaker on and the other foot bare.

“Could you mangle a sock?”

“No.” he answered.

“Alright, let’s go.” Warren said as he shouldered him and helped out and down to the street where he didn’t have a problem hailing a cab.

The doctor cleared things up. His ankle had been wrenched pretty far in going past where it should go. The bruise was from the initial contact that pushed his ankle that far. The swelling was now the inflammation from the stressed ligaments. Nothing was torn however and nothing was broken. The cure, keep the ankle elevated and on ice until the swelling went down. With that knowledge Warren concluded that just as soon as Nate had stopped hurting from the bruising, he'd ignored the swelling and pushed the ice off it.

Warren had him put his foot up immediately. Now toting a very expensive ice pack they had gotten as part of their doctor's visit. Nate was lying sideways in the back seat of the cab and leaning against Warren's left arm so he could get his left foot up on the back of the seat.

At least he wasn't complaining at this point. He was quiet and respectful towards the doctor and answered all his questions. Warren was reminded that he'd been through the routine before. A bruise near his eye, one on his back and a welt on his arm. The last visit had Warren gnawing on his thumbnail so bad it had started to bleed. Explaining away all the bruises as something that might normally happen to a kid was impossible. And he was taken aside and questioned about abuse to the kid. At that point Warren had already seen so much evidence to conclude the same he felt he could do something about it then. It was Juliana begging him to lie about it that caused him not to right away, but he was just as wrong as the rest of them about it.

So he'd cracked. He agreed with the doctor's assessment. When the police arrived Warren had pointed the finger well enough. The old man denied it. Juliana denied it. And at the last Warren had watched as Nate tried to explain it away, how he'd gotten this done to him. The policeman razed him, trying to get him to slip up in his telling, but the kid was a pro by then for lying about it.

That just left a long conversation with Warren watching Juliana back up Nate's claim and tell the officer it was her battle with Warren that was the problem. He was saying it all to get back at her about something, something they fought about constantly. The House and the money. And if he could discredit her and her husband Warren would have control over it.

Warren only answered direction questions and stuck to his story, but it failed to be enough to file charges. A long investigation from child services had concluded that was not only Nate in the best of care, he had advantages over other children and Warren had seen one to many fake hugs from the old man to the kid during, especially when the kid was playing along that he went ahead and packed all of his things and left. She could have the house and the money, which she took greedily and it all just dwindled away in her husband's incapable hands.

Warren leaned his head back and sighed. He felt Nate turn a little to try and get a look at him, but he couldn't for the way he was sitting. Warren's cell phone rang and he dug that out and answered it.

"Warren."

"Your ok?"

"Yes I'm fine." Warren answered.

"Ok." Kit said coming in more clearly and bringing Warren out of his dazed state. "Did we, uhm, forget about me? The meeting, getting the plans done?"

"I'm afraid I did, Kit. I've been dealing with the kid." Warren said, "I set all my work aside."

"What's the matter with the kid?" Kit asked coming through with concern instead of sounding annoyed.

"Just a sprained ankle, really." Warren said, "Coming back from the doctor's now. Although it's important to be sure, in the end it's a wasted trip, especially when the doctor's words were to keep him off his feet and his foot up

and we've done nothing but struggle to get him there and now back."

"But he's ok?" Kit asked.

"Yes, Kit how come you didn't call me sooner?" Warren asked.

"Let's see." Kit replied, "Last time you failed to show, you got shot. I called the office and no one was there. I called your house and begged Nate to answer the phone if he was there. And I had as yet to call your cell phone because by then, since there was no one else to ask I'd convinced myself something else happened. About now I decided I needed to call just to know, before that I was afraid you wouldn't answer."

"I'm sorry Kit." Warren said, "If it had come back in my mind I'd have called to keep you aware. I tried to do too much in the office with this on my mind and I just came home to deal with this and I eventually pressed him to the doctor's office."

"Alright, Buddy. But we need to get this done. I got Henry prepped for first thing in the morning." Kit said.

"Okay, come by my place, we'll do it there. I don't want to leave the kid alone right now. I'll order pizza and we'll stay up until it gets done. I should be there soon enough myself." Warren said.

"I'm on my way." Kit said.

"See you."

"Ditto."

"Nate, my arm." Warren said, "My shoulder isn't perfectly healed yet. I just need to get my arm up out from under you."

Nate pulled himself forward and Warren lifted his arm. Nate leaned against his side and Warren rested his arm down along Nate's front side and absently grabbed at his side.

Kit was downing beers. After the pizza and getting Nate into bed, he'd been hanging on the couch watching them work for a while, with Kit swearing about one thing or another which Warren allowed since he'd been pushed out of any kind of work place to do the actual work. He already had a few before showing up while waiting at the bar, but as long as Warren kept him focused he was capable of doing the job at hand.

They got done and it was already late. Kit was smiling though because Warren had it all patched up and ready to be redrawn. "Well now all I have to do is get this to Henry by eight." Kit said and swallowed the last of the contents of his bottle.

Warren, who had edged slowly towards the beer closer to the end of the work detail, followed along. Kit led the way to the two chairs and sighed as he sat down.

"I love this spot." Kit said, "I swear you bought this chair for me."

"It matched this one." Warren said, "And it just happens to be mine."

"Hmm." Kit said holding a fresh bottle with both hands. He loaded the place up with beer before he'd even started in on the work. Warren gave into it deciding it was possible for them to drink it all and not leave any for the kid before the weekend was over.

They sat quietly for a while drinking. When Warren's sight got a bit blurry he looked at the bottle in his hand and decided he had enough and since he'd had enough he didn't think Kit needed anymore for any reason.

Warren got up and grabbed the bottle out of Kit's hand. With some delay he looked at Warren questioningly. Kit's beer was warm already just for having held it so long and not drinking it. Warren dumped the last of the beer in the bottles into the sink. He then put on coffee and was

completely amused to stand there and watch it brewing for the duration.

He brought two cups back over to the table. Knowing how that was going to go he'd dropped ice cubes into them. He waved a cup in front of Kit's drooping eyes. Kit came up from his sag and grabbed the cup. "Why?" he asked.

"Time to sober up some." Warren said.

"It's Friday."

"We still have work tomorrow."

"Oh, ok." Kit said and started to down the coffee like it was another beer. Once the difference caught up to him he turned his head and made a face. "Are you trying to kill me?"

"Sober you up."

"Done, next beer." Kit said sitting up and smiling. Warren sipped his coffee as he looked at him.

"No more."

"Oh man."

"You'll be fine." Warren decided, "We don't need an all-nighter just now."

"I don't have that much to do tomorrow."

Warren set his cup down and took Kit's empty cup and went to refill it. On his way back Kit was drinking out of the cup he'd left. "What?" Kit asked as he got close.

"You're fine." Warren said and sat down. He sipped off the cup in his hand.

"Wait." Kit said causing him to stop. "You're drinking my coffee." Warren laughed a little and set the cup down. Kit reached over the table to get at it and knocked the book off it. "Oh oh, I got it." Kit said bending down over the arm of the chair and scrambling with his hand.

"Just leave it."

"Nope nope, I got it." Kit said. He grabbed the book and slid it over by walking his fingers along it. "Yes." Kit said as he came back up to a sitting position bringing the book up with him. He was moving it to set it back down when he stopped. "Wait a minute." He said bringing it closer to look

at it. "What do you know?" He said smiling, "I had a book much like this."

"I know." Warren agreed. Kit turned the book around and flipped it open. He scanned through the pages.

"Whoa, this one has pictures, mine didn't have pictures." Kit said as he moved around in the chair to get sat up more. He stopped long enough to take another haul off of Warren's cup of coffee, when that was empty he took a drink from the other one. Warren got up to refill both of them. He came back and sat down. He set the cups down and heard Kit start laughing.

Warren turned to look at him and Kit looked back stopping his smile at Warren's expression.

"Oh come on, look at this." Kit said displaying the image on the page, "That can't be done."

"Doesn't look that hard to me." Warren said. Kit chuckled and pulled the book towards himself and pawed through it. He started laughing again. "It's not a joke, Kit." Warren said, "It's a serious book."

Kit showed him another image from it. "Have you ever thought of doing something like this before?" Kit asked.

"No." Warren answered.

"So this book is putting ideas into your head." Kit decided.

"That is the point." Warren said, "So that you are not left not knowing what to do when you get to it."

"Do you want to do this?" Kit asked.

"I am in the frame of mind that it is part of what happens when it's two men over a man and a woman, who get together for sex." Warren answered.

"Didn't sound like a yes to me."

"I'm curious about it." Warren added, "I don't find it offensive at this stage of my discovering."

"I'm curious, too." Kit said and flipped to another page. "You just can't do this with a woman."

"I would agree."

“I want to be him.” Kit said pointing at one of the figures.

“I’m sorry Kit, in most cases I’m willing to play into your sense of humor. But right now you are just drunk and it’s not coming at me as funny.”

“That’s because I’m not joking.” Kit said and looked at him.

“Give me the book.” Warren said. Kit handed it over. Warren closed it up and put it in his lap.

“I’m serious.”

“Please stop.” Warren said, “I might be inclined to be offended.”

“I read a whole book, Warren. It made me curious about it.”

“It sounds like your mocking me.” Warren explained.

“I’m not.” Kit said, “I would think you’d give me more credit in being honest with you.”

“I’m not saying you’re lying.” Warren said. Kit frowned and leaned over the arm of the chair. He reached over and grabbed the book out of Warren’s lap. He went quiet for a while paging through it. Then he chuckled at something and Warren looked away. Kit brought the book back to show Warren. He looked at the next picture.

“That’s me and that’s you.” Kit said.

“At this point I’m inclined to believe you, but you’re drunk. And your curiosity is nothing more than you being jealous of me. Just because I’m exploring something new you have to claim to be interested in the same thing.” Warren decided.

“Okay, I’m jealous.” Kit said, “But not like your saying. After all these years of knowing me. I think it should be me you explore your curiosity with. I mean if I can be curious with you, this is best. I’d hate to think some guy you hardly know would push you into something you didn’t want to do. Or worse, force you. This should be with someone you trust.

Someone who can handle you saying no about something and not get mad.”

“I would never let someone force me to do anything.” Warren decided.

“So what then?” Kit asked, “You don’t like me that way? You said I’m an attractive guy.”

“I meant it.” Warren said.

“Scale of one to ten.”

“Kit, I’m not going to feed your ego on this matter. It appears that you are using this to boost yourself.”

“I’ve said what I think of you already.” Kit said, “And in my world that was me saying ten. It’s not hard, just give me a number.”

“I am not a ten.” Warren said.

“You say that because you don’t look at you as much as I do.” Kit said. He then turned to look at Warren. “Is it because I’m Hispanic?”

“You know better than that.” Warren said.

“Well, I know it’s cool to be friends, hang out, but maybe not for anything like that.” Kit suggested.

“You should know that my eye for beauty has nothing to do with anyone’s race or coloring.” Warren said.

“Athena.” Kit said withdrawing, “I’m sorry Warren. I just didn’t know if that extended to guys or not.”

Warren turned his head sipping his coffee. “An eight.” He mumbled.

“What was that?”

“Eight.” Warren said looking back at him.

“Is that good enough?” Kit asked.

“Just drop the pursuit.” Warren said, “Before I do start to take it too seriously.”

“That’s what I want you to do.” Kit said.

“You mean it?” Warren asked, “You’re just as curious?”

“Yes.”

“And those pictures, they aren’t offensive to you?” Warren asked. Kit flipped to another page. He smiled.

“That’s me, that’s you, what do you say?” Kit asked.

“I’m afraid you’re just drunk.” Warren said. Kit grabbed the cup of coffee and downed it.

“Plenty sober here.” He insisted.

“I was enjoying your companionship.” Warren said, “Why not leave well enough alone?”

“You don’t think I’d be any good.” Kit said sinking back into the chair and going through the book some more.

“I have nothing to generate a basis for comparison on.” Warren said.

“You kissed him didn’t you?” Kit asked hiding his face behind the book.

“Yes.”

“Then you can check that out. I’m no superman, but maybe I’m not bad.”

“Fine, Kit, stand up.” Warren said. Kit bounced up out of the chair, setting the book down as he did. He moved to stand to face Warren. Warren judged his sobriety on how much he was swaying, it wasn’t much. He looked into his eyes which were looking back with no holding back. “Take off your shirt.” He instructed.

Kit looked down towards Nate’s door and back. “The kid could come out.” He said.

“He’s asleep and can’t get around too well on his on.” Warren said, “But if it makes you feel better, we can go into my room.”

“Well.” Kit said looking back, “It’s just a shirt. Everyone I know has seen me without one on already.” He started to unbutton it, glancing at Warren. “What about you?” he asked letting the shirt hang unbutton.

Warren got up from the chair and turned out all his buttons as well. He then slid out of his shirt and put it on his chair. Kit did the same.

“I can’t believe that undershirt.” Kit said, “It would make more sense on me.”

“Don’t fall into a stereo type.” Warren said causing Kit to smile.

“It’s just the style it’s more like a tank top.” Kit said as he moved closer to grab at it and pull the bottom edge out of Warren’s pants. “Wife beater.”

“Don’t say that.”

“I’m sorry, I have no couth.” Kit said. “It’s just something they call it. Really tacky, yes, but some times too close to the truth.”

“Too close.” Warren agreed as Kit pulled it off him and tossed it into his chair.

“Now we’re back to ice cream, Warren flavored ice cream with chocolate jimmies sprinkled on the front.” Kit said. He ran the back of his hand down along Warren’s hairy front as he did. “Aside from that are we really doing anything new here?”

“What do you mean?” Warren asked.

“Standing around with no shirt on?”

“No, not new.” Warren agreed and moved in towards him and ran his arms under Kit’s and around his sides getting to his back. Kit’s arms came up around Warren’s shoulders.

“We might have been here before as well.” Kit said, “Usually one of us unable to stand up and the other one hoisting him up.”

Warren ran the back of his head along side Kit’s neck until his face came up beside Kit’s.

“Okay that’s new.” Kit decided. Warren continued to turn his head as his mouth moved towards Kit’s and his lips lined up. He then pressed them against him. Kit’s hesitation was brief, after that both his hands came up to Warren’s head grabbing a hold of him and taking control of the kiss.

This lasted a while before Kit pulled away to look at him.

“Well?” Kit asked.

“That’s all you want is commentary on how good you are?” Warren asked. Kit smiled at him.

“No, I’ll just take another kiss instead, this time from you.”

“Reciprocate?” Warren asked.

“Yes.” Kit said and moved his arms and hands to get them under Warren’s so that his would come up. “Waiting.” Warren pulled his head down, almost sideways to give it to him. “Mmm.”

“Shh.” Warren said and Kit started laughing and Warren came all the way back around to thinking he was just messing with him to feed his need to make him laugh. Kit saw the look come over his face and moved in grabbing a hold of him in a more intimate embrace, running his hands along his back and the kiss was more mutual.

They didn’t hear the door open while they were busy doing that. Nate came out and was watching them for a moment. “When you’re not so busy, you think you can help me go the bathroom?” Nate asked. Kit came away from Warren quick. He turned to face the kitchen giving his backside as the only thing left for the kid to look at, but Warren could see him trying like hell to suppress laughter.

Warren headed towards Nate. “Yes.” He answered as he got close. Nate was looking him up and down as he approached. Warren gave him his shoulder to lean on and got his right hand around the kid’s back and helped him to the bathroom. Warren closed the door.

Nate was already making unhappy noises. Warren kicked the seat up as Nate used him to stay stood up. “Is that the best you can do?” Nate asked, “Kit?”

“Hush, what do you know anyway?” Warren asked.

“I know the other guy looked kind of like superman.” Nate said.

“Once again your mind is polluted by the advent of television and its desperate need to portray people in a hyper

sense of perfection. That's not an example of either the real world or what makes a person attractive. There is a lot more to consider than just one's physical attributes of which you are born with and have no choice about. It's a hundred other things that makes a person spark against you."

Nate sighed as he finished up. "Whatever."

"Aside from all that, Kit *is* a good looking man."

"Yea right."

"Nate, he is not ugly."

"I didn't say he was ugly."

"That is what your emphasis against my choice is implying." Warren said, "You just don't know. You're still just a boy."

"Whatever, done here." Nate said. They turned back towards the door and Warren started to open it. "You might just be to drunk to know any better."

"I'm not that drunk." Warren said. Nate didn't say any more as they came out of the bathroom. Warren helped him back to his bed and closed his door after he came back out. Kit was all the way in the kitchen behind the counter.

Warren reached him and wrestled him for the beer bottle he'd gotten out of the refrigerator. "Enough already." Warren said.

"With all this coffee in me, it's got me thinking I should just go home and get some sleep now." Kit decided.

"Sleep sounds like a good idea, Kit." Warren said. Kit started to head back to the chairs to get his shirt. Warren held him by his arm. Kit turned back to see what he was up to. "Bedroom is this way." Warren explained.

"You want to sleep with me?" Kit asked.

"Tell me how that's new?" Warren asked. He could think of many occasions where sleeping in the same room as well as a bed had come up, sleepovers, road trips and sometimes just passing out from the drink already on the bed.

Kit moved to follow him while Warren still held on to his arm leading him back to his room. Kit pulled away to sit on the end of the bed and pull his boots off. He got up and saw Warren watching him. "What?" Kit asked.

"I may have forgotten what you looked like without your clothes on." Warren said, "You don't care if I look now do you?"

Kit unsnapped his jeans looking right at Warren and pushed them down past his thighs. He then pulled them all the way off and was left standing with only his hat on. "Yea?" Kit asked.

"Definitely." Warren agreed as he slipped out of his shoes and managed to get undressed himself. He moved to his dresser and opened the drawer.

"No pajamas." Kit said.

"They are not pajamas. They are perfectly legitimate sleep wear for a man." Warren said.

"Whatever, go without." Kit said. Warren closed the drawer and moved over to the bed. Kit was already on the far side from the dresser and had the blankets pulled back for him. Warren crawled in and lay down.

"That was necessary." He said as Kit pulled the blankets back up over him up to his stomach. Warren turned to look at him as he lay beside him. "You okay with this?" Warren asked.

"Did you say I was an eight just to boost my ego?" Kit asked seriously. Warren smiled coming up on his elbow to get his friend in his sight. Kit looked at him waiting for an answer.

"If I wanted to just feed your ego, I'd have given you a ten." Warren said. He set his right hand on Kit's belly. "This detracts." He rubbed his hand around on it.

"You like the beer belly." Kit said.

"I like you, its part of you." Warren said. Kit looked down at where Warren's hand had stopped.

“Move your hand down.” He said. Warren moved so he could do that. “More...More.” Kit rolled up towards him and began kissing him again while Warren’s hand grabbed ahold of Kit.

7

Warren held Kit’s face by his chin and rocked his head back and fourth. “Wake up, time to go to work.” He said. Kit moaned and turned his head away. Still holding his chin Warren turned it back towards him and Kit’s eyes open. Then his mouth opened and stopped still as Warren’s face came into focus for him. He then looked around to take in where he was. He came back to look at Warren.

“Tell me.” He said, “Did we just do all of that, or was I dreaming?”

“You weren’t dreaming.” Warren said, “We did all of that.” Kit closed his eyes and pressed his lips together. “Come on get up, you need to get to Henry before it gets too late.”

Warren pulled off the bed and walked around it. He grabbed Kit’s left hand and started dragging him up. Kit groaned and came off the bed just making it to his feet. Once up Warren pulled him into the bathroom. Kit was still trying to focus on his surroundings when he caught sight of both of them in the mirror as Warren ran his hand up his arm.

“No.” Kit said getting Warren’s attention. “No we shouldn’t have done this. We’re best friends. I don’t want to lose that.”

“I’m fine with it.” Warren said moving in towards him and getting his arms around his sides. Kit looked at him skeptically. “Once we go out that door, we’ll go to work and back to our lives and nothing is going to change.”

Kit sighed relaxing some for the moment. Warren smiled at him.

“We just haven’t gone out that door quiet yet.” Warren said, “There’s still something I want to explore.”

He moved in towards Kit’s face and got his lips on his own. Kit’s lips didn’t move and he was still in reaction. Warren slowly pulled his head back taking in his friend’s look.

“No Kit.” Warren said, “Please tell me you didn’t do this once just for me? Tell me that you were just as curious to try it as I was.”

“I’m sorry, Warren.” Kit said, “I shouldn’t have...”

“No.” Warren complained. He pulled away and headed back into his room headed for his closet. He would skip getting showered. He’d already gotten cleaned up at one point and it was more something he wanted to do. He was yanking out his clothes as Kit came to stand in the doorway to the bathroom.

“I’m sorry.” He said.

“Get dressed so we can get the hell out of here.” Warren said without looking back at him. When he did look back Kit had his jeans and boots on and was reclaiming his hat from the night stand next to the bed. He glanced at Warren and then headed out of the room.

Warren wasn’t far behind him, finished dressing, but still working on his tie as he came out in time to see Kit had his shirt back on and was headed towards the front door with their work. He looked back while Warren got himself some juice out of the refrigerator. He then waited for Warren to look at him. Warren finally did, wondering why he hadn’t had the smarts to be gone already.

“I’ll see you at lunch on Monday?” Kit asked starting to smile.

“Don’t look for me.” Warren replied. Kit’s smile faded and he turned to the door and headed out it, closing it behind him.

Warren drank his juice while he squeezed his eyes shut. He then shook it off, rinsed out the glass and headed towards Nate's room. He knocked and cracked the door.

"Nate?"

"Yea?"

"You need help with anything or want to come out and be on the couch?"

"No, I'm good here, thanks Uncle Warren."

"Alright, going to work. I should only be a couple of hours. I want you to call me there if you need anything, ok?"

"Yes."

Warren closed the door and left for work.

The weekend went by pretty quickly after that. Warren catered to Nate, bathroom, food in bed and switching out his ice packs. Between that Warren almost had the place to himself, going back to just listening to music Sunday morning and reading the paper in the afternoon. That evening he got Nate all the way to the table for dinner. It was a hassle getting his foot up, but Warren felt that it was worth it. Other than speaking of his necessities Nate didn't have much more to say about anything.

Warren gave him the book and asked him to put it in his room until he could manage taking it back to the library. He almost spoke against the book itself saying it was nothing but trouble, except that he had enjoyed reading it. Nate gave him a weird look about it, but made the book disappear regardless.

After some peace and sanity Warren wasn't looking forward to Monday, it had nothing to do with the work. It was lunch he had to contend with. He couldn't quite remember refusing to meet Kit for lunch without a good reason. It was always on schedule against trips, meetings, and sick days. Sitting at his desk as it got closer to lunch Warren slowly stopped working to sit there and think about it.

He'd been waiting for Henry to drop off the new plans so he could then express them over to Mr. Ponsetter. Until that was done, he wasn't going to relax.

Part of him just wasn't surprised when Kit came into the office. He smiled and handed Leigh a tube containing the new planes. "Hi Leigh, I'm sure you know what to do with this." Kit said.

"I sure do, thank you Kit." She said. He set the tube to lean against her desk while she picked up the phone. Kit came into Warren's office carrying a paper bag. Warren eyed him as he came in. Kit closed the door and set the bag on Warren's desk. He then sat down in the chair facing Warren.

"This is work, right?" Kit said.

"Yes." Warren agreed. Kit nodded.

"We're still doing that?"

"Yes."

"But you're still pissed." Kit decided.

"Yes." Warren agreed.

"I knew this would happen eventually." Kit said, "I'd do something to get you completely pissed off at me. So much so that you'd have every right to send me right back out the door."

Warren just continued to look at him. His thumb was just sitting on his lower lip threatening to slip inside where Warren would start chewing on its nail.

"I've been thinking about it all weekend." Kit said, "Trying to find some way to make up with you. I get the idea that you somehow think I was mocking you."

"Among other things." Warren said.

"Well, I wasn't." Kit said, "But you feel however you feel about it. Because I know I feel like shit and I feel guilty. So I'm just going to ask you. If it's at all possible, what do I have to do to make up with you? Because we're going to stay working together, but the rest...I'm not just going to walk away from that without a fight."

“How about we just cut to the chase, because I can’t stand to have another day go by with this still between us. Whatever I have to do Warren. I’ll do it.”

“Anything?” Warren asked.

“Yes, anything I am humanly capable of doing.” Kit replied. Warren waited to speak, looking Kit over and thinking about it some more. He was right about work. Although Warren appeared to be above him in some kind of ranking for the pecking order of things, Warren wouldn’t be sitting in that chair anymore than Kit having his own construction company if it wasn’t really a true partnership.

That would stick regardless. Their friendship was all around it. And Warren had always felt that even if the work they did together disappeared the space would fill in somehow between them and they would stay friends. He could picture them both old and retired and sitting in the park playing chess. Kit would be asking him for the millionth time, which way does the knight move? Warren was sure he didn’t want to miss that.

“Please.” Kit said when Warren hesitated to long.

“You owe me big.” Warren said, “I’m talking huge.”

“Yes Warren.” Kit said. Warren’s voice went up because he was still pissed about it. It was once again the deception and not so much the playfulness of Kit that had done him in.

“I’m talking gigantic, Kit, understand? No quibble, no renegotiation. It’s whatever I want!” Warren explained pointing at himself. He glanced past Kit to see Leigh turn around at the last of it to look at him. She quickly turned back to facing the door. The express courier was just coming in to pick up the plans.

“Anything for you Warren.” Kit said sounding humbled. Warren had heard that before and he couldn’t quite remember any time that Kit had ever said no to a direct request, but he was sure he had.

“It’ll be difficult for you.” Warren said, “I’m not talking buying lunch or anything. It’s going to require you to be under a strain.”

“Ok.” Kit said. Warren leaned forward and pulled the bag over towards him to see what was smelling so good. “We okay now?”

“Yes.” Warren answered as he pulled out a burger from the bag and tossed it at Kit. “Are you ready?”

“Yes.” Kit replied.

“I want you to stay sober, starting right now. I don’t want you drinking a drop today, tomorrow or the next day.” Warren said. Kit had almost taken a bite, but hesitated. When Warren’s eyebrows came up he took a bite and nodded.

“Got it.” Kit said.

“Good.” Warren said.

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Barnes looked at Warren as she sat down. She started to open her mouth. “Please don’t read me today, Barnes.” Warren said.

“Ok.” She said, “Hi.”

“Hey.” He said. He leaned back in his chair and got his paper up. He heard her sigh and glanced around the end of the paper to see her looking for Kit.

“So both missing yesterday.” She said.

“Business lunch.” Warren said.

“Both of you?” she asked.

“Yes.” He answered. He peeked at her again to see her nodding and behind her he could see Kit coming towards the table. He stopped and then turned all the way back like he’d forgotten something. He stood there for a minute looking at nothing, shrugged and came back around to finish coming to the table.

Kit spun his chair around to sit in it backwards and laid his arms over the back and folded his fingers together.

“Kit.” Barnes said.

“Hey.” Kit said and then turned as their server approached the table with a bottle of beer for Kit on a tray. “Uhm...Lori right?”

“Yes Kit, Lori.” She said, “Same as it’s been for years now.”

“Right.” Kit said, “Go ahead and put that beer on my tab, but I don’t want it. Give it to some else.”

“I’ll take it.” Warren said. Kit’s head swung around to look at him and Warren raised his eyebrows.

“Yes, give it to him.” Kit agreed, “I’ll have...oh an ice tea, I guess.”

“Long Island?” Lori asked.

“Uhm no, just plain old tea, on ice.” Kit said. Lori was moving to hand the beer to Warren who set it down next to his drink and Kit eyed it for a moment and then went back to Lori. “Okay, whatever you got going on back there that resembles a steak. Rare, I mean bloody, you know what? Just walk the cow out here and hand me a knife and I’ll be set.”

“No problem Kit.” Lori said.

“Thank you.” Kit said and looked back at Warren tipping the beer to his mouth. His tongue came out of his mouth and ran along his upper lip. He then shook his head and ended up looking at Barnes.

“What the hell is going on?” Barnes asked.

“Nothing, everything is fine here.” Kit said, “Just hungry over thirsty, that’s all.”

“Uhn Hun.” Barnes said. “And if I stick my hand some where between the two of you I’d get an electric shock.”

“We’re fine Barnes.” Kit said. He looked at Warren, “Right?”

“Yes.” Warren agreed, “Everyone back to work?”

“Yes, thanks to you, Buddy.” Kit said, “Of course they are all bitching and complaining about tearing up the stuff

they already built and realizing that backing up just enough to make room for the changes means they aren't getting anything done today. Then, well then they all running around me doing that and have the balls or in some cases the female equivalent of that, to ask me what's my problem? It's only noon, but they done ask me some many times, five times in Spanish maybe twenty in English, that I said the next person to ask me what my problem is is getting a pink slip for an answer.

"That was just before I headed here."

"What's your problem?" Barnes asked.

"Nothing I can't handle." Kit said, "Just doing one of those once in a while deals where I check my powers of sobriety. I'm fine."

"You're all over the place." Barnes said, "To my eye your jonesing."

"No, I am not jonesing for it." Kit said, "Because if I were then I would be an alcoholic. I am not an alcoholic. I can do this just fine on my own. It's not like I need detox or anything. See steady hand." Kit put his hand over the table trying to hold the palm flat to facing its surface, but it was shaking just a bit. He yanked it back. "Okay, maybe not so easy, but I'm doing it and I have yet to kill anyone, ok?"

"Why?" Barnes asked.

"Because I can." Kit said, but his eyes glanced over to watch Warren take another sip from the brown beer bottle. He then chased that with a sip from his drink. "Just need a cigarette to help me along and if I can't have that, then beef, meat, raw." Kit said. Warren's gaze turned towards him and smiled. "Bloody raw." Kit said. Warren finally laughed but Kit's humor wasn't amusing himself at this point.

"You guys are going to work this out, right?" Barnes asked.

"Yes." They both answered looking at each other.

Lori shoved a large plate with a large piece of bloody steak in front of Kit and sat up just to enjoy looking at it. "Thank you." Kit said with genuine feeling.

"You're welcome." Lori said as she slid the drink beside it. The steak kept Kit busy and happy for a while.

"I hate to say this." Barnes said, "But that is starting to look good to me and I try not to eat dead animal wherever possible."

"You can't have any, its mine." Kit said. She laughed.

"If I wanted some that bad I'd order my own, but maybe not enough to feed three people like yours is." She said.

"Well, even if you just wanted a taste, just to try it, no." Kit said, "I need this, I need all of it."

"Alrighty then." Barnes said. She looked over at Warren as he glanced down at his newspaper. "I hope this doesn't last too long."

Warren didn't comment.

The next day Kit was even worse. After the same size steak he had Todd bring him onion rings, nachos and cheese, and chili fries. As far as they could tell he would eat it all. Barnes didn't even ask him questions about it. She just watched with a fascination people might have to witness a bad accident. She might not want to, she just couldn't stop.

Warren wasn't though. He'd seen it all before and he remembered just how hard it was for Kit to do. It came about right before he proposed marriage to his second wife. And even after knowing him well before than, knowing he liked his occasional beer, she was afraid he was nothing more than a drunk. So he stopped drinking to prove her wrong. That's where the beer belly came from, not from drinking beer, but eating to kill off the craving.

"How's your hand today?" Barnes asked. Kit put down his fork long enough to hold it out where it was steady. "That's good."

“Not a problem.” Kit said, “Just needed to clear the piping a little.”

“So you can clog it up with cholesterol.” She said.

“This is nothing.” Kit said, “You should have seen me when I was a kid. There were three kitchen tables in my house. And all of us kids zoomed over them like Hoover vacuum cleaners leaving nothing but the cleanly gnawed bones.”

Barnes started laughing and Kit smiled for her, but it didn't last when he looked over at Warren's expression as he flipped the pages of his newspaper. He frowned at him and then went back to his variety meal.

“Don't eat all day.” Warren said.

“Why not?” Kit asked.

“You'll be at my house for dinner.” He replied.

“I will?” Kit asked.

“Yes.” Warren replied.

“Ok” he said. Warren glanced at his open faced stare, then at Barnes and then went back to reading his paper.

9

Kit showed up just as Warren was putting food on the table. Nate had already wobbled to it and looked at his Uncle. “It's Kit.” Warren said.

“Hmm.” Nate said. Warren went over and opened the door. Kit was facing down the hall and then looked at Warren.

“Should I be checking your breath?” Warren asked.

“You don't trust me?” Kit asked.

“Some people stumble, at least your trying.” Warren said. Kit leaned into Warren's face and breathed into his nose. “Come in.” Warren said.

“I hope you don't call that a kiss.” Nate said as Kit came towards the table.

“Sobriety test, the old fashion kind.” Kit explained as he came over and sat at the table.

“Why no kiss?” Nate asked. Kit looked over at Warren as he took his seat at the table.

“He didn’t ask me.” Warren said. Kit looked back at Nate.

“Why would I want to kiss him?” Kit asked.

“You know what? Never mind.” Nate said, “I haven’t asked, but I thought you guys had something going on.”

“Best friends.” Kit said.

“You know what I mean.” Nate said.

“He might not remember last Friday.” Warren said.

“Oh shit.” Kit said, “What did I do?”

“I knew you guys were toasted.” Nate said. Kit looked at Warren helplessly.

“You remember most of it.” Warren said.

“I do.” Kit admitted, “What’s he talking about?”

“Just forget it, sorry I asked.” Nate said and started in on his food. “Not my business.”

“Okay but now I need to know.” Kit said, “What did I do?” Nate finished his bite of food while Kit sat there without touching any food yet.

“You kissed him.” Nate said evenly.

“In front of you?” Kit asked exasperated.

“Just don’t talk about it ok?” Nate said, “Sorry I said anything. You look all freaked out, ok?”

Kit turned to look at his plate and glanced at Warren. “That’s not a bad idea.” Warren echoed between bites. “I’m sure nobody got scared.”

Kit had his fork up but stopped to keep looking at Warren. “Your food is getting cold.” Nate added. Kit started eating. After a while Nate narrowed his eyes at him. “What is wrong with you?” Nate asked.

“Nothing.” Kit said.

“Your eating like a pig, you weren’t doing that before.” Nate pointed out.

“Well...I thought most kids ate like pigs, like if they didn’t eat their food it would evaporate, why you so different?” Kit asked. Nate turned his head away to look at the floor. “Uhm.” Kit said, “I have no couth right now. At this point your table manners have me beat.”

“Just slow down before you choke on something, geez.” Nate said looking back at him. Kit licked his lips as he looked at the kid. “How does it taste?” he added.

“You know what?” Kit answered, “Everything taste great right now, but it doesn’t last. So I just get something else to eat. I haven’t eaten this much in...I can’t remember.”

“It shows.” Nate said leaning towards him and looking down his front.

“What this?” Kit asked bouncing his belly with his hand.

“Oh gross.” Nate said, but he was laughing and falling back in his chair. Kit smiled at him.

“Happens to the best of us, kid.” Kit said. “I used to be called tooth pick back in the day.”

“A thousand years ago.” Nate echoed.

“Okay, you keep thinking that, before you know it your wondering why you’re not a kid anymore yourself and people start saying act your age Kit.”

“They wouldn’t call me Kit.” Nate said.

“Right.” Kit said and smiled. Nate smiled and shook his head back and fourth. Kit finished his food and looked at Warren. “Got any more?” he asked.

“No.” Warren said, “That was a healthy portion of food.” Kit looked disgruntled and sat up against the chair back. When Nate finished he looked over towards the kitchen. “I’ll clean up tonight, Nate. You can start doing it again tomorrow.”

“Ok.” Nate said as he pushed his chair back and stood up. He pushed his chair back and hobbled across the room towards the bathroom.

“How’s he doing?” Kit asked.

“He’s favoring it right now, but the swelling has gone down and his coloring is almost back to normal. He’ll be walking normal in a few more days.”

“And you?”

“Better, just an occasional reminder now again that there was something wrong at one point.” Warren said. Nate came out of the bathroom and headed towards his door.

“I’ll be in my room.” Nate said, “I shouldn’t need to come back out again for several hours, but by then I probably will.”

“Night Nate.” Warren said.

“Night.” Nate said and disappeared into his room. Warren got up and started to clean up. Kit jumped up to help, passing him everything from the table as Warren handled the clean up in the kitchen.

“He’s got some idea about us.” Kit finally said.

“You’re more than welcome to explain your position on it to him.” Warren said looking at Kit. Kit made a face.

“Uhm.” He said. Warren smiled. “I’m guessing he knows something about you though?” Kit asked.

“He was the one who checked out the book from the library for me.” Warren explained.

“*What?*”

“It became a point of interest to him that when I went to meet Chief for the second time I failed to see it as a date. And he thusly concluded since it was new to me that I might have questions. So he got the book for me to read.” Warren explained.

“They let a kid check that out?”

“Apparently.” Warren answered.

“Ok.” Kit said.

“He read it himself the week before when you stayed with him.” Warren said.

“You think that’s a good idea?” Kit asked.

“I don’t know why you’d even ask that.” Warren said, “The moment you found out about me, what did you do?”

Kit shrugged as if he'd forgotten which Warren was sure he hadn't.

"You read a book about it." Warren said.

"Yea, but I'm not a kid."

"You are more than welcome to explain to me your position on keeping a child ignorant of things. Especially things that are near to them, as in me being here and him being worried about what it means when his uncle starts dating a guy."

"And this helped?" Kit asked.

"Yes." Warren said, "I would never hinder anyone's quest for knowledge. I don't think at his age he should be ignorant of sex."

"Yea, regular sex though." Kit said. Warren finished cleaning up and stood there and stared at Kit not saying anything. "What?"

"You should reassess your statement with more clarity." Warren said.

"I offended you." Kit decided.

"And yourself."

"Whoa whoa." Kit said, "We're talking about you and the kid knowing about it. Maybe he should know you're different, but that book was as you said, serious."

"Which definitely had a point of him no longer thinking it was something to make fun of and laugh at." Warren said. Kit looked at the floor.

"I'm sorry." Kit said.

"I wasn't offended before, Kit." Warren said.

"But you are now."

"As long as you think its best to look down on me for something you'd actually participated in, yes."

"I'm sorry Warren. I swear to you, I am not mocking you or looking down on you. I'm the damn fool here who doesn't know any better, that's why I am suffering at your request."

“It can’t really harm you.” Warren said. He came out of the kitchen and headed towards his chair and sat down. Kit meandered towards him and finally sat down in the companion chair.

Kit sat there fidgeting against his own thoughts. Warren thought he was struggling for something to say, something that would end it and maybe allow him to go back to being able to have a few beers now and again.

Warren let him stew on it while he relaxed and just enjoyed him being near, which he’d always done. He looked at Kit and he looked back at him.

“I don’t know what to say anymore, Warren.” Kit said, “I think its fubar now.”

“No.” Warren said, “Look at where you are at. I invited you here.” Kit took a deep breath and then let it out.

“Why do I feel so uncomfortable than?”

“Because you did something you cannot undo.” Warren said. “You staked a claim where as maybe you shouldn’t have. Maybe you should have been happy with what you had.”

Kit dropped his head into his hands and pushed his hat back so that it was now resting on the back of his head while he leaned forward.

“You want a beer?” Warren asked after watching him for a while.

“This is a trick question.” Kit said bringing his head up and pulling his hat back in place.

“Do you want to go back to having a beer?” Warren asked.

“Yes.” He answered. Warren got up from the chair and headed towards the refrigerator and pulled out a bottle of beer. He opened it on the counter. “This isn’t some kind of test is it?” Kit asked, “One where I’m not really suppose to take it from you and drink it until you actually say something like Simon says you can drink again now Kit, is it?”

Warren walked over to him. "You can have the beer. I am offering it to you. I'm not a Simon says kind of guy." He held out the beer and Kit reached for it. Warren rolled back on his feet and pulled the beer just out of reach.

"Oh man." Kit said. Warren smiled at him.

"You want the beer?"

"Yes." Kit answered. Warren took another step back.

"Come and get it." he said. Kit got up and walked over towards him and reached for it again. Warren stepped back and Kit stopped and put his hands on his hips. "I know you want it. Come and get it." Warren turned around and headed for his room, tipping up the beer and taking a sip. It wasn't too much longer before Kit sprinted after him coming into Warren's room.

Warren let him take the beer. He then moved behind Kit to close the door. Kit tipped the beer up to his lips and began to down it. While he was busy doing that Warren's hands came around his sides and unbuttoned his shirt from behind. Kit finished the beer.

"Ahhh." He noted. Warren pulled his shirt off with his left and grabbed the empty bottle with his right. He then set them aside. Kit slowly turned around to look at him. "No." he said evenly.

"Admit it." Warren said sounding annoyed, "You had to get drunk to be able to do that with me."

"Alright." Kit said, "I admit it. I felt the need to get loose as a goose before I could do any of that."

"That's fine for you Kit." Warren said and narrowed his eyes, "Now it's my turn."

"No Warren, anything else, anything at all. A month of sobriety, anything." Kit said.

"No renegotiation." Warren reminded him. "This is what *I* want. And what I want from you is *you* stone cold sober."

Kit just looked at him for a while. Warren waited patiently. Kit licked his lip and gulped with his Adam's apple

going up and down. “This will end it?” Kit asked, “We go back to business as usual after this?”

“Yes.” Warren agreed. He might not have expected Kit to come at him so quickly. Kit moved forward, pinning Warren to the door with his body pressed up against him. He came at his face with his recently moistened lips and started up on Warren’s left cheek and ran them down along it, gliding over his lips. He came back to get Warren’s nose in his mouth and came back down to Warren’s mouth and started kissing him, mouth wide open and pushing Warren’s head to the side. Warren’s hand came up running over the back of Kit’s head and knocking the hat off.

Kit brought his arms down, grabbing Warren and pulled him back as Kit walked backwards heading toward the bed and kissing Warren’s lips repeatedly. When he got close he swung Warren around and tossed him onto the bed on his back. He came down on him and kissed him again.

Kit came up some keeping eye contact and gliding over Warren’s face as he undid Warren’s tie with ease and familiarity. He then pulled it away from Warren tossing it to the side somewhere. He then pushed out all Warren’s buttons on his shirt and pulled it open, revealing his chest which didn’t have an undershirt on it. Warren decided he didn’t want one in the way this time. At this point he thought maybe Kit would have just ripped the damn thing off him the way he was going.

Left hand on Warren’s head, right hand gliding up Warren’s left arm Kit moved down along Warren’s chest and grabbed his nipple with his teeth and tugged quickly. Warren was glad he remembered that much, how much he liked it. He moved back up along him moistening Warren’s skin with his tongue as he went and getting up on his neck. He stopped there to get his mouth wide open on it and acting like he might just be getting ready to take a bite. He then slid his mouth along Warren’s jaw back towards his mouth.

Kit dropped his weight on Warren and brought both arms around his head as he took in his lips again. Warren was already lost to it. Everything they had done before was tenuous and kind of awkward. It wasn't anything like what Kit was doing now. Warren decided he was right, with Kit sober it was a whole different ballgame.

Kit came up for air and looked into Warren's face again. Maybe he was waiting for some kind of protest. Warren couldn't be sure. He could feel Kit pressed up against him along the length of his body and as far as he could tell, they were both ready to go.

"Anything for you Warren." Kit said and went back to running his lips all over the other man's face.

Warren woke up to Kit sitting up and looking down at him from where he sat on the bed. "Hey." Warren said.

"Are we done yet?" Kit asked, "Can we go back to being friends now?"

"Yes." Warren agreed.

"Good." Kit said and looked away. He rolled his head back to look at Warren. "You know. I was thinking that as long as we aren't really occupied elsewhere, that maybe we could get together and do this again."

"That's fine Kit." Warren said.

"Good." Kit said, "And the other day when you pulled me into the bathroom, was that to take a shower together?"

"Yes."

"Do you still want to do that?"

"Yes." Warren replied. Kit hopped off the bed and led the way to the bathroom.

10

Barnes looked back and fourth between them as she sat down. Kit was back to having his beer and Warren was back to hiding behind his paper.

“Alright.” Barnes said as Kit smiled at her. “Are you going to let me in now? For two days you’ve been looking at each other almost hatefully and now you’re just back to normal?”

“Yes.” Kit said, “Actually it’s better then normal today. All the kids got right to work. It’s always helpful to pass out breakfast burritos and coffee to get them started.”

“You should do that everyday.” Warren decided.

“Then how would they know when I’m actually trying to do something nice for them if I did it everyday?”

“Good point.” Warren said.

“Waiting.” Barnes said.

“For what?” Kit asked.

“The final word on what’s going on between the two of you. The only other sticky thing about it was you getting pissed about Warren’s discovery about himself and just a bit of jealousy that he and I were talking about things that don’t include you.”

“There was that.” Kit agreed. “I think I’ve set myself straight about it now.” Warren chuckled behind his newspaper.

“Well?” Barnes asked.

“You can’t stand not knowing, can you?” Kit accused.

“Fine, yes, I want to know why you two have been acting this weird.” She agreed.

“Maybe you just want to know if your premonition was right.” Kit said. Warren dropped his paper to look at them.

“Ok, maybe.” She agreed.

“What did you see?” Kit asked.

“No you tell me, if you can’t then I’ll have to live with it.” she said. Kit laughed.

“It’s not that hard to guess really, is it?” Kit asked.

“I’m still not going to.” She said.

“Now why do I feel like the two of you have said something that I don’t know about?” Warren asked.

“Nope, not anything like that.” Kit promised, “Usually when two people are fighting and then they are all nice towards one another, everyone knows they kissed and made up. I don’t get it Barnes, especially with your powers of perception you should have figured it out manually and without your Glenda the good witch powers.”

“Oh Jesus.” Barnes said. Kit laughed and she smiled at him. “You’re telling me what?”

“That Warren and I got together.” Kit said, “Why should the two of you be the only ones having a same sex experience?”

“And this was just sex, right?” she asked.

“Of course.” Kit admitted.

“And nothing else happened?” she asked.

“Like what?” Kit asked shrugging. She groaned and dropped her head on the table. Then she looked up to see the two of them shrugging at one another.

“Never mind.” She said, “I should have known better than to even ask.”

“Your sister on line one.” Leigh called through. Warren clenched his teeth thinking he should have made some attempt to contact her about Nate needing to see the doctor. He picked up the receiver and hit the line.

“Warren.” He said.

“Hey.” She said, “I need to talk to you about something.”

“Nate’s fine now.” Warren said, “It was just a sprain.”

“I know all about Nate’s injury.” She said sounding acidy to him. “He’s a kid. Kids get beat up from time to time.”

“It’s nice to hear that note of concern.” Warren said.

“I call him on his cell phone all the time Warren. You’re just at work when I do. I’m keeping up with his activities. All of them.”

“What do you want then Juliana?” Warren asked.

“I need to talk to you about something.” She said, “Some guy I met.” Warren groaned inwardly not wanting to here any kind of love story from her just then.

“Go ahead.” He said.

“Well it’s really odd.” She said, “Because around here it’s mainly people of color. And a white person or even an English speaking white person is noticeable. So I’d say that just in being here this long I know everyone like that. So I was a bit startled to see this man. I can tell you that I can stand comfortably around a hundred native men in this place and not have a care in the world. But one white guy who looks out of place, I wasn’t interested in having a conversation with him. Not to mention I was out in the field getting water and was at present alone.”

“Did anything bad happen to you?” Warren asked.

“Allow me to tell it to you.” She said.

“I just don’t have the time to hear about some kind of romance you’ve had out there, wherever you are. Can you manage to get to the point?”

“Warren, damn you.” She said, “I’m calling you at my expense to tell you something. I called to talk to you, but fine whatever. I’ll condense it for you. I’ll make it quick so you can get back to your own little life in your own little world, where you can be happy and pretend you don’t even have a sister.”

“I’d find that hard to do as long as I have to watch over your son for you.”

“Whatever, just let me spit this damn piece of information out and I’ll leave you the hell alone, ok?”

“Please.” Warren said.

“Anyway.” She went on, “As I said I had no desire to talk to him and I was just trying to get him to part ways. Then he said ‘I’ve spoken to Warren, I’d like to speak with you now.’”

“I’m to believe that you met some guy from back here that knows me all the way out in Africa?” Warren asked.

“Did I not mention that this encounter was odd?” she asked right back, “At this point, I’d like to get off the phone with you myself so I can get back to my life and stop thinking about you. But I haven’t been able to do that since, so please just shut up and let me finish.”

“Go ahead.” Warren said.

“I don’t know why I tell myself if I just talk to you normally you’d just follow along.” She complained, “God.”

“The point, Juliana, beyond your rambling and furtive imagination where you end up meeting the most wonderful man in the world...”

“Shut up.” She said. They were both quiet for a moment after that. He heard her breathing. “Anyway, that got my attention long enough to keep me from running away from him. So I let him talk to me some. He didn’t want to say anything about himself. He just wanted to know a few things about me. So he starts asking, mainly about my childhood. Tell me that doesn’t sound odd?”

“Unbelievable actually.” Warren said.

“Well since that’s all dead and buried I didn’t see the harm in answering a few questions. It seemed like he just wanted to know how my childhood went. Was it ok? Were my parents nice, etc? After that he asked if I’d ever been married, did I have any children. Well this conversation needed to end there, because I don’t really want to go back to thinking about all that. So I told him it was none of his God damn business, although if he knows you and he’s talking to me he has to know that we no longer have the same last name and that implies a marriage.” Warren groaned inwardly thinking about how she never even bothered with the divorce. She’d just left him and went on with her life. She didn’t have much to worry about once he went to prison for twenty years to life.

“Today?”

“I’m getting to it Warren. Ok? I don’t like this, that man makes me uncomfortable with him acting so familiar.

But fuck it ok? He's gone now, I ran the fucker off and so you can get back to your damn job and you better start taking better care of my kid, I'll sum it up and hang up. He left, but he left with a message. He said when I spoke to you again to give you a message, so here's your goddamn message, Warren. Chief says hello."

The line dropped after that. Warren held the phone for a while just thinking about what she said. When it started to complain he hung it up.

Warren was just getting inside the door to his apartment when he realized he was so disturbed he'd left his briefcase at work. He took a deep breath and closed the door deciding if he really needed it he'd just go back to the office for it.

Nate came out of his room, walking normally again he walked over to the back of the couch and leaned against it. Warren looked at him and then started to take off his tie. Once he had that off he hung it up on the coat rack and pushed out his top three buttons. Then he rolled up his sleeves.

"Are you doing that because of me?" Nate asked.

"I had thought I was capable of trying new things. In regards to this I didn't think it was such a bad idea, especially against the heat of the day. It's just something I would have to get use to." Warren said.

He pressed the palms of his hands to his forehead for a moment leaning his head forward. He then looked up to see Nate still watching him. "You're not wearing a t-shirt either." He mentioned.

"Is that going to bother you?" Warren asked.

"No." Nate said, "It's just your in white and I can tell that's all."

"Again, something new for me to try and work against the heat of the day." Warren said. Nate eyed him some more suspiciously.

“Ok.”

“I’m not mad at you.” Warren clarified, “But I’m sure it’s obvious to you that I’m upset.”

“I guess.”

“Well I received a call from your mother today.” He said. Nate made a face expecting the worst. “I really don’t want it to be another issue between us. I thought I’d mention this though. And as well, when your mother calls again, please tell her to call me back on the matter we spoke about. Tell her I apologize for being rude and it is a concern that we should talk about at length and my abrupt behavior was inappropriate.”

“Ok.” Nate said.

“She also mentioned something along the lines that I interpreted as you getting beat up. You don’t have to tell me, but I’m here to talk about it with you if you want.”

“What do you mean?” Nate asked.

“Your injury Nate, she seemed to be under the impression it was the results of some conflict between you and someone else? I might also venture it’s what really happened to your skate board.”

Nate hesitated still looking at him. Warren turned to head towards the kitchen to get something cool to drink. “Ok.” Nate said, “Some kid for no reason came up and tried to take my skate board. Well, he’s got it now. All he had to do was kick me in my shin like that and I really couldn’t run after him.”

“I’m sorry Nate. You and I both know that the city isn’t always safe. You need to look out for yourself.” Warren said. He then took a breath, “And we could go get you another skate board.”

“No.” Nate said.

“Why not?”

“It’s just something someone can take from me. I don’t want it.” Nate said. Warren took that as giving up. He also felt bad for the kid in general.

“If you should change your mind, let me know.” Warren said and went on towards the refrigerator to get himself some water on ice. Nate followed him over and leaned against the counter. Warren looked at him. “What?”

“Jake’s back now.” Nate said.

“Good.” Warren said.

“I thought about having him over, but I don’t want to.” Nate said.

“Why not?” Warren asked.

“You might have company.” Nate said, “And you might not get dressed on Sunday.”

“We already clarified that.” Warren said, “If you have company I will be dressed on Sunday. I’d respect you.”

“And?”

“And if it’s a concern I’ll make a point not to have any company of my own while you do. I think it would be good for you to see your friend. I’m guessing it’s been a while.”

“Yes.” Nate said.

“I can also just as easily drive you to him and you could stay with him if you like.” Warren said.

“I don’t like his mother.”

“Why?”

“She never stops talking, she doesn’t leave us alone and we never have any fun. At least here we could just play X-Box and go wherever we wanted without all that.”

“He’s welcome here, Nate.” Warren said. Nate made faces with his lips. He then pushed off the counter.

“I’ll go call him then.” He decided and headed back to his room.

Warren hadn’t opened his paper. He was also not eating. He was drinking an ice water at this point and Kit kept eyeing him over Barnes talking about sports with him.

When she finished her telling of whatever game had taken place Kit smiled at Warren.

“Hey.” Kit said.

“Yea?”

“I was thinking I’d stop by tomorrow.” Kit said, “Maybe...maybe just stay in town, too.”

“Sorry Kit, not this weekend.” Warren said. Kit was already nodding and turning his head back to Barnes. “The kid is having company, so I told him I wouldn’t.”

“Right right.” Kit said, “Still making him nervous.”

“Yes.” Warren agreed.

“And there’s something else.” Kit decided.

“I agree.” Barnes said.

“I am just sitting here contemplating things.” Warren said, “Nothing necessarily wrong here.”

“Still.” Kit said, “How about you let us help you think.”

“I don’t even want to go back to it, so I am loath to drag you back to it as well.” Warren explained.

“Waiting.” Kit said.

“Alright.” Warren said coming forward and leaning on the table. “If I’m to believe this isn’t the results of Nate being completely honest with her and giving her his name, Juliana claims that a man spoke to her all the way over in Africa. That this man had a strange interest in her life. He also said he’d spoken with me. And to make it clear he requested she tell me he said hello.”

“Who?” Kit asked.

“Chief.”

“In Africa?” Kit asked.

“That was my reaction.” Warren said, “But I can’t help but ponder it further and draw a new conclusion about him and other things.”

“Listening.” Kit said.

“So am I.” Barnes agreed.

“This goes back to the whole suspicion of people watching me and why. I concluded it was over, that they took

a blood sample and concluded I was not the person they were looking for. Now I think maybe Chief was related to the blood sample. That in fact it wasn't a paternity test, but trying to make enough of match to discover something else. That perhaps I am his brother."

"You were kissing your brother?" Kit asked.

"Kit please, let me jostle this further than you can rattle it all you want. Along those lines everything coming from him begins to make sense. His approach, his resistance and now the idea that he's also sought out Juliana as well as me." Warren said.

"Warren, if he was your brother or even if he thought he was, why would he let you do that?" Kit asked.

"His point was lost on me, Kit." Warren said, "He was resisting me and trying to convey that no matter how connected he might feel with me, how much he wanted to know me it wasn't to be about being lovers. And I wasn't hearing it at all. My excuse is at a glance here's a man I'm attracted to. Being new to me in general I wasn't being cautious about ulterior meanings to the event. My acceptance pushed me on and he as well, may have underestimated my reaction and found that when I wanted something I was hard to resist."

"But he still let you do it." Kit said.

"And said it was causing him a great amount of guilt." Warren said, "He also said at one point it might just be the worst possible thing he could ever imagine himself doing. Then he said as hard he was trying I was hard to resist. You can sympathies can't you Kit?"

"Sure." Kit said and smiled.

"How does he end up being your brother?" Barnes asked.

"Yea, he doesn't look anything like you." Kit said.

"Mores the reason for wanting to do the test, to be sure. I don't know enough about it myself, but with Juliana and I being twins we share about eighty to ninety-five

percent of the same DNA. So I am thinking should we have the same parents that they may find as much as fifty percent matching. Again, I'm no expert and I'm just sitting here practically making this up as I go along.

"And Barnes, as I said, Juliana still stands by her words that we were in fact adopted. To further that Ba'mosa made the suggestion that in order to get children who looked similar to them they may have paid a lot of money causing someone to do something unethical, like take us from our parents without them giving us up. That would be the potential for brothers and sisters, especially if they had to replace the ones they lost."

"Whoa." Barnes said, "It sounds elaborate."

"What Kit?" Warren asked against his expression.

"You know my cousins. The ones that went missing?" Kit asked.

"Yes." Warren said.

"They were adopted, their adoptive parents didn't know they had been lost. They were just never traced back to their parents. It wasn't that their parents didn't want them anymore, they just got lost on a long ass road trip and disappeared." Kit said.

"Ok." Barnes said. "Am I the only one who had a normal family?"

"Yes." They both agreed with her.

"So now what?" Kit asked.

"I will definitely have a more reserved approach towards him when he returns." Warren replied.

"Ok." Kit said, "At least now you understand that he can't be that way for you, even if his answer is different than what you think it is."

"Yes." Warren agreed, "I may as well accept that now. He's not going to be that way with me."

Kit looked all the way to the other side of the bar hiding his face from Warren. Warren waited a moment while he did that.

“Kit?”

“Yes?” he answered without looking back.

“How do you know what he looks like?” Warren asked. Kit turned to look back at him.

“I saw you with him here at the bar.” Kit answered.

“You weren’t here.” Warren said.

“Not where anyone could see me. I guess I was kind of stocking you about it.” Kit said and smiled.

“You didn’t believe me.” Warren said.

“Always helps to see things with your own eyes. You *were* out in public.” Kit said.

“Ok.” Warren said.

“And he does look just like Superman.” Kit said, “That might explain it. He left you to fly off to Africa, probably took him five minutes.”

“Stop.” Warren said, “He’s had plenty of time to get there like anyone else.”

“Ok.” Kit said. Warren ran his hand along his chin thinking about it though.

12

Warren drove Nate out to pick up Jake. Round trip it took two hours on and off the highway. That included a quick trip through a drive thru to get dinner along the way. At first the boys were quiet not having been near one another in person in a long time. But before Warren got back to the apartment, deciding to park his car curbside for the weekend, they were already shoving each other back and fourth in the back seat just for something to do.

Warren was relieved when they could get out of the car. It was getting harder and harder to ignore their rambunctious behavior, which he was doing to just cut Nate some major slack.

Warren headed for his chair once inside and the boys tore off for Nate’s room to start gaming. They had the sound

cranked and the door open, but it was still much quieter than when Nate was playing it in the living room. Warren was lost in his paper he'd been avoiding reading over thinking too much during the day. He finally set it aside and saw the boys had come out on the couch and were channeling surfing.

"You guys need anything more to eat?" Warren asked.

"No." Nate said firmly. Warren scratched his head realizing he was interacting when he wasn't supposed to be. He remembered Ba'mosa's words about it. Even though he thought about it, he wasn't going to just shuffle off to his room just yet though.

He decided to get up and make something anyway and leave it for them. He was busy doing that when he noticed Jake glancing back at him one too many times. It was more than just trying to see what he was doing. He'd get final word when he smelled the food. Warren finished with it and pushed it out on the counter, but didn't offer it. It got Nate turned around as well at one point. Then he looked disgruntled at Warren's effort and sunk back into the couch.

Jake came up on his knees turned around and began to just look at Warren until he finally looked back. "Yes?" Warren requested. Nate grabbed at Jake's arm trying to get him to turn around.

"Is it true you date guys?" Jake asked. Warren turned to see Nate come up to join him in the way he was kneeling and looking back.

"Shh." Nate was trying to say.

"Before I respond to that with an actual answer." Warren said, "I might inquire as to what would bring you to such a question?"

"Stop." Nate said looking at Jake. Jake ignored him.

"Nate said so." Jake explained. Nate gave Warren a guilty expression.

"I thought you'd prefer it others didn't know?" Warren asked looking at Nate. He looked away and groaned. Warren looked back at Jake. "Yes, it's true."

He could tell by the kid's reaction he wasn't expecting that as an answer. He leaned back and looked at Nate with his surprise. "Just..." Nate was saying and mouthed words at Jake. Jake's eyes moved from Nate's and back to Warren's.

"Is it also true that you are just kind of an asshole?" Jake asked, "With the way you just say things to Nate."

Warren looked at Nate as he started to squirm. "Well." Warren said picking up the phone, "Now that you know, there's no point in my being reserved about it. I should call my friend and see if he's not too busy to come over tonight." Warren started punching numbers and stood up. He eyed Jake as he scanned him up and down in his shirt and tie.

"I think you *are* an asshole." Jake said and turned on the couch and slid back down to face the TV. Warren pulled the phone away and hung it up. At this point the boys were done interacting and stared at the TV blandly. Warren put the phone back and headed off into his room.

They'd devoured what he had made for them. They'd also left the mess. Warren came out to this fully dressed. He was in a mood to start over. Maybe just keep things mellow by not making an issue about any of it. He'd do it for Nate, because at the moment he was in the mind to send Jake packing. And since he's screwed Nate's chance of being friends with Brandon and forbidding him to have Mindy as a friend, he was going out of his own way about the friend Nate had already had for a long time.

He cleaned up the mess and started to get things ready to make breakfast when the boys came out of Nate's room. They meandered over to where Warren was. "Would you guys like to do anything today?" Warren asked, "Miniature golf, amusement park?"

"Actually." Jake said, "I'm pretty sure we don't really want to do anything with you. And we don't want any breakfast. I'm treating. Bye."

Jake led the way out of the apartment as Nate silently followed locking them out the door. Warren began putting things away. He really didn't need a whole breakfast just for himself. He'd do just fine with coffee. He got that started and went to get his paper. The morning was pretty quiet for reading and he decided he wouldn't bother with lunch either, eating a little food just for himself and he'd stop trying to interact. Maybe he'd let the boys call out for Pizza or something.

He was lost to his surroundings when the sound of the door flying open brought him back. The two boys came through the door all excited and smiling. Warren glanced and went back to his paper. Then he realized the two of them were just standing in front of him. Warren finally dropped his paper to see them both smiling.

Jake twirled the skate board on its end off the floor. "Look." He said proudly, "We got Nate's board back. That guy was a wuss against the both of us. He started running the minute he saw us. Smacked him good and took the board back."

Warren looked at their proud faces for a moment. "Do you really think responding to acts of violence, where someone takes something from you, effectively committing a crime that the just thing to do is merely reciprocate the same actions back at them?" he asked.

Both their faces dropped. Jake started to turn away. "I should have guessed you wouldn't agree with standing up for yourself, being just a fag and all." He led the way towards Nate's room, hoisting the board over his shoulder as he went and Nate followed silently while Warren literally had his tongue in his mouth with his teeth. He stopped when he tasted blood.

No Pizza, he'd cook.

While trying to decide what to cook the doorbell rang. Warren got up from the chair already swearing about it in his

mind, wondering who the hell it could possibly be. He unlocked and opened the door to find Kit standing there.

“Hey.” Kit said.

“Kit, I thought I told you not this weekend.” Warren said.

“Yea, I was just in the neighborhood though. Thought I’d just say hi.” Kit said.

“Hi.” Warren said.

“They here?”

“Yes.”

“In the room?” Kit asked.

“Yes.” Warren agreed. Kit moved in towards him and kissed him quickly. He smiled as he pulled back and away.

“I’ll just have to let that hold me.” Kit said. He then turned and headed down the hallway. Warren was slowly closing the front door when he heard the sound of Nate’s door closing.

He went on into the kitchen, aggravated now by Kit not hearing him on top of everything else going badly. During his frustration he began making a full course meal that was well balanced and healthy, something two teenage boys would have no interest in eating during a sleep over on a Saturday night.

By the time Warren had it all out on the table, with full table settings he was feeling just a little bit better and decided he might make it through dinner after all. He went over and cracked Nate’s door and called them to dinner.

He sat down in his seat and found Nate sitting down beside him so that Jake could sit further away and ended up facing him. The boys looked over everything with seeming disapproval, but they must have missed lunch because they began to devour the meal and Warren was beginning to really relax. He’d clean up and go to his room leaving them to amuse themselves the rest of the night. It would be over before too much longer.

They'd mostly finished when Jake spoke again. "Mr. Keith?" he queried.

"Yes." Warren answered with some wild thought that he might just compliment the meal.

"Do you like boys too?" Jake asked, "You know, like my age?"

Warren leaned back in his chair and turned to face Nate as he looked guilty and scared. Warren turned back to look at Jake. "As a matter of fact." Warren said, "I do not. In regards to you and your company. I don't even want that. Never mind any further interest in some idea that I'm automatically perverted into wanting do something with an underage boy. I find boys your age to be uninteresting, uneducated and immature. In regards to you specifically, you are rude and uncouth in your presentation of yourself to someone you barely know based on your fears and ignorance.

"So you can rest assured that I have absolutely no interest in you. It's been my recent discovery that I am interested in men, full grown, fully matured and intelligent."

"Yea?" Jake said sounding like he was ready for a battle, "Then why did you give Nate that book so he could learn how to be queer, too? Huh?"

Warren looked at Nate as he sagged in the chair. He already looked defeated. Warren turned to look back at Jake who looked like he was ready to stand up and start throwing punches. "As far as your concern over Nate's well being about this. You are in error. I did not give Nathaniel that book to read and learn how to become queer. The truth of the matter is he checked it out of the library and gave it to me so that I could learn how to be queer.

"And before he did that, without my knowledge or request he read the book himself before he even showed it to me."

Jake glared at him and then looked at Nate waiting for him to deny it, which he didn't. Jake pushed himself away

from the table. He got up and jolted towards Nate's room. Nate turned to watch as he came back out with his belongings and headed for the door. "I'm going to have my Mom come pick me up." Jake said, "Uhm, I'll call her from a pay phone. I..wouldn't want to spend another minute in here."

He bolted out the door and slammed it shut. Warren's eyes came back to Nate. He was pushing all the dishes out of the way so he could lay his head sideways on the table. His shoulder shucked once.

"Once again your actions serve you just, Nathaniel." Warren said, "I can not understand why in the one hand you insisted you wouldn't want anyone to know and the first thing you did was tell your friend. I tried not to be offended here, but apparently it wasn't going to end until the whole child abuse issue came up. Are you happy now?"

"He found the book." Nate moaned, "I had to tell him something."

"Why didn't you take that back to the library yesterday, knowing he was coming here and you were perfectly capable?" Warren asked.

"I forgot." Nate said rubbing his face along the table. Warren got up from his chair and stepped closer.

"Oh Nate." He said and went to touch the side of his face in a simple caress.

Nate jumped up from the chair and knocked Warren's whole arm away with a karate chop which hit him hard enough to feel it. Nate spun around glaring at him, his sadness and revere replaced by instant anger.

"Don't touch me." Nate shouted, "Don't ever fucking touch me, not ever."

He stormed towards his room and slammed the door so hard that the picture did fall off this time. It hit the floor with the glass shattering.

Nate started hollering after that. Warren remembered this from when he was eleven as well. Unable to anything

else he would just open his mouth and let sound come out that had no meaning. He could holler himself hoarse. It had startled Warren before, but now he understood that part of him needed to let the unchecked anger out in some form. He hadn't gotten around to just breaking things yet.

Warren just stood there listening to it and it may have gone on past an hour. At this point Nate's door flew open and Warren didn't immediately see him on the other side. Instead he saw the book come flying out the door with the door slamming shut immediately behind it. The book flew towards Warren and was just hitting the floor when it stopped at his feet.

Despite the moment, which had Warren standing still just listening to Nate rage beyond the door with it hitting him over and over again how what he'd been trying like hell to avoid had come home. Warren had come to another idea as he picked up the book. It was what it contained that caused all the trouble. In doing something positive for Warren, it had prompted Kit's activity with him and now it had sent Nate's friend running out the door leaving Nate distraught.

It was in of itself, nothing but a book, words written down to share ideas and information. But it was also powerful. Warren came back to Barnes' warning about the book he'd given Athena. And the idea he had just then was that whatever it might contain of ideas and information could be equally compelling. Compelling enough for people to suppress it or fight over it.

Warren moved over to the phone and set the book down and picked up the phone. He dialed it.

"Hello you've reached Ba'mosa...and Athena...and we might not be home or just can't come to the phone right now, so leave us a message and we'll get back to you."

"Hey Ba'mosa, Athena, Errol, Nina, and Bree." Warren said, "Your friend Warren saying hello. And Athena if you could call me back at your earliest convenience that

would be great. Thanks.” Warren said against the beep. He hung up the phone and moved to sit down in the chair, staring at the door knowing it was just sitting there unlocked, not holding anything back if someone wished to come in.

The phone rang while it was still in his hand and Warren answered. “Hello.”

“Hey Buddy.” Kit said, “I’m sorry. I wasn’t supposed to do that. Ok?”

“Kit, just go ahead and come back over.” Warren said.

“But?”

“Look I ran the kid off and Nate is having a melt down. So the weekend is shot, just come over. I could use the company right now.”

“You want some beer?” Kit asked.

“No, just you.” Warren said.

“Be right there.” Kit said.

He wasn’t kidding. He must have still been in town because he showed up rather quickly. Warren finally went to the door to let him in and got the thing locked again. He flopped back into his chair and Kit stood facing down at him.

“You ok?” Kit asked.

“No. I screwed up.” Warren said.

“I shouldn’t have come over, I’m sorry.” Kit said.

“Even if you hadn’t things wouldn’t be any different.” Warren said as he showed him the book, “This set him off. And I was hearing a kid I don’t know calling me a queer, a fag and insinuating that I was child molester.

“I should have just sucked it up for the kid. I should have defended him, but all I could think to do is defend myself.”

Kit knelt down in front of him and then moved in to get his arms around him. He pulled Warren close.

“Kit why are you hugging me?” Warren asked.

“Because you’re upset.”

“You never hugged me before just because I was upset.” Warren said. Kit pulled back to look him in the eyes.

“I was thinking this was something we could do now.” Kit said.

“In regards to this.” Warren said, “That and you coming all the way over here to only just kiss me. I really think you should save all that emotional stuff for your ex-wife.”

Kit stood up taking in Warren’s pose. He stepped back and looked around. “You’re right Warren.” Kit said, “She’s the one I’m in love with. Why else would I keep letting her come back in my house after I’m sure I divorced her at her request. It means I love her, right? So all my emotional shit should be just for her.” He turned slowly around looking at everything that wasn’t Warren, until he came back to his friend. “How about we just fuck?”

“Ok.” Warren said getting up from his chair and leading the way to his bedroom.

The definition of the term had to be clarified at some point. A lot of what Kit was doing to Warren didn’t qualify as only belonging to the single term. After their initial desire was sated Kit had taken to just holding Warren in his arms and looking at him. He’d also spent an excessive amount of time caressing his ear with his mouth and tongue. After a while as Warren getting that much from the interplay himself he decided it was something Kit wanted him to do to him. Once he started to do it, getting in and around his ear, tracing his tongue along its ridges he could tell just how much Kit was enjoying it.

After the majority of activity Kit also wouldn’t let Warren just sleep on one side of the bed alone. Kit curled up against him and held him in his arms. Warren might have thought to complain about it, but it just wasn’t coming out of his mouth. He eventually gave into sleep in that position.

When he woke up he was entangled with Kit and had managed to have his head come to rest on Kit’s stomach which had become his pillow at some point. He wasn’t sure if

Kit was fully asleep with his hand caressing Warren's back. But when he looked at the way Kit's head was crashed into the pillow he decided he was doing it to Warren from within his sleep.

"Kit." Warren said.

"Mmmm."

"I think we're done here."

"It's Sunday, we don't have to move at all."

"I'm done with being in this position." Warren explained. Kit let up his arm and stopped pinning Warren between his legs. Warren got up and moved over. Kit rolled away from him showing his back and appearing to go back to sleep. Warren sighed at that. In part he was right, they didn't have to get up, but Warren didn't linger in bed past sleeping. He preferred to at least get sat up.

He found himself lingering just then looking at Kit's back going all the way down to where the blankets were failing to cover him past his thighs. Warren reached out and touched him. He ran his hand along his back and Kit let out a sound of acceptance about it.

Warren moved to close the gap getting right up behind him in a position that was now sexual to him where as he'd never thought so before. He wrapped his arm over Kit's side and hugged him back towards himself.

"There you go." Kit said.

"Just let me know when you're able to get up." Warren said.

"Hostile." Kit said. Warren helplessly laughed against him. "I like that, too. You laughing. Now right where I can experience you moving with it."

"I'm just not sure how much of this we should be doing." Warren said. Kit pulled away rolling on to his stomach.

"We can go back to this." He said.

"I think after the third time I'm out of energy for it." Warren said. Kit pushed himself up to look at him.

“Shower then.” Kit suggested.

“That I can do.” Warren agreed. Not only would they be up, they would be back to something Warren enjoyed, touching and being wet and it wasn’t necessarily about the next orgasm.

He got in the shower first getting the water started and backing up so that Kit could get in. He was now effectively blocking the shower from Warren. While he was getting his hair wet Warren held his sides and rested his forehead against his back.

Kit moved to turn sideways and pressed against the back of the shower wall so the water could hit Warren. Kit watched him turning his head getting his hair wet. Warren looked him. Kit smiled.

“Still thinking I’m doing this just for you?” Kit asked.

“I am on that frame.” Warren said.

“And the fact that I am enjoying it?”

“I was beginning to wonder who, once they’ve allowed themselves to do it, wouldn’t enjoy it?”

“There’s a thought.” Kit said smiling, “But there are still men who couldn’t stomach it. They fall back on the idea that it takes away from them being masculine. I don’t think I’m being any less masculine here. Nor do I think that of you. It’s just more of it between us. That’s where the difference comes in for me.”

“There are men who are feminine in their ways about this.” Warren said.

“You read that.” Kit decided, “And I’m sure that’s true and no big deal. It’s just not me seeing us that way.”

“What’s your point, Kit?”

“You have to at least admit I’m not drunk.” He replied. Warren stopped what he was doing under the water to look at him. Kit smiled. Then he moved in for a wet kiss which Warren swooned from, but still felt he was just as much a part of. Kit moved in front of him getting more water on his back and Holding Warren in his arms.

They got out and got dried off. Warren leaned against the sink inspecting his chin and getting ready to shave. Kit came up behind him and pressed himself against him.

Kit grabbed up the shaving cream and began to apply it to Warren's face, working from being directly behind him.

"What are you doing now?" Warren asked.

"I am going to shave your face." Kit said.

"I'm perfectly capable on my own." Warren explained.

"That's not really my point." Kit said as he started in, man handling Warren's face as if he didn't know which way to turn his head on his own against Kit's strokes. "It's about the luxury of it being done for you. Give in to being treated with it."

Warren was too busy letting him do it to say anything. He was definitely enjoying the sensation of Kit touching him repeatedly. Kit smiled at him through the mirror as Warren even waited for him to wipe off his face with the towel.

"Confession time." Kit said as he moved to sit on the edge of the counter. Warren turned to lean against it to look at him.

"About?" Warren asked.

"It's going to be pretty big." Kit said, "Try not to just explode."

"Alright."

"You are not the first man I've been with like this." Kit said.

"So the idea that we'd discover this together was in fact a lie?" Warren asked.

"Yes, but I think what I wanted most after all the things I can't change, is that I was the first man for you. That's enough for me and everything I said about why, trust me, I'd say that from experience." Kit said.

Warren just looked at him as the moment held him in understanding something.

"You know why my first wife left me? And my ex why she finally decided to divorce me?" Kit asked.

“Your affairs, I’ve heard about them.” Warren said.

“I know, I’ve told you most everything about them.” Kit said, “I try and let you in on my life where I can. The only thing you don’t know is that they were not with other women. They were with men.” Warren made a disapproving face. “I may have said she in a few places where I should have said he.”

“Why couldn’t you tell me?” Warren asked.

“Without knowing you’d ever come to this yourself, I was afraid it would be something you could end the friendship over.”

“I wouldn’t do that.”

“I believe you, but I couldn’t risk it before.” Kit said, “It’s not that I don’t trust you. I’ve seen it happen. I don’t know what I’d do without you in my life.”

“I’m not going anywhere.” Warren said. Kit smiled.

“There’s more.” Kit warned.

“Is this specific to something you’ve actually done against me?” Warren asked.

“Not really.”

“Then you should know that you can trust me.” Warren said, “Even if you’ve had cause to keep things from me for fear that I wouldn’t understand. I’d do that for you if you’d do that for me.”

“Okay.” Kit said, “This goes back to why I was so mad when you told me this about yourself. At this point I need you to know that it was never me looking down on you or mocking you. The reason why I was so damn upset is because if I’m this way how the hell could I not know you might be too?”

“I didn’t know.” Warren said.

“I ignored the signs.” Kit said, “Because on any given day I would say you were a straight man’s straight man. You are just a little odd for most people to take. It’s not a slight against you though.”

“What are you saying Kit?”

“There have been a few people along the way who have made comments about you. I took care of it for you. I slammed them as hard I could on any obvious flaw I could find on them. Telling them they had no right to say shit and that if I didn’t know you were straight and normal, which I did, then no one did.”

“I really don’t care what other people think of me.”

“I know, but I wouldn’t let people build a rep on you against what I knew about you. It’s a shitty world when it comes to this. So I would protect you and defend you about it. So when you said something just then all I could think was how could I not know?”

“I’d guess the same way I didn’t know this about you.” Warren decided.

“You think I’ve been deceptive.”

“Yes.”

“It’s like this, Warren.” Kit said, “Do you know everything I’ve ever done even knowing me this well?”

“No.”

“Okay, so to me it was something I did that you didn’t need to know about.” He offered.

“Okay Kit.”

“The rest is about my wives and just about any woman you’ve ever seen me with. I don’t know for sure if I’m doing exactly what anyone else would do according to what a man and woman should be to one another. I claim to love them, but what I know is that I like to have sex with them. There’s no doubt about that. What I’m not sure of is everything I’ve done to keep them around according to what other people think should be done.

“I’ve had a man here and there the whole time.” Kit went on, “And I don’t know if I truly love my woman, but I know how much I love those men.”

Warren just looked at him.

“You’re shocked, I can tell.” Kit said, “Your thinking it’s like you never knew me at all.”

“Yes.”

“Well.” Kit said, “As far as my ex-wife and what was said last night. She caught me red handed. She requested and amicable divorce because she didn’t want anyone to know that she’d found her husband in bed with a man.

“Since then, the only reason she keeps coming back, it’s for the sex. It’s what wooed her and had her saying yes in the first place. Now she doesn’t have to worry about the commitment, about broken trust. She finally gets to know me and asks me why and I try and explain it, but we’re not in love anymore, maybe we never were. We just have fun.”

Warren waited for him to go on. Kit smiled.

“You can look back and you’ll start to remember things, things I’ve said and done according to you that should show you that I did want you to know. I just couldn’t tell you. That even with everything else I’ve done outside of my friendship with you, that you are the man I love the most.” Kit explained. Warren looked down for a moment. “The idea that you were interested in men, that you just said it out loud when you started to think it. I was impressed. I was more pissed at myself and maybe afraid, because the minute I knew I started wanting you right then.

“The next day when I came back with that book. That was me trying to tell you I knew, I understood. And I’ve had that book a long time. Barnes saw right through my lie saying it was old school. I was jealous, definitely jealous that you’d found someone else to explore this with and that had me coming and going in a way I didn’t like. That night I was suppose to meet David. It was a date. I was chasing him before this came out about you. And I showed up for it, but then you came in with fucking Superman. I got so mad and upset, seeing is believing, that I left. You didn’t see me, you were occupied.

“Then he left and you said you didn’t have to wait for him. And the idea that you’d been shot. I just couldn’t stand it. I was so close to the idea that you might be gone forever

and I'd never get the chance to tell you just how much I love you.

"I'm sorry I got drunk, Warren. I didn't know how else to approach it. I was thinking if it went badly we could write it off as a bad go at drinking and we might be okay. The next day I was still afraid, so afraid that in pushing you towards that with me I'd lose you as a friend. And you had me believing it the whole weekend. My heart has never beaten so hard for so long.

"The next thing I know, what you wanted to make up for it was you bringing me back into your room. I'm thinking that I'm dreaming, because you're telling me you want me and want us to be sober. The idea that it was possible. I just went nuts on you."

"I know." Warren agreed and they smiled at each other.

"I want you to know that I don't just want to have sex with you. I want to show you all I know about it. With the emotions, the passion, being close. I want to show you what it's like to be lovers.

"And I did come all the way over here yesterday just to get a kiss from you. That's part of it. I couldn't really stop myself. I'm still expressing this idea to you as something I want to do. But...maybe you don't want to do that. There's always the idea that you're going to realize I'm not so good looking and you've made a mistake and we'll stop. If that happens we'll always be best friends and I'll always love you more than anyone else."

Warren moved in towards him and wrapped him into his arms and stood where he could still look at him. "Kit, you have everything you need to get the guy or the girl and you know how to use it." Kit smiled and Warren kissed him softly for a moment. He then pulled his face away. "I'm not at all surprised your ex-wife keeps coming back for more."

Kit laughed and pulled himself up against Warren and rested his head on his shoulder. "So what do you say?" Kit

asked, "I'll even give up the woman if that's something you want."

"I would never require that of you." Warren said, "As your friend I would never want to take something away from you, especially something I know how much you enjoy." Kit squeezed him tightly.

"You could have one too." Kit said.

"If I were that lucky." Warren said.

"Maybe Miss Clarkson will show up again?"

"I don't think so, she's gone."

"Well you'll find someone and when you do I'll be behind you on it." Kit promised.

"I know you would."

"So?"

"Yes Kit." Warren said as he pulled back along side him to look at him again. "Show me everything you know. My only resistance up to this point is my thinking you were going way out of your way for me. I was having enough trouble just allowing that, past you insisting on it the first time and me wanting you again because of that. I do want you and you are the man I love the most."

Kit squeezed him tightly as he came off the counter to stand in front of him. He then started kissing him again. He stepped back and smiled.

"You hungry yet?" Warren asked.

"Yes." Kit said, he turned towards the bedroom. "I think I'm going to talk to the kid, see if I can make sense out of all that happened."

"You can try anyway." Warren said, "At this point nothing could make it worse."

"Faith my man, faith. I can do wonders when I want to." Kit said.

"If you think you can get past him just not liking you."

"Ah, initial impression. I scared the shit out of him that first day. After making him work like a dog, he's at least got some respect for me." Kit said.

Warren went into his room and pulled up his loose fitting sleeping pants. He then looked back at Kit as he went towards the door. Kit smiled and just hefted his jeans on and followed him.

“Have I ever mentioned how sexy those pajamas are?” Kit asked as they came out the door.

“Uhm no, I think it’s always been the source of bad humor.” Warren replied.

“Oh yea and one other thing, Warren.” Kit said.

“What?”

“You fucking gorgeous, ok? I don’t know what is wrong with people and why you don’t have them dropping like flies around you.”

“Stop.” Warren said laughing.

“Ok. I’ll prove it to you later.” Kit grinned grabbing Warren’s shoulders for a moment before they moved into the kitchen.

Kit sat at the kitchen table drinking coffee while Warren fixed them some breakfast. He made enough for Nate as well, but he didn’t count on him coming out to eat it. He moved it all to the table and Kit started looking at it suspiciously and then at Nate’s door.

“You’re not going to go get him?” Kit asked.

“No.” Warren answered, “He only has to show up for dinner. He can smell this I’m sure.”

Kit jumped up from the table and went over to Nate’s door. “Food kid, get your ass out here and eat something.” Kit said. He came back over to the table smiling. Warren just looked at his self satisfied expression. When he glanced at the door Nate was coming out of it looking grumpy and disturbed. He sat down at the table and glared at him.

“Do I have to eat?” Nate asked.

“No.” Warren replied.

“Just eat, it smells good.” Kit said. Nate looked only slightly confused by them not agreeing. He then turned towards the food and started eating some. “Doesn’t matter

how pissed you are, it's always good to still eat when it's available. You don't know what it's like not to have it available." Kit explained.

"Do you now have to know everything that is going on about me?" Nate asked.

"And who do you tell everything to when your shit is slinging all over the place?" Kit asked.

"No swearing, please." Warren requested.

"Right I meant to say crap. Or stuff or something." Kit said, "Well?"

"I don't have to talk to you." Nate said.

"Do we have to go through this again?" Kit asked. "I asked a question, it wasn't that complicated. When we spent an hour trying to get you to answer one before it was not cool. Just answer it."

Nate refused to answer. Kit reached over and grabbed his plate and pulled it towards him. "Hey that's mine." Nate said.

"Oh so you can talk. You didn't look that interested in this, I don't want it to go to waste." Kit said.

"Give it back."

"And the magic word is?"

"I'm not saying please for you." Nate complained. Kit lifted up his plate and dumped it onto his own.

"You don't appreciate anything." Kit said, "You know what happens when you don't appreciate what you've got?"

"What?"

"You lose it." Kit said and smiled.

"You going to let him do this?" Nate asked looking at his uncle.

"I think he makes a valid point." Warren said.

"Fine, I wasn't hungry anyway." Nate said getting up from the chair. He went and slid over the back of the couch and turned on the TV. Kit looked at Warren waiting for him to say something and Warren smiled at him.

Once finished eating Kit helped Warren clean up bringing it all into the kitchen and getting the dishwasher loaded. At one point they came towards one another over the dishwasher and kissed.

Kit headed over towards the couch. Warren stopped halfway towards it and stood there watching. Kit came around and sat on the couch. He smiled at Nate.

“Oh man, don’t even.” Nate said.

“Come on, give me a shot here.” Kit said, “I got wisdom.”

“Yea right, stealing a kid’s meal, that’s wisdom.” Nate said. Kit smiled at him.

“We just don’t always like what other people do, do we?”

“Nope.” Nate agreed.

“Progress.” Kit beamed, “I got to tell you you’re not the only kid to be embarrassed by a grown-up. I can’t even begin to tell you how many times my parents embarrassed me.”

Nate groaned and rolled his head away.

“It’s awful, really, but I won’t bore you with all of that.”

“Thanks.” Nate said.

“I’ll just tell you the worst of it.” Kit said. Nate rolled his head back and fourth on the couch. “I probably went through five friends before meeting Warren. And my parents embarrassed me in front of every one of them. And they all disappeared after a while. Who could blame them, hen?”

“Whatever.”

“Then I met Warren, my new best friend. I knew it. I knew when we started talking that we’d be cool hanging out together. I got all excited to bring him to meet the family. I just get in the door and before I can even say his name Mom points at me.” Kit pointed at Nate.

“It was your dad.” Warren corrected.

“Right, my dad. He points right at me and says ‘No no no, no white kids, they are trouble.’” Nate looked at him more questioningly. “Yea no big deal now, but we’d just moved up here and they wanted everything to go easy for everyone. It’s not the kids that are trouble, it’s their parents and they didn’t want any fights with the white folks over their kids messing them up or whatever. But I didn’t know any of that. So I was so embarrassed, I just ran into my room threw myself on my bed and cried.”

“You big baby.” Nate said. Kit laughed at him.

“Sure, I was a lot younger than you, but with my track record with them all I knew was I just lost my new best friend. You might not be crying here, but I’m pretty sure it feels the same.” Kit said. Nate made a face about it being too close to the truth. “Well, I finally stopped sobbing like my whole life was over. I was nine. That ended it all for me then.”

“Geez.” Nate said. Kit smiled at him.

“So I come out of my room ready to be a bastard to the old people, whatever I could do to annoy them I would. I had a plan forming, but it just got lost. When I came into the living room there’s Warren, still there, he hadn’t left. He was sitting there talking to my Mom...”

“Your dad.” Warren said.

“Dad, right, one of them people. And he’s just going on and on about the things we’d done already, the things we were going to do. And they just couldn’t believe he had me doing something that didn’t involve spitting on someone.” Kit said. Nate started to smile and stopped.

“What’s the point?” he asked.

“The point is no matter how much they embarrassed me and him about it. He didn’t let it bother him. He was there to be my friend. It wasn’t about them or what they thought. He didn’t have to like them, he liked me. And if someone is your best friend, nothing gets in the way of that. And your friend, what’s his name?”

“Jake.”

“Right, Jake, if he’s really your best friend...”

“He was.” Nate interrupted.

“He either is or he isn’t. And if he is he’ll get past this. He doesn’t even have to like your uncle about it. All that matters is if he likes you. Best friends are for life Nate. If he doesn’t get past this then maybe he was just a friend you had for a while.”

“My only friend.” Nate said, “He’s already embarrassed me in front of two other people. Now he has to run my only friend off I got left.”

“I’m sure you had nothing to do with it either.” Kit said, “Sum it up for him, impressing him with bravado.”

“Geez.”

“He’s not impressed with your uncle right?”

“Neither am I.”

“And his family?”

“I don’t like his mom.” Nate answer. Kit smiled and Nate groaned and turned his head away knowing he was being taught.

“I bet she embarrasses him and you, too.” Kit said.

“Yes.” Nate admitted.

“Okay. Now you have to tell me, what does she do?” Kit asked smiling. Nate smiled back at him.

“She calls him Bunny Boy.” He said and Kit started laughing and got Nate laughing.

“That’s awful. He must just want to pass out from it.” Kit said. Nate stopped laughing and relaxed.

“He won’t get past this.” Nate said solidly.

“He will if he’s really your best friend.” Kit promised.

“And if he doesn’t.” Nate said, “Then I don’t have any friends.”

“Sure you do, you just need to know where to look.” Kit said getting up. He smiled at Nate. “He’ll come around, I’m sure. And he doesn’t have to like your uncle or his ugly

boyfriend.” Kit walked around the couch headed towards Warren.

“I never said you were ugly.” Nate complained.

“You didn’t think I heard that did you?” Kit asked looking back at him. Nate groaned again and went back to looking at the TV. Kit stopped to smile at Warren. Warren grabbed his arm and leaned in towards him and whispered.

“Nice going Uncle Kit.” He said.

“I am *not* calling him Uncle Kit.” Nate shouted coming around on the couch glaring at them. He then flipped back around and sat back on the couch watching the TV. Kit and Warren turned to look at each other and they both started laughing.

Nate got up, turned the TV off with the remote and threw it at the couch. He then went into his room and closed the door. “I think he took that the wrong way.” Kit said still laughing.

“Yea he did.” Warren agreed and moved into him getting his arms around him.

“Want to watch porn?” Kit asked.

“No.” Warren answered.

“Okay, then you let me make my chili specialty.”

“Definitely not.” Warren said.

“Okay, how about we just sit on the couch and watch a movie?” Kit asked.

“That sounds good. You want popcorn, too?”

“No, too early.” Kit said pulling away and headed towards the TV. He got a movie started and joined Warren on the couch. He then looked over at him sitting on his own end. “You want to sit there and just watch a movie or do you want to watch it with me?” Kit asked. Warren smiled.

“With you.” He said. Kit turned and got his legs up on the couch. Warren moved over toward him and leaned against him and stretched his legs out and they started to watch the movie together.

After a while Nate came out of his room and stopped to look at them. "Oh man." He moaned and went past them heading towards the kitchen.

"Don't knock it until you try it." Kit called after him.

"Easy Kit." Warren said.

"I meant that in general." Kit said, "It's just as much fun with a girl." Nate came to the back of the couch arms loaded up with food.

"You're hogging the couch." He claimed.

"So?" Kit asked.

"So, what if I want to watch the movie?" Nate asked.

"Then you come around and sit on the floor like every other kid in America. I never got couch time myself." Kit said. Nate came around the couch and got in their way as he unloaded his arms onto the coffee table. He then sat down on the floor, leaned against the couch and pulled the table close so he could eat at it. "There you go." Kit said.

"Shh, I'm trying to watch the movie." Nate said.

"It's already half over." Kit explained.

"Shh." Warren said, "I agree with Nate, let's just be quiet and watch the movie." Kit looked down at him and Warren grabbed his chin for a moment. He then looked back at the TV screen.

When the movie was over Nate got up and started another one, returning to his spot. Warren was overwhelmed with an urge to reach out and touch the side of his head to include him. He sighed and curled into Kit closed his eyes some and telling himself he needed to respect Nate's need for distance.

