

# Camp Little Eagle

## CSU - II

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### Table of Contents

Chapter 1.....	2
Chapter 2.....	21
Chapter 3.....	51
Chapter 4.....	80
Chapter 5.....	112
Chapter 6.....	142
Chapter 7.....	164
Chapter 8.....	187
Chapter 9.....	222
Chapter 10.....	248
Chapter 11.....	277
Chapter 12.....	311

# MultiMapper

## Chapter 1

"Poppa? Why do we have to go here?" Kevin asked in a small voice.

"Because I think this will be something good for you and I want you to grow up to be as smart as you can possibly be." Allen said gently, then glanced in his rear-view mirror to see that Billy and Juana were keeping up with him.

"But you said you'd still love me if I was dumb." Kevin said seriously.

"Kevin, I will love you no matter what, and because I love you, I want the things that are best for you. That includes the things that will make you grow up to be big... and strong... and smart." Allen said slowly.

"But what if I don't get big or strong or smart?" Kevin asked even more quietly.

"It won't make a bit of difference. Just as long as you honestly tried your best, I'll be proud of every single thing you achieve." Allen said gently, then noticed Kenny looking at him in the rear-view mirror, so he quickly added, "That goes for all of you."

"I know it does Pop. I remember how you made such a big deal out of that clay ashtray I made for you in summer camp two years ago. You acted like it was the most beautiful thing you'd ever seen." Kenny said with a smile.

"Because it was... That was the first thing you ever made for me. You made a belt for your Dad and you made that ashtray just for me. If you'll go into my room when we get home, you'll find that ashtray on my dresser." Allen said seriously.

"It's just a weird little cup made out of clay... and you don't even smoke." Kenny said frankly.

"I keep the things from my pockets in it when I change clothes. I use it every single day and whenever I see it, I remember how proud you were when you gave it to me. That's why I want all you boys to have the best possible education. So you can all have that feeling of accomplishment again and again." Allen said, then quickly checked his mirrors before changing lanes.

"We'll be to Camp Little Eagle in just a minute. Just look at the place and give it a chance. If it turns out that you really don't

like it, we'll come up with something else, I promise." Allen said, more to Kevin than the rest of the boys.

After a long moment of silence, Kevin finally asked, "Does Reuben and Ricardo get to go to Camp Little Eagle with us?"

"Reuben might, Ricardo is still too young to go to school." Allen said, then looked to make sure that Billy and Juana were still there.

"Lookit!" Kevin said as he pointed at the huge open gates.

"Are they going to lock us in here?" Jake asked with immediate panic in his voice.

"I don't know, we'll ask about that while we're touring the place." Allen said as he stopped his car at the security shack by the gate.

"Good morning sir. Could I please see your identification?" the security guard asked courteously.

"Of course." Allen said and pulled out his wallet.

The guard took Allen's Starfleet identification and looked at it carefully for a moment, then looked down at the clipboard in his hand.

"Welcome to Camp Little Eagle Mr. Thompson, I hope you and your children enjoy the tour of our facility. If you'll follow this road, there is guest parking to the right of the main cabin." The guard said pleasantly as he handed Allen his ID.

"Thank you." Allen said, somewhat surprised at the guard's politeness.

\* \* \* \* \*

"This makes me wish I was a kid again so I could go to school here." Billy said as he looked around.

"You *are* a kid Billy." Deacon said with a chuckle.

Reuben ran up to the group standing by the cars and said, "Momma is changing Edovina, she said she'll be ready in a minute."

"Thanks Reuben, how do you like this place?" Allen asked with a gentle smile as he noticed Ricardo hurrying to Reuben's side.

"It's really pretty. I've never seen anyplace like this except on TV." Reuben said as he looked around curiously.

Ricardo tugged on the back of Reuben's shirt and urged him to lean down.

Ricardo whispered something to Reuben, then was quickly pulled into a hug.

"What's wrong?" Billy asked with concern.

"He's never been in the woods before, he's afraid there might be lions." Reuben said with a smile.

"It's okay Ricardo, the only lions in Florida are in the zoo. We can take you to see them if you want." Allen said gently.

Ricardo shook his head vigorously.

"Okay, then we'll save the zoo for some other time." Allen said, barely keeping the chuckle out of his voice.

As Juana approached the others, Jake quietly asked, "Would you mind if I carry Vina?"

"Here you go. She has just been changed." Juana said with a tender smile.

"Good morning everyone. I'm Chief Hawkeye Tecumseh, the head administrator of Camp Little Eagle."

"Nice to meet you Chief Tecumseh, I'm Allen Thompson, this is Billy Pierce and Juana Vasquez." Allen said pleasantly.

"A pleasure to meet you." Chief Tecumseh said as he shook each person's hand in turn, then looked at the boys and asked, "Who do we have here today?"

"These four are Jake, Xain, Kenny and Kevin Thompson." Allen said as he pointed to each boy.

"Five. You forgot Vina." Jake said with a teasing smile.

"How careless of me, this young lady in Jake's arms is Jake and Xain's daughter Edovina." Allen said with a proud smile.

Chief Tecumseh leaned in to get a good look at Edovina, then said in a gentle whisper, "Before I met Sean and Cory Short, I might have been curious as to how that was possible. Now... Let's just

say that I know for a fact that anything can happen, and around here, it probably will..."

"I know that feeling." Allen said with a smile at Chief Tecumseh's peaceful nature.

After another moment, Chief Tecumseh looked up at Jake and said, "You two have a beautiful daughter."

"Thank you." Jake said with an equal mix of pride and respect.

"And Xain, I believe you will bring a refreshing point of view to our discussions. It will be good to have you amongst us." Chief Tecumseh said in a professional tone.

"I will endeavor to perform my duties adequately." Xain said seriously.

"Of that I have no doubt." Chief Tecumseh said with a smile.

"These are my sons Kenny and Kevin." Allen said as he indicated the boys.

Chief Tecumseh looked at Kenny and Kevin and quietly said, "Two minds, two spirits but one heart."

Kenny glanced at Kevin and nodded his agreement.

Kevin looked up at Chief Tecumseh and said, "Huh?"

"In time..." Chief Tecumseh said as he ruffled Kevin's hair, then turned and looked at Allen expectantly.

"Next we have Billy's brothers Deacon and Lawrence." Allen said with a smile.

Chief Tecumseh looked at the boys carefully, then got a distant look as he turned slightly to face a stand of trees.

After a long silent moment, Chief Tecumseh turned to face the boys again and gave them a secretive smile.

"Nice to meet you?" Deacon finally said in a hesitant voice.

"A pleasure and honor to meet both of you." Chief Tecumseh said with a large, delighted smile.

Deacon hesitantly looked at Lawrence in question to find an equally puzzled expression looking back at him.

"The difference between a good man and a great man is his willingness to accept the responsibility for the greater good." Chief Tecumseh said seriously as he looked Lawrence in the eyes.

"Um, okay." Lawrence said hesitantly.

Chief Tecumseh laughed and said, "Don't worry about it now, it will make sense later."

Deacon glanced at Lawrence and whispered, "That's what I'm afraid of."

Allen walked to Reuben and picked him up, then walked to Chief Tecumseh and said, "This is Reuben Vasquez."

Chief Tecumseh looked at Reuben for a moment, then smiled and said in a distant voice:

"One who will not see himself,  
finds fault in others.  
One who stands above the rest,  
is weak when alone.  
One who hides amongst the rest,  
stands proud when in gold.  
The least in size and in strength,  
makes his brothers whole.  
One is left who stands alone,  
do you know his name?"

Reuben smiled at Chief Tecumseh and proudly said, "The thumb."

Allen looked at Reuben with astonishment, then over at Chief Tecumseh with question.

"I don't get it." Kenny said slowly.

"The first finger is the one that points, the second is the tallest, the only time you notice the third one is when it wears a ring and the pinkie is the smallest. All that's left is the thumb." Reuben explained with a smile.

"That's cool." Kevin said with a look of understanding.

"So it is. Welcome Reuben, all of you. Please follow me so we may begin. Beside the administration building is the cafeteria..." Chief Tecumseh said in a louder voice as he extended his arm to indicate the buildings they were approaching.

\* \* \* \* \*

"There's a bunch of them." Mouse whispered as he tried to look out the window without being obvious.

"The tall one is cute." Simon whispered in return.

"Gentlemen, perhaps you could share with the rest of the class what is so interesting outside?" Mr. T said in a firm voice from the front of the classroom.

"I'm sorry sir. It's just that there's some new kids." Mouse said timidly.

Mr. T walked to the window and saw his father leading a group of people up the path.

"Are these the ones you mentioned Cory?" Mr. T asked curiously.

Cory stood from his seat and looked out the window.

"Yes sir. They're looking around the camp to see if they want to go to school here." Cory said seriously, then took his seat again.

"I see. My father mentioned that we might be receiving a visit from him this morning. If you'll continue to work on your assignments, the teachers will walk around and check on the progress of each group." Mr. T said seriously.

\* \* \* \* \*

There was a knock on the classroom door which drew the attention of everyone in the room.

"Good morning Derek, do you mind if we interrupt your class for a few minutes?" Chief Tecumseh asked quietly.

"We've been expecting you. All the workgroups are finishing up their assignments, now would be the perfect time." Mr. T said as he stood back to allow his guests entry.

"Students, I'd like for you to meet the Thompson, Pierce and Vasquez families." Chief Tecumseh said in a booming voice.

All the students watched the group of people entering the room.

"I believe we adults should go outside for a few minutes and allow the children time to speak amongst themselves to get to know each other." Chief Tecumseh said with a gentle smile.

All the students watched as the parents, teachers and student-teachers filed out of the room.

\* \* \* \* \*

Cory walked to the group at the front of the room and said, "Jake, why don't you and Xain follow me and I'll introduce you to our group."

Jake glanced at Xain, then followed Cory without comment.

Sean automatically went to Kenny and Kevin and drew them away to another group while Gabe led Deacon and Lawrence away.

"Come on Reuben, you can sit with us." Timmy said from his seat.

Reuben looked behind him to see that Ricardo was following and walked to the group of desks where Timmy was sitting.

"Reuben and Ricardo, these are my friends Trent and Jose." Timmy said proudly.

"Nice to meet you." Reuben said timidly as Ricardo clutched to his side in fear.

"Guys, this is Reuben and his brother Ricardo. They just moved here last week." Timmy said seriously.

"I just got here a couple weeks ago too. Are you gonna live here with us?" Jose asked curiously.

"No. We're going to live with my momma in our apartment. We just came here to see if we want to go to school here." Reuben said cautiously to the slightly older boy.

"It's nice here. There's no roaches or nothin like that and everyone takes really good care of us. They don't yell at us or hit us or nothin." Jose said frankly.

"G... G... Good f-f-food." Trent stuttered in a quiet voice.

"Trent has trouble talking sometimes. His words get stuck." Timmy explained.

"It'll be great if you go to school here, then I won't be the only Mexican anymore." Jose said frankly.

"Is it bad being the only Mexican?" Reuben asked quietly, feeling a little shame at asking the question.

"Not that bad. No one messes with me about it at all. I just think it'd be nice to have someone else like me around... do you speak Spanish?" Jose finished in a small voice

Reuben nodded cautiously.

"Can you teach me? I was raised by white people and never got to learn any Spanish at all. It's like I'm not a real Mexican if I can't speak Spanish." Jose asked hopefully.

Reuben smiled and nodded.

"C... c-c-can I learn t-t-t-too?" Trent asked hopefully.

"You can't even speak English..." Jose began to say when Reuben interrupted.

"I'll teach you both. Maybe your mouth will like Spanish words better than English ones." Reuben said with a smile at Trent.

Jose looked at Reuben consideringly for a moment, then said, "I didn't think of that. You're smart, I like you."

Reuben smiled at the statement and said, "I like you too."

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"Kenny and Kevin, I'd like you to meet Mouse and Luke. You already know Kyle." Sean said as he approached a small group of desks.

"Hi. Nice to meet you." Kenny said politely as Kevin watched cautiously.

"Hi. Do you two want to go to school here?" Mouse asked with a trace of excitement in his voice.

Kenny looked at Kevin with question.

"I dunno." Kevin mumbled.

"This place is great. We get to go hiking and climbing and last week they took all of us into town and let us go to the mall and buy whatever we wanted. And every Saturday we all get to go to the library downtown." Mouse said with excitement.

Kevin looked at Luke curiously, trying to interpret his expression.

"Don't worry about Luke. He went through some really bad stuff so he doesn't talk much, but he's my best friend and everyone

says that I talk enough for both of us so it's okay." Mouse finished with a smile.

Luke glanced at Mouse, then back to Kenny and Kevin and gave a nod of agreement.

"Is your name really Mouse?" Kevin asked quietly.

Mouse laughed and said, "My real name is Harold Eugene Mauser but it really doesn't fit me. I mean, the guys tried calling me Harry for a few days when I first got here but it just wasn't right. I guess because I'm small and my last name is Mauser that someone thought Mouse would be a good name for me and everyone started calling me that. At first I thought they were making fun of me because I'm short but now I like it. A lot of the guys have nicknames and I think mine is one of the best. I bet if you guys start going to school here you'll get nicknames too... Um, what was the question?"

Kyle giggled and said, "When you ask Mouse a question, he'll usually give you the answer but he'll take the scenic route to get there and there's no telling where you'll end up."

\* \* \* \* \*

"Deacon and Lawrence, I'd like for you to meet Arlo and Simon." Gabe said with a smile.

"Nice to meet you." Deacon said automatically.

In a distant voice Arlo said, "It's a small room, a basement I think. The sunlight is burning in through the window, it almost hurts because it's so bright. There's two people holding each other. There's no fear, no pain, no doubt... only love. It's their first kiss... It's the moment when everything changes..."

"When? When are you seeing? Is there anything in the room that can help you see when it is?" Simon asked firmly.

"No... yes. Their shoes have buttons. And there's a lantern in the room." Arlo said in deep concentration.

Simon quietly said, "Come back Arlo, come back to here and now. What you're seeing was a long time ago."

Deacon and Lawrence watched in confusion as Arlo seemed to be struggling.

"It's okay. Let go of the moment and come back here. Just follow my voice and come back." Simon said even more quietly.

A moment later, Arlo got a surprised look as he glanced around the room.

"Did I do it again?" Arlo asked, sounding as if he were about to cry.

"Yeah, but only for a minute. Say 'hi' to Deacon and Lawrence." Simon said gently.

Arlo looked up at the two boys and timidly said, "Hi."

"Don't worry about Arlo, sometimes that just happens. He has this psychic vision thing that kicks in without warning. Most of the time it's something that happened a hundred or so years ago and doesn't matter, but last week he had one and found Trent's missing gameboy game." Simon said, then glanced at Arlo to see how he was doing.

"The Clan Short telepaths checked him out and the visions are real. They can't figure out where they're coming from, but they said that Arlo is really seeing something when he zones out like that." Gabe said seriously.

"I'm such a freak." Arlo said as he slumped down in his chair.

"I think we're all a little freaky somehow Arlo." Lawrence said quietly.

Arlo looked at Lawrence with question.

"Last week I felt like one of the biggest freaks on the planet. Since I've met Deke and the guys... I don't know. I just figured out that our differences make us into who we are. They make us special." Lawrence said seriously.

"Besides, people who are all the same are boring." Deacon said with a smile directed at Lawrence.

"Well, if that's true, you won't find any boring people around here." Simon said happily.

Arlo reluctantly nodded in agreement.

"We're thinking of going to school here. What do you guys think of the place?" Deacon asked seriously, wanting to change the subject.

"I think you'll like it. The teachers kind of make stuff fun." Simon said with a smile.

"How can school be fun?" Deacon asked cautiously.

"Well, you see how we're broken into little groups in here?" Simon asked seriously.

"Yeah." Deacon answered.

"We're supposed to work together to figure things out. We pick a leader, figure out what needs to be done and work as a group to solve whatever the problem is." Simon said happily.

"And there's not always just one answer and sometimes the right answer is 'no, it can't be done'." Arlo said, drawn in by Simon's excitement.

"Wow. That sounds a lot better than sitting and reading stuff out of a book." Lawrence said happily.

"Yeah, Chief Tecumseh says that the textbooks are here to give us the answers, but they serve no purpose if we read them without questions... or something like that. He talks like a fortune cookie sometimes but he's really smart." Simon finished in an impressed voice.

\* \* \* \* \*

Jake and Xain walked slowly to the group of boys where Cory had been sitting when they entered.

"Guys, I'd like you to meet Jake and Xain and their daughter Edovina." Cory said to the seated boys, then said to Jake and Xain, "These guys are Devon and Uri." Cory said happily.

"A pleasure." Uri said with a thick Eastern European accent.

Devon nodded at Uri's statement and looked timidly at Jake and Xain.

"Nice to meet you." Jake said shyly.

"Greetings." Xain said formally.

Edovina started whimpering and fussing in Jake's arms.

"I think Vina needs her A'nirih." Jake said quietly.

"Caring father." Devon whispered to Uri.

"Do you speak Vulcan?" Xain asked as he accepted Edovina into his arms.

Devon looked at Xain in a moment of panic, then quickly said, "Yes... I mean no. I just know some words."

"I understand." Xain said peacefully as he rested Edovina's head against his shoulder and rubbed her back slowly.

"So what do you guys think of this place. Is it a good place to go to school?" Jake asked, then smiled at the sight of Xain holding Edovina so tenderly.

"I cannot say. It is the first school I have attended." Uri said shyly.

"I've been to a lot of schools, sometimes two or three a year and this one is the best one I've been to." Devon said, losing a little of his shyness as he was drawn into the conversation.

"Why." Xain asked curiously.

"Because no one makes fun of me here..." Devon said, then stopped abruptly and looked around.

A long moment of silence fell over the group until Cory said, "Devon got teased a lot at his other schools. He lived with his grandparents and they bought him clothes that were..."

"Nerdy." Devon said in a small voice.

Cory nodded and said, "Horned rimmed glasses, pocket protector... the works."

"You look pretty normal to me." Jake said honestly.

Devon looked at Jake hesitantly, then gave a timid smile.

"We got Devon set up with a decent haircut, wardrobe and contact lenses before he moved in here. He's just a normal guy just like anyone else here." Cory finished with a smile at Devon.

"I've never been looked at as normal before... I'm still figuring it out." Devon said quietly.

"Anyway, the partnership that Devon and Uri have seems to be working. Devon helps Uri catch up on his school work and English while Uri helps Devon with his social skills." Cory said frankly.

"A logical arrangement." Xain said seriously.

Mr. T walked into the room and looked around for a moment before saying, "I see you've adopted our visitors into your groups. That's good. If you'll all come outside, we have a practical exercise to demonstrate our teaching technique."

All the groups got up and followed Mr. T out of the room.

The group of adults and students followed Mr. T away from the classroom and down a rise to a part of the Camp that was under construction.

"The men who are working on our new cottage are inside taking a break, that gives us time to use some of the skills we've been developing in class." Mr. T said as he stopped by the porch of the cottage.

"As you can see, the steps have not been built for this cottage. The objective of this exercise is to determine how many steps will be needed. You will have fifteen minutes to find the answer. Bring it to me when you're finished and be prepared to explain how you found your answer. Any questions?" Mr. T asked as he looked around the group.

Mr. T noticed Sean holding up his hand and said, "Yes. Sean?"

"Are we required to use any particular method, and are there any restrictions?" Sean asked carefully.

"Good question. The only restriction is that you have to maintain your groups. Any other questions?" Mr. T asked seriously.

After a moment of silence, Mr. T said, "Go on, the clock is ticking."

After the groups of boys scattered in all directions, Allen said, "I like that you're teaching them to problem solve from a real situation rather than a theoretical word problem."

"Well, we still have the 'One train leaves from Chicago' type of problems, but that's mostly for the sake of SAT preparation. If we've done our jobs correctly, by the time the students reach that stage, those problems won't pose any serious difficulty because they'll have the skills to solve them both in the mathematical and practical sense." Chief Tecumseh said seriously.

"What are they doing?" Billy asked curiously as he noticed Timmy, Reuben, Ricardo, Jose and Trent sneaking around the side of the unfinished cottage.

"Taking a creative path to find the solution to the problem." Mr. T said with a smile.

"So there is more than one way to find the correct answer?" Juana asked curiously.

"The number of ways is only limited by the children's imaginations." Chief Tecumseh said with a smile of delight as he saw Kenny and Kevin's group quickly gauge the height of the porch with a piece of rope, then run up the hill.

"I have a feeling that we're going to get some interesting answers to your question." Allen said with a smile.

"I expect most if not all the answers will be the same, the methods for achieving the answers will most likely be drastically different.

Jake's group approached the porch and began taking precise measurements. As Uri called out each measurement, Devon wrote it down.

"You've got me really interested now. I can't wait to see what they came up with." Billy said with a smile.

"It is one of the rewards of teaching." Chief Tecumseh said with a nod.

\* \* \* \* \*

Cory handed Mr. T his answer then took two steps back to stand with his group.

"With thirty-five seconds to spare. Good work everyone." Mr. T said as he looked over the answers.

"It seems that we are all in agreement that the correct answer to the question is five steps." Mr. T said then looked at Jake's group and asked, "How did you find the answer?"

Xain glanced at Devon and received a nod of encouragement to go ahead, "We went to the neighboring building and calculated the slope of the entry stairway and the height of each stair. Then

we measured the height of the porch. It was then a simple matter of mathematics to determine the number of stairs."

Mr. T nodded, then turned to face Kenny's group and asked, "How did you find the answer?"

Mouse stepped forward and said, "We found out how tall the porch was, then went around to the other buildings until we found another one with a porch that was the same height."

Allen chuckled at the ingenuity of the solution.

Mr. T gave Mouse a nod of approval before he turned to Deacon's team and asked, "And how did you arrive at the answer?"

Simon stepped forward and said, "Arlo pulled up the blueprints for the building on the computer and it was written out right there."

Billy and Allen shared a smile at the solution.

Mr. T walked to Reuben's group and asked, "And how did you come up with the right answer?"

Timmy stepped forward and said, "I askeded the guys who were building the new cottage how many steps they was gonna build there and they told me."

Allen, Billy and Juana all chuckled at the solution.

"All the different solutions led us to the same answer. You have all done very well. Xain, I need to speak with you for a moment, the rest of you may go and have a snack in the cafeteria now if you would like. Students, be back to the classroom in fifteen minutes. The rest of you may join us in the administration building when you have finished your snack." Chief Tecumseh said in a happy tone.

Xain approached the group of adults cautiously with Jake at his side.

"Nothing to worry about young man. I just thought I would introduce you to your teacher while the others are having their snack." Chief Tecumseh said with a gentle smile.

"That would be acceptable." Xain said carefully.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Thank you for waiting Miss Blacklance, I would like for you to meet Xain Thompson." Chief Tecumseh said in a peaceful tone.

"T'nar pak sorat y'rani." Miss Blacklance greeted Xain formally and held out her hand in the appropriate salute.

"T'nar jaral." Xain said, giving the customary reply.

"If it is acceptable, I will be administering the academic portion of your class load." Miss Blacklance said seriously.

"Academic portion?" Jake asked slowly.

"Yes. Xain will participate in the practical studies, physical education, arts and humanities with the rest of the students. The academic portion of Xain's studies will account for nearly half his day." Chief Tecumseh said, then turned to Xain and continued, "You will be attending class in the same room with those students you just met, and just as the other groups of students each have a teacher for their academic progress level you will have Miss Blacklance."

"I find the arrangement not only to be logical, but also satisfying." Xain said in a speculative voice.

"Good. My son has discussed this matter in detail with Miss Blacklance, T'Mal, Patriarch Short and your father. I believe we have found a balance that will allow you to progress academically without denying you the experience of participating with the other students." Chief Tecumseh said seriously.

"And we can make adjustments to the program if we need to as we go along. Just let us know if something isn't working for you." Mr. T said quietly.

"I will. Thank you all for your efforts on my behalf. I will endeavor to gain the full benefit from all the arrangements you have made." Xain said reverently.

"Who's that?" Reuben asked as he and Ricardo hurried into the main room of the academic office.

"This is Miss Blacklance, she is going to be Xain's teacher." Juana said as she bent down to give each of her sons a hug.

"Xain gets his very own teacher?" Reuben asked in surprise.

"That's right. If you decide to go to school here you'll be sharing a teacher with Trent and Timmy and Jose." Mr. T said warmly to Reuben.

"I thought you were going to be our teacher." Reuben said hesitantly.

"Well, I will in a way. I'm more like your teacher's teacher. I tell my teachers what to do and they tell you what to do." Mr. T said in thought.

"So you're like our grand-teacher." Reuben said with a smile.

Mr. T chuckled and said, "If that's the way you want to think of me. That's fine. And I guess that would make my father your great-grand-teacher."

"I like the sound of that." Chief Tecumseh said with a smile, then continued, "If anyone has any questions, I'd be happy to answer them now."

"Jake was concerned about the gate and the guards, I'd like to know about that." Allen said frankly.

"Yes. There are one or two of our children that various government and international agencies would like to get a hold of. For that reason, we have what is probably one of the three most secure facilities in the state of Florida."

"And the other two are across the street." Mr. T interjected.

"So the boys aren't locked in here." Allen said, wanting to be clear on that point.

"If there were indications of an intruder or another threat to security, then the gates would be closed and the facility would be locked down until the danger had passed. Otherwise, no. The boys won't be locked in." Chief Tecumseh said seriously.

Allen glanced at Jake and received a smile and nod in return that it was okay.

"There's a whole bunch of other guys having snacks now. We saw JJ and Justy." Kevin said with excitement as he walked in with the rest of the boys following him.

"Yes. We have many multi-level classes like the one you have observed. It is our belief that there is much benefit for the

students to have peers of many ages rather than being segregated by age or grade level.

"Does anyone have any more questions for Chief Tecumseh before we leave?" Allen asked as he looked around.

All the boys were looking at each other curiously but no one answered.

"I have a message for all of you from Commander Dodds inviting you to the Southcrest Ranch at the conclusion of our meeting. I was also asked to tell Mrs. Vasquez that Teri Short will be at Southcrest as well." Chief Tecumseh said seriously.

"My fifteen minutes is almost up. I'd better get back to my class. It was a pleasure to meet all of you." Mr. T said as he walked toward the door.

"It was nice to meet you too." Allen said quickly.

"Did anyone have any other questions?" Chief Tecumseh asked as he looked around.

"No? Then it's been a pleasure to meet all of you. Please let me know when you have reached a final decision." Chief Tecumseh said pleasantly.

"I wanna go to school here." Kevin said immediately.

"Me too." Kenny said quickly.

"Guys. We aren't going to decide this today. We'll talk about it and make a decision tomorrow after we've had some time to settle down and think it over." Allen said seriously.

"That sounds like a good idea to me. What do you guys think?" Billy asked Deacon and Lawrence.

"Okay by me." Deacon said honestly.

"Me too." Lawrence said with a nod.

Allen glanced at Juana and received a nod in return.

"We'll call you either tomorrow or Friday when we've reached a final decision. I think you're going to end up getting the whole squad." Allen said with a smile.

"I think you're right." Chief Tecumseh said happily.

"Thank you for taking the time to show us around. Hopefully we'll be seeing you soon and often." Allen said as he shook Chief Tecumseh's hand.

"It is my hope that it is to be so." Chief Tecumseh said reverently as he shook each of the adult's hands in turn.

"Goodbye!" Ricardo called and waved as the group headed toward the door.

"Goodbye." Chief Tecumseh said with a tender smile as he returned the wave.

## Chapter 2

Mr. T walked into the classroom to find all the students talking amongst themselves in small groups.

"Please take your seats and take out the books you've been reading." Mr. T said firmly.

All the students took their seats and began to dig through their backpacks to get the books each had chosen from the 'suggested reading' list.

Mr. T wrote the word 'Thesis' on the white board at the front of the room, then said, "What I'd like for you to do is write a thesis statement for your book. What I mean by that is that I'd like for you to sum up the overall point of the entire book in one sentence. I realize that depending on the book that it might be difficult to do, but your teachers can give you individual help as you need it to discard the unimportant details."

The room fell silent as everyone started considering how they would describe their books in such simple terms.

Mr. T then wrote 'Summary' on the board and said, "After you've identified the point of the book, I'd like for you to give a brief summary of the entire story. This usually works best when you write a sentence each for the introduction, body and Conclusion. Remember to keep it brief. The entire summary is to be one paragraph."

Mr. T looked around with satisfaction as everyone seemed to be concentrating intently on their assignment.

He made his way to one of the groups of students and quietly said, "Simon, I need to talk with you about something. Please come with me."

Simon looked at Mr. T with question as a trickle of fear ran up his spine. He glanced over and noticed an expression of concern on Arlo's face.

"Should I bring my books?" Simon asked in a small voice, trying to hide the tremble of fear.

"No, we'll be back in just a few minutes." Mr. T said, then extended his hand to indicate the door to his office.

Simon reluctantly got up from his chair and walked to the door with Mr. T at his side.

\* \* \* \* \*

Mr. T motioned for Simon to enter, then moved the door, leaving it about six inches open.

In the back of his mind, Simon felt a slight sense of relief at the gesture. If Mr. T had closed the door he would have panicked... knowing that the door wasn't closed, that he wasn't completely alone with an adult, gave him the courage to continue.

"Please take a seat Simon." Mr. T said as he sat behind his desk.

Simon reluctantly took the offered seat, then looked at Mr. T with question.

"It's come to my attention that you've found a way to bypass the security features that we've put in place and have been visiting inappropriate sites on the Internet." Mr. T said firmly.

Simon ducked his head and mumbled, "Yes sir."

"I think it's important that you understand why we restrict access to pornographic materials. The images that you see are harmful to a developing young mind. The pornography industry as a whole is corrupt and objectifies people. Pornography leads you to seek sexual gratification for it's own sake, filling your mind with graphic images that are designed to stimulate you. In reality, sexuality is just one component part of a relationship and should happen naturally as a relationship progresses. Repeated exposure to the graphic sexual images can lead you to make some unwise decisions that will ultimately hurt you." Mr. T said with concern.

"I understand." Simon said quietly.

"My father has left the decision to me of whether we should revoke your Internet privileges for your own safety. Although I'm reluctant to do so, I understand that the lure of these images can be quite compelling." Mr. T said with concern sounding in his voice.

"May I explain why I visited those sites?" Simon asked cautiously.

"Go ahead." Mr. T said as he sat back in his chair.

Simon took a deep breath and thought for a moment before saying, "If you have a list of the sites that I visited, you'll notice that none of them have pictures. The site that I spent the most time on was a gay story archive. I went through it looking for a certain type of story. A lot of the stories were kind of like what you were talking about with the pictures, they just talked about random, anonymous sex. A few of the stories were even worse than that and really bothered me, but I finally found what I was looking for." Simon said seriously.

"Which was?" Mr. T asked cautiously.

"If you'll go to [pyro.csuproductions.com](http://pyro.csuproductions.com) I'll show you." Simon said, sounding more confident.

"Just a second." Mr. T said as he opened a browser window and typed in the URL.

"When you get there, go to Pyro's stories and look at the story called 'Camp Time'." Simon said as he leaned forward to see the computer's monitor.

"Okay. I'm there." Mr. T said as the story filled the screen.

"That is what I was looking for. It's a story about someone my age; someone who is hurting and alone... and gay. It talks about his pain and his struggle and how he finally finds love and acceptance." Simon said with a slight smile at the memory.

"I don't understand why you need to break the rules to read a story like this when you have an entire library to choose from." Mr. T said as he looked away from the site.

"I think you *do* understand. Please don't take this the wrong way, but what Native American role models are there for you in movies, on television and in the library?" Simon asked as he rested back in his seat.

"No one really springs to mind." Mr. T said reluctantly.

"It's the same for me. If I were straight, I could turn on the television, rent any video or read any book and see examples of romance and love. But to find a story about someone who I can identify with... I have to go underground." Simon said, now with a tone of pleading in his voice.

"But in the last few years, some of the prime time television shows have introduced gay characters." Mr. T said in thought.

"Yeah. Adult characters. And of those, can you name a single one of them who has had a healthy, long-lasting relationship?" Simon asked seriously.

"Not off the top of my head." Mr. T said carefully.

"Face it. Gay television characters are the butt of the jokes and take every stereotype to the extreme. I suppose it's better than being completely absent from the media, but not by much." Simon said, now sounding tired.

"...and Tonto never gets the girl." Mr. T muttered to himself.

Simon gave a weak smile and nodded in understanding.

Mr. T closed the browser window, then opened an application that Simon didn't immediately recognize.

"Are you killing my Internet access?" Simon asked as he realized that Mr. T had his user account on the screen.

"No. This story, 'Camp Time', do you think you can find other stories like it?" Mr. T asked as he opened a submenu and typed in a command.

"Yes. I've started reading another story by Pyro called 'The Lonely Prince', I've only read two chapters, but so far it looks like it's going to be great."

"Good. Then if you'd be willing, I'd like for you to do a job for me." Mr. T said as he looked away from the computer.

"What's that?" Simon asked curiously.

"Read more of these stories. When you find a good one, copy the link and email it to me. Together, we're going to build a library of uplifting stories that your classmates may be able to identify with." Mr. T said, then closed the application.

"Is it okay if there's a little sex in some of the stories?" Simon asked hesitantly.

Mr. T thought about the question and finally said, "If the sexual contact is a healthy expression of love, I think it will be fine. When you email me the link, you can mention anything that might be disturbing in the story and I'll make a judgment whether or not to include it in our library. Some of our students have been

through some... extreme experiences, we need to protect them from things they might not be able to deal with."

"I'll keep that in mind. I've had some extreme experiences of my own." Simon said with a pained look.

Mr. T looked at Simon with concern and asked, "Is there anything you need to talk about?"

Simon snapped out of his wandering thoughts and said, "No, I'm doing okay. Dr. Dan is working with me to deal with things. Every now and then I just flash back a little."

"Well, if you ever need to talk about anything, you know where to find me. No matter when you need me, I'll always have time for you." Mr. T said quietly.

"Thanks Mr. T, I think I knew that but it's good to hear you say it." Simon said with a contented smile.

"Let's get back out to the class before Arlo worries himself sick." Mr. T said with a smile as he stood.

"What did you do to my account?" Simon asked as he also stood.

"I reduced the restrictions on your account so you won't have to work around network security to read your stories. I also listed 'Pyro's Place' in the lockout exception file in case either of us find someone who might enjoy an uplifting story." Mr. T said as he walked toward the office door.

"Thanks for listening to me Mr. T. I promise I won't bypass network security again." Simon said seriously.

Mr. T stopped with his hand on the door knob and said, "If you need to access something that you don't have clearance for, just come to me and ask me."

Simon smiled at Mr. T and said, "I will, I promise."

\* \* \* \* \*

"Are you in trouble?" Arlo asked with concern as Simon took his seat.

"Almost, but Mr. T was cool enough to let me explain before he nuked me." Simon said as he pulled out a clean sheet of paper.

"What did you do?" Arlo asked curiously.

Simon smiled at his friend and said, "I used that little hack you showed me to bypass the network security but I must've screwed it up because he caught me."

"Mr. T knows that you hacked the network?" Arlo asked with renewed fear.

"Yeah. But he didn't seem too worried about that part of it, he was just worried that I was looking at stuff that was going to hurt me..." Simon trailed off in thought.

"You sound surprised." Arlo said in a considering voice.

"When I realized why he called me into his office, I thought I was in serious trouble. I guess I was surprised when he actually listened to me and cared about what I said." Simon said honestly.

"If you can't figure out what he's going to do, then no one can. You've been here longer than anyone." Arlo said quietly.

"Yeah, but when I got here I was a real mess. I was scared of everyone and didn't really get to know Mr. T or any of the other teachers. I'm still learning how to get along here just like you and everyone else." Simon said seriously.

"So you're not in any trouble?" Arlo asked, seeing the need to change the subject.

"No. It's cool. What did I miss out here?" Simon asked as he looked around.

"Not much. We were all just finishing up our story stuff. It's almost time for lunch so we probably won't do anything else." Arlo said in thought.

\* \* \* \* \*

As the group of boys walked into the cafeteria and automatically took their place in the serving line, an eight year old brown haired boy dropped back in the line to stand with Mouse, Luke and Kyle.

"JJ said that the new guys went to your classroom. How were they?" Obie asked with excitement.

"We only got to talk to two of the guys, but they seemed alright. They're pretty normal... I mean they have a dad and have nice clothes and I bet they live in a house so I don't know why they'd

want to go to school here when they could be around normal kids." Mouse said in thought.

"How old do you think Kevin is?" Kyle asked Mouse seriously.

"He's about Obie's size so I guess he'd be about 8 or 9." Mouse said in thought, then looked at Luke to see him nodding in agreement.

"He's going to be 12 in about a month. Kenny is his twin brother." Kyle said seriously.

"Is he sick?" Mouse asked with immediate concern.

"I'd never tell anyone about the stuff that happened to you, and I won't do that to Kevin either. But I will tell you that he's not sick, he's small because he had a hard life growing up. He's going to school here because he probably couldn't fit in at a regular school. Trust me when I say that Kevin *needs* to be here." Kyle said frankly.

"What about his brother? He seemed pretty normal." Mouse said cautiously.

Kyle thought about the statement for a minute, then said, "It depends on how you define normal. Kenny could probably go to a public school and do okay, but he's been through enough stuff that he should be able to fit in here too."

"They're Clan aren't they?" Obie suddenly asked.

Kyle looked at Obie with question.

"I didn't think about it before, but that's why they're all coming here as a group isn't it? Those guys are Clan members and they're going to go to school here where they can get up and go if they need to do something for the Clan." Obie said in a voice of deep thought.

"And I thought I was the telepath here." Kyle said with a smile.

"Am I right?" Obie asked seriously.

"More or less. Not all the guys are Clan members... yet." Kyle said with a secretive smile.

"Wow. Well that does it for me, if they're Clan, then they've got to be okay." Mouse said firmly.

Kyle immediately shook his head in disagreement.

"They aren't okay?" Mouse asked in confusion.

"They're fine. But you can't assume that someone is okay because they're a part of the Clan. We're all people, we make choices, some good and some bad. If you want to know if someone is okay, you need to get to know them and decide for yourself. Otherwise, you're leaving yourself open to get used or hurt." Kyle said seriously.

"Okay, thanks Kyle. I guess it's easy for us Camp guys to think of you Clan guys as being bigger and better than regular people." Mouse said timidly.

"Nope. We're the same. We just have different jobs." Kyle said carefully.

"You Clan guys rescue kids in trouble, you done it for all of us. But what's our job?" Obie asked curiously.

"After we've rescued the kids, it's up to you Camp guys to help them heal. You give them a family where they can belong and feel safe and find hope for the future." Kyle said firmly.

Obie, Mouse and Luke looked at each other in surprise at the statement.

"So your jobs are no less important than ours, because without you guys to take care of the new kids, what's the point of us having the Camp? We could just dump all you guys into the CPS system and hope for the best." Kyle said passionately.

Mouse thought seriously about the words before quietly saying, "Yeah. I never thought about us having a job or doing anything important but I guess we do."

Kyle felt a nudge from behind him. He turned to see Gabe pointing to the line ahead of them.

"Whoops, sorry." Kyle quickly said and motioned for the other boys to move forward with him.

\* \* \* \* \*

After making their selections, the boys automatically went to the table where the people from cabin one normally sat.

"You guys mind if I join you?" Obie asked quietly as he followed Luke and Mouse to the table.

"No problem, you can join us too if you want to Kyle." Mouse said as he took his seat.

"Yeah. Thanks Mouse. But just don't be too mad if I have to leave in the middle of lunch. Cory likes to talk business while we eat and I might have to go over there if it has something to do with me." Kyle said as he sat down.

"So *that's* why you guys sit together at that big table?" Obie asked in surprise.

"Well, yeah.... why did you think?" Kyle asked in confusion.

"We kinda thought it was a way of saying you Clan guys were better than us Camp guys." Mouse said frankly.

"You mean it's not?" Simon asked as he took the seat beside Mouse.

"I bet you don't even know what we're talking about." Mouse said with a grin.

Simon thought about it for a second, then said, "From what I overheard as I was walking up and the fact that Kyle is here, I'd have to say... the Clan table?"

Luke chuckled as he nodded.

"Shut up." Mouse said to Luke dryly.

"No wonder he never talks." Obie said with a smile at Mouse.

"Just so you guys know, I'm going to talk to Cory about the reputation the Clan is getting around the camp. I guess we just didn't think about how it would look to you guys when we decided to sit together at lunch." Kyle said with concern.

"You Clan guys don't have to prove anything to us. I was just a little surprised to find out why you sit together." Mouse said quickly.

"It's not that. What I'm concerned about is that if you guys who've been around for a while think that about us, what do the new guys think? If we seem unapproachable and full of ourselves then none of the new guys will feel comfortable coming to us if they need something. That is just one less reason for them to want to stay here." Kyle said in thought.

"Wow. If you Clan guys are all this serious at lunch, it's probably a good thing that you sit together." Obie said with a teasing smile.

Kyle chuckled at the statement, then said, "We'll have to consider that too."

\* \* \* \* \*

The hours since lunch had passed normally as the students rotated through their circuit of afternoon classes.

The cabin one students were relieved to reach the last class of the day which was art.

"What's wrong Arlo?" Simon asked with concern as they walked into the cabin and took their seats.

"I don't know, I feel kind of like I do when I'm having one of my visions, but... I'm not having one." Arlo said with a weary and concerned expression.

"Maybe you need to lay down, you look really tired." Simon said quietly.

"Yeah. I think I need to, besides, I'm ahead on my work for this class." Arlo said, then hugged himself for warmth as he suddenly felt cold.

"Mrs. Sixto, can I take Arlo to our cabin? He's not feeling well." Simon asked as he approached her desk.

The art teacher looked at Arlo shivering as he sat in his seat, then said, "Take him to your cabin and someone will be by to check on you in a few minutes."

"Thank you Mrs. Sixto." Simon said quickly and hurried back to Arlo.

\* \* \* \* \*

"I hear that Arlo isn't feeling well." Chief Tecumseh said as he walked into Cabin One.

"He was just feeling a little weird at first, but now it's like he's freezing cold and can't get warm." Simon said with full worry for his friend.

Chief Tecumseh put a hand on Simon's shoulder to assure him.

Simon flinched away as if in pain and stumbled back a few steps before turning to look at Chief Tecumseh with a mix of fear and anger in his eyes.

Chief Tecumseh looked at Simon consideringly, then said in a pained voice, "Please forgive me Simon, I forgot for a moment."

Simon took two deep breaths and tried to calm himself as he heard his pulse pounding in his ears.

"Is there anything I can do?" Chief Tecumseh asked with concern.

"No. I'll be fine. Dr. Dan has been able to help me with everything else, but I still can't stand to have anyone touch me." Simon said as he finally felt the adrenaline rush starting to subside.

"Very well. Let us see what assistance we can provide young Arlo." Chief Tecumseh said quietly and walked to the couch where Arlo was laying.

"C... c... c... can't g... g... get warm." Arlo said, then his teeth started to chatter.

Chief Tecumseh gently moved the back of his hand to Arlo's cheek to gauge his temperature, then withdrew it quickly.

"It can't be." Chief Tecumseh whispered and could see a cloud of mist form as his warm, moist breath came near Arlo.

"What's wrong with him?" Simon asked in panic.

"I suspect it is something far beyond my ability to correct." Chief Tecumseh said in thought as he walked to the phone.

Chief Tecumseh dialed the phone quickly, and waited as it rang.

*"Foote residence."* A young woman's voice answered.

"I need to speak with Aubrey, it's important, tell him it's Hawkeye." Chief Tecumseh said with urgency.

*"I'm sorry Chief Tecumseh. Uncle Aubrey was called out on an emergency this morning. We're not expecting him back for a few days."* The woman said apologetically.

"Do you have a number where I can reach him. I really am in desperate need of his help." Chief Tecumseh said frankly.

*"No. He's going to a remote village in the South. If you really need help, my cousin Jerico is here. He's been away learning the*

*ways of the Shaman for the past few years. He could probably help you."* She said in thought.

Chief Tecumseh took a deep, cleansing breath before saying, "The Great Spirit must have a plan..."

The girl giggled and said, *"I'll go get him."*

After a moment of hearing whispered voices speaking in the background, a voice called, *"I've got it Lucy, hang up."*

*"This is Jerico Foote, can I help you?"*

"I think I've got a fox spirit here. Are you Shaman enough to handle it?" Chief Tecumseh asked bluntly as he watched Simon put another blanket over Arlo.

*"How certain are you?"* Jerico asked quickly.

"I have seen one who was possessed with a fox spirit before, and this is what it looked like." Chief Tecumseh said seriously.

*"Good enough for me. Lucy said you're from Camp Little Eagle, right?"* Jerico asked in confirmation.

"Yes, please hurry. This spirit is quite aggressive." Chief Tecumseh said with concern, then noticed the blue tinge to Arlo's skin.

Chief Tecumseh put his hand over the mouthpiece of the phone and quickly said to Simon, "Go and get Derek, he should be in his office."

Simon nodded and ran out the door.

*"Have someone meet me to help carry in my things. I'll be there... in eight minutes if the Great Spirit will provide a tail wind."* Jerico said quickly.

"Go! Now!" Chief Tecumseh said firmly and hung up the phone.

As Chief Tecumseh walked back to the couch where Arlo was laying, he noticed that the blue color was becoming more pronounced and the boy's eyes were starting to drift closed.

"Young Arlo. You must stay awake. Listen to my words, it is dangerous for you to sleep now. Stay awake." Chief Tecumseh said seriously.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Mr. T was called away on an emergency. I brought the older guys in case they can help." Simon said in a rush as he hurried into the room.

"Yeah, every telepath at Camp Little Eagle freaked out at the same time." Mouse said quickly as he looked around.

"Good work Simon. We can use all the help we can get. Harold, I need you to go to the bathroom and turn the shower to the hottest water you can stand. Uri and Devon, pick up Arlo and carry him to the bathroom." Chief Tecumseh said firmly.

Mouse gave Chief Tecumseh a disapproving look for a moment for calling him Harold, then did as he was told.

"Is there anything I can do?" Simon asked helplessly.

"Stay near to me. If I can think of anything to help Arlo, I may need you to get it immediately." Chief Tecumseh said seriously.

"He is so cold that it burns to touch him." Uri said in surprise.

"Imagine how he feels. Get him under the hot water now." Chief Tecumseh said urgently.

\* \* \* \* \*

As the boys reached the shower, they stopped and looked at Chief Tecumseh with question.

"Well go on. We have an excellent clothes drying machine if that's what you're worried about. Just get that boy warm." Chief Tecumseh said with a shooing motion.

Uri and Devon stepped into the shower, clothes, shoes and all, and held Arlo under the shower's spray.

A cloud of steam erupted as the hot water hit the pocket of cold that was surrounding Arlo.

"NO!" Arlo screamed in a strangled voice of pain.

A wall of force erupted out from Arlo, and knocked Devon and Uri away and forced the others in the room to fight for balance.

A moment later Arlo collapsed in the floor of the shower stall.

"Get him back under the shower's spray." Chief Tecumseh said as he regained his balance.

Uri and Devon picked up Arlo again and forced him under the shower's spray.

Once again, the hot water hit the cold pocket of air surrounding Arlo and a cloud of steam billowed out from his body.

"Is it working?" Mouse asked into the steam cloud, trying to see anything.

"It's too early to tell." Chief Tecumseh said in thought.

\* \* \* \* \*

Mr. T rushed into cabin one and immediately noticed steam rolling out of the bathroom door.

As Mr. T was walking into the foggy bathroom, Luke was rushing out with tears in his eyes.

"Mrs. Sixto said that there was an emergency over here." Mr. T said as he rushed into the room and looked around.

"What happened Father?" Mr. T asked with concern at the sight of Uri and Devon holding Arlo under the shower.

"Feel his face and tell me what you think." Chief Tecumseh said as he led his son closer to Arlo.

Mr. T stepped forward through the fog and put his hand on Arlo's face and was surprised by how cold the boy was. Before he could withdraw his hand, the water had started to freeze on his fingertips.

"A fox spirit?" Mr. T said uncertainly as Chief Tecumseh guided him away from the shower's spray.

"Perhaps. But it doesn't make sense, not with the eagle spirits protecting our camp." Chief Tecumseh said as he watched Uri and Devon turning Arlo to try and get the warm water all over him.

"Is Uncle Aubrey on his way over?" Mr. T asked as he turned his full attention to his father.

"No. He was called away for an emergency in the South. His student said that he would come and offer whatever assistance he can." Chief Tecumseh said gravely.

"If this is a fox spirit, we need a powerful Shaman to fight it." Mr. T said desperately.

"We have no choice in the matter. The novice Shaman is the only one available to us. To make matters worse, the hot water isn't going to last much longer and I can think of nothing more to keep Arlo warm enough to survive." Chief Tecumseh said gravely.

"Is there anything I can do now?" Simon asked in a small voice.

"Yes. Go to the guest parking lot beside the administration building and wait for the Shaman. He has not been here before and would not know how to find this cabin. Tell him to hurry." Chief Tecumseh said firmly.

Simon nodded and ran out of the room with tears streaking down his cheeks.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Are you the Shaman?" Simon asked desperately as the old 1950's pickup truck pulled into the guest parking lot.

"Yes. Will you help me?" The Native American man in his mid twenties asked as he set the parking brake.

"Please hurry." Simon said in a pleading voice.

"Take this. What's your name?" The young man asked as he handed Simon a large copper bowl.

"Simon. You've got to move faster. Arlo can't last much longer."

"I can't help your friend if I don't have the things I need." The Shaman said as he started heaping things in the bowl.

Within a few seconds the young Shaman had filled the bowl with things that were random junk and garbage to Simon's untrained eyes.

The young man then pulled a robe and a feathered fan from the passenger side of the truck.

"Lead the way." The young Shaman said as he pulled the robe on.

"Come on." Simon said as he started to run full out toward cabin one cutting across the open grass, completely ignoring the walking paths.

\* \* \* \* \*

"I'm afraid you're too late." Mr. T said as he stood in the foggy shower stall with the body of Arlo still being held by Uri and Devon.

"Maybe not. Simon, fill that bowl half-way with water and bring it here." The Shaman said seriously.

"He's dead." Devon said in a disbelieving whisper.

"Excuse me? Shaman here. I'm in tight with the Great Spirit. At least let me give it a shot. What have you got to lose?" The young man said as he lit something in a small clay bowl.

"Derek, please. We must trust the emissary of the Great Spirit." Chief Tecumseh said quietly.

Mr. T reluctantly nodded his acceptance.

"Good, then lay him down in the floor and step away. All of you." The Shaman instructed professionally.

"Here's the water, what do you want me to do with it?" Simon asked quickly.

"Set it beside your friend, then stand back. What I'm about to do is extremely dangerous, so no matter what happens, everyone stay back." The Shaman said as he lined up a row of pouches beside him.

The young Shaman started to chant as he sprinkled a pinch of something from the first pouch into the clay bowl.

There was a sparkle like miniature fireworks, then a puff of smoke.

Without looking, the Shaman reached down to the second pouch and pulled a clump of herbs out.

He dropped the clump into the clay bowl as he continued to chant.

Within a few seconds, a thick smoke started rising from the bowl. Without interrupting his chant, the Shaman picked up his fan and started fanning the smoke over Arlo's unmoving body.

After long seconds of fanning, the Shaman abruptly stopped both fanning and chanting. Quickly, he picked up Arlo's limp hand and put the fingertips into the water of the copper bowl.

With his other hand, he drew a crystal out of one of the pouches and carefully touched it to the other side of the bowl.

"Arlo, listen to me. Go into the light. You'll be safe in the light." The Shaman said in a clear voice, then shook his head.

"He doesn't know me. Simon... all of you. Call to him. Tell him to go into the light." The Shaman said quickly, then in a more panicked voice said, "DO IT NOW!"

"Come on Arlo. It's Simon. Do what the Shaman says and go into the light." Simon said in a desperate voice.

"This is your teacher, Mr. T. Simon is right, you need to go into the light." Mr. T said with tears streaking down his face.

"This is Chief Tecumseh. Trust in the emissary of the Great Spirit. Join with the light." Chief Tecumseh said in a pained voice.

"It's working... almost... almost... Got 'im." The Shaman said and quickly pulled the crystal away from the side of the bowl, and pulled Arlo's hand out of the water at the same time.

"What *exactly* did you just do?" Chief Tecumseh asked carefully.

"Preserved your friend's soul." The Shaman said as he held his hand over Arlo's face, making sure to keep it at least an inch away.

"It sounded like you just sent Arlo into the light, as in, to the other side, the afterlife." Mr. T said suspiciously.

"No, Arlo's soul is in the bowl. The light was just to lead him where he needed to be." The Shaman said, then nodded as if deciding something.

"When we asked you to save Arlo, we really meant body AND spirit." Mr. T said slowly.

The Shaman glanced at Mr. T and gave him a considering look before saying, "This fox spirit is far too strong for me to expel. I doubt that any Shaman alive today could expel the spirit without destroying the soul of the host. Now that Arlo's soul is safe, I'm free to battle the spirit that has inhabited his body. When that battle is finished, I'll just put Arlo back into his body where he belongs."

"Is there anything we can do to help?" Simon asked quietly.

"You're Arlo's friend right?" The Shaman asked seriously.

Simon nodded hesitantly.

"Good. Think about where Arlo is most comfortable and take him there. Once you have him in his most comfortable place, then talk to him. Tell him what's going on and tell him that by tomorrow morning he'll be back to normal. He won't be able to hear your spoken words, but he'll be able to feel what you mean." The Shaman said carefully.

"What if I spill him?" Simon asked in panic.

"Get him... Mr. T to help you move him. While you're doing that, I'm going to get to work on identifying our unwelcomed guest and figuring out how to get rid of him." The Shaman said seriously.

"Where do you want to take him?" Mr. T asked quietly.

"To the table by the big window. We like to sit there and talk while we look out at the camp." Simon said in a lost tone.

"It's going to be fine. Come on, I'll help you." Mr. T said as he stood.

Simon reluctantly stood, then bent down to take hold of one side of the bowl.

"Slow and easy. We aren't in any hurry." Mr. T said gently.

\* \* \* \* \*

As Mr. T and Simon walked out into the main room of the cabin, they noticed Luke huddled into a ball, crying in the floor.

"Let's get Arlo settled, then I'll talk to Luke." Mr. T whispered as they carefully moved to the table.

They positioned the bowl on the table and made sure that it was steady before letting go.

"Just talk to him. Let him know everything is going to be alright." Mr. T said softly.

"But how can it be? Arlo's body is dead." Simon said with tears in his eyes.

"We don't have any choice but to trust in the Shaman. He seems to know what he's doing and he says that Arlo will be back in his own body by morning. Trust in him and trust that the Great Spirit

has a plan for the greater good." Mr. T said as he looked Simon in the eyes.

"But I don't believe in the Great Spirit." Simon said softly.

Mr. T smiled and said, "Faith doesn't just happen. Not everyone has it and the Great Spirit doesn't require it to do what must be done. But it's possible that this experience could open your eyes to a greater power that watches over us all. I'm not asking you to believe, I'm just asking you to keep an open mind about the possibility."

"Okay, I'm going to talk to Arlo now. Luke needs you." Simon said quietly.

"Call me if you need anything." Mr. T said as he turned.

"Yeah, I will." Simon said as he took a seat at the small table and looked into the copper bowl of water that housed the soul of his best friend.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Would you guys get him some dry clothes? I want to get him changed and into bed before I do anything else." The Shaman said in thought.

"Isn't he dead?" Devon asked slowly.

"No, the fox spirit has claimed this body and is making it his own. If you'll look closely, you'll see that he's taking shallow breaths." the Shaman said seriously.

"Come Devon, we will get Arlo some clothes." Uri said as he walked toward the bathroom door.

"Is there anything I can do to help Arlo?" Mouse asked timidly.

The Shaman smiled at him and said, "Go pull back the covers on his bed and if there isn't a chair nearby, bring one in. Someone will need to stay with him at all times."

"Okay." Mouse said quickly and rushed out of the room.

The Shaman held his hand over Arlo's face and concentrated.

"No. It can't be." He mumbled to himself as he brought up his other hand and held it over Arlo's heart.

"Shhh. I can feel your pain. Don't worry, I'm beginning to understand what you are and I'm not going to destroy you." The Shaman whispered as he concentrated.

"Whoever you are, you don't belong here. I know it feels like a safe place to hide but you're hurting Arlo by being here."

Arlo's eyes opened and looked around in panic.

"Shhh. I'm not going to hurt you. Rest now and when you're a little stronger we'll figure out where you belong and find a way to get you back there." The Shaman whispered.

The Shaman looked deeply into the wild eyes and found no intelligence, only animalistic fear and mistrust.

"Just sleep now. I won't let anyone else hurt you. Just sleep and we'll get this all sorted out." The Shaman said as he gently stroked the boy's auburn hair.

"You're not going to get rid of it?" Devon asked in a challenging voice from the bathroom doorway, holding a stack of clothes.

"I'm going to get rid of it, I just won't destroy it." The young Shaman gently said as he watched the troubled eyes fighting to stay open.

"Why not? It attacked Arlo, shouldn't you get rid of it so it can't attack anyone else.?" Devon asked as Uri walked to his side.

"It isn't that simple." The young Shaman said as he glanced down to find his patient asleep.

"Would you please dress him and put him to bed while I prepare the things I need?" The Shaman asked as he turned his attention to Uri and Devon.

"Um, yeah. Sure." Devon said uncertainly.

"He's in a deep sleep. He shouldn't wake up, but if he does, just talk to him gently and come get me." The young Shaman said as he stood.

"This evil spirit won't attack us will it?" Uri asked with a note of fear.

"No. The spirit won't attack except in self defense and he isn't evil, he's frightened." The Shaman said quietly.

"What's wrong?" The Shaman asked as he walked into the common room of the cabin.

"I don't know. Luke started crying and I can't get him to stop." Mr. T said as he held the crying boy in his arms as Mouse stood by, looking on with wide eyes.

"Why is he crying?" The Shaman asked with concern.

"I don't know. Luke won't talk for days at a time and when he does talk, he only says one or two words. I can't get him to say anything at all right now." Mr. T said as he tried to sooth Luke.

The Shaman noticed Mouse's look of concern and asked, "Do you know what's wrong with your friend?"

Mouse turned his attention to the Shaman and quickly said, "No. Not really. I mean, I think it's about some of the stuff that was done to him before he came here, but he never told no one about that. Not even Dr. Dan."

"Dr. Dan?" The young Shaman asked, glancing at Mr. T.

"Dr. Daniel Richardson. He is a child psychologist that works with the boys." Mr. T said in a distracted voice.

"I think it would be a good idea if you called him. I'd like to try talking with Luke, maybe I can help." The Shaman said hopefully.

Mr. T nodded and stood, still carrying the 12 year old boy in his arms.

"Luke, my name is Jerico. I'm a Shaman." The Shaman said as he accepted Luke from Mr. T.

Luke didn't make any show of hearing but clutched tightly to the Shaman's chest.

"Where can I take him so we can talk privately?" The Shaman asked Mouse quietly.

"Our room. It's right over here." Mouse said as he led the way down the hall.

As the Shaman was about to enter the room, he noticed Uri and Devon carrying Arlo's body toward the hall.

"Would one of you stay with him and come and get me if he wakes up?" The Shaman asked hopefully.

"We both will stay with him." Uri said immediately.

"Thank you." The Shaman said with gratitude and followed Mouse into the bedroom.

\* \* \* \* \*

Simon reached into the bowl and touched his fingertips to the water as he said, "The Shaman says you can't hear the words I'm saying but you'll know that I'm here and that everything will be okay."

"I don't know why I believe it, but I think I do. I think he knows what he's doing and he'll have you back in your body by morning." Simon said quietly.

"I guess I never really thought about how good a friend you are to me Arlo. You put up with all my weirdness and don't complain about it at all."

"You act like I'm doing you some kind of big favor by being your friend. So what if you have a vision now and then. It's no big deal."

"You put up with me keeping the light on when I sleep and my nightmares every night. Even if you weren't my best friend, you're probably the only person in the world who could stand to be my roommate."

"I guess what I'm really saying is that I've never had a friend before and you're the best friend I could ever imagine. You've been there for me since the day you arrived and I never thought that someday I might lose you..." Simon said, then realized what he was saying.

"...Not that I'm going to lose you now. But this whole mess made me think about how horrible my life would be without you."

\* \* \* \* \*

The Shaman concentrated on the boy in his arms, and hugged him a little tighter.

A moment later the Shaman looked up and quietly asked, "What is your name?"

"Mouse." He said in a whisper.

The Shaman smiled at the name and quietly asked, "Mouse, could you do something for me?" .

"Sure, if it'll help Luke." Mouse said immediately.

"Yes. I think it will. I just need for you to bring me an apple from the cafeteria." The Shaman said quietly.

"Okay." Mouse said as he turned to run out of the room.

"Wait." The Shaman called quickly.

Mouse stopped in his tracks and turned to face the Shaman with question.

"The nicer the apple is, the more it will help Luke. If you can find one without any bruises or cuts, it will help him even more. I need the best apple you can find." The Shaman said seriously.

"Yeah." Mouse said, then took off running.

After a long silent moment, the Shaman finally said to Luke, "I'm a chosen one too. Running away from your gifts doesn't help you or anyone else."

Luke looked up at the Shaman with panic as he started to pull away.

"I'm not going to try and force you to do anything. I have accepted my gifts and chosen a life of service as a Shaman. Whatever choice you make is your own and I won't try to influence you in any way. You don't have to worry about me. Nothing you say or think around me can hurt me." The Shaman said seriously.

"Did I cause what happened to Arlo?" Luke asked in a trembling voice.

"No. I can't say how or why he was possessed by the rogue spirit, but I can promise you that you had nothing to do with it." The Shaman said seriously.

"Are you sure?" Luke asked in a whisper.

"Yes. Your friend Arlo is a spirit medium. It's almost like he has a flashing neon sign over his head that says 'Possess Me' to the entire spirit world." The Shaman said carefully.

Luke nodded.

"Tell me what you want to do about your gifts and I'll try to help you if I can." The Shaman said as he renewed his hug.

Luke enjoyed the hug and quietly said, "I don't want to be a chosen one."

The Shaman gently smoothed Luke's brown mop of hair and said, "Only the Great Spirit can bestow and withdraw our gifts. If it were in my power, I would take the burden away from you."

"I... my parents... they... they were part of a satanic church. They wanted me to be a high priest and... and..." Luke trailed off in tears.

"And perform sacrifices and other horrible things." The Shaman said quietly as he continued to stroke Luke's hair.

"Human sacrifices so we could gain the favor of... the dark one." Luke whispered.

The Shaman hugged him tighter and said, "I'm guessing that you've seen the dark side of our gifts. If you would like, I can show you the other side. I can show you how we can help people and make the world a better place."

"But I'm evil... I've been dedicated to Him. They made me take unholy communion. I ate Human flesh and drank blood." Luke said, then started crying again.

"Luke..." The Shaman began to say, but was interrupted.

"Lucifer. They named me Lucifer in his honor." Luke said into the Shaman's chest.

"Luke, look at me. Look with your second sight and see my spirit. Tell me what you see." The Shaman said seriously.

Luke reluctantly pulled back from the Shaman and got a distant look in his eyes.

"I can see the light of your spirit... it's almost burning... it's beautiful." Luke said distantly.

"I can see your spirit too. A chosen one who has been corrupted by evil has a distinct aura. All those things you went through were to try and corrupt you. But you never *chose* to follow that

path. Your spirit is pure and the choice is still yours." The Shaman said seriously.

"So I don't have to be evil and cause bad things to happen?" Luke asked uncertainly.

"No. Not unless that is what you choose to do. All those things your parents did meant nothing if you didn't make that choice." The Shaman said as he looked Luke in the eyes.

"But I was able to wither plants and make people sick just by talking to them and touching them." Luke said in confusion.

"Those are the gifts that you carry with you. The choice is yours if you make a plant wither or grow big and strong. You can make the healthy become sick or help the sick become healthy. I believe that we were brought together in this place and time so you could have your choice clearly defined."

Mouse rushed into the room and thrust an apple toward the Shaman.

"Luke, this apple is a symbol of your choice. By accepting it, you are accepting the responsibility of your gifts. No matter which path you take in the future, it will be with the knowledge that when you accepted the apple, you stopped denying what you truly are." The Shaman said seriously.

Luke looked up at Mouse holding the apple out to him, then turned and looked at the Shaman with question.

"If you refuse the apple, you can continue as you have been. Not speaking, not being a part of anything... who knows? Someday you might even find a way to be happy." The Shaman said in thought.

Luke looked at Mouse again and saw the true concern in his eyes. Carefully, Luke accepted the apple and then took a big bite of it.

"Is Luke going to be okay now?" Mouse asked the Shaman hopefully.

"What do you say Luke? Are you going to be okay?" The Shaman asked him with a gentle smile.

Luke looked into Mouse's worried eyes and said, "Yeah, I'm going to be fine."

"Oh wow. That's so cool. I never heard Luke say that many words in a week before! Can you say something else or was that it? Trent is gonna be so jealous. Up to now even though he stuttered, he still talked more than you. Maybe Jerico can help Trent too... I mean after he fixes Arlo." Mouse rambled.

"From the sound of it, you may not get the chance to talk." The Shaman said with a teasing smile at Luke.

"I don't have that much to say anyway." Luke said with a smile at Mouse.

\* \* \* \* \*

Simon moved his hand to the side of the bowl and gripped it, letting his fingers barely touch the water.

"I guess it's time for me to tell you about me. I couldn't tell anyone before but... I know you'll understand."

"I've never had a family. I don't know what my real name is or where I was born." Simon said in a distant voice as he looked out the window at the camp.

"My first memory is of some woman carrying me. I don't know who she was, but I'm pretty sure she was smuggling drugs across the border. All I remember is how afraid she was as she ran with me. I remember being scared as she ran and ran."

"That's how it was for me when I was a kid. They used me to smuggle drugs and things across the border into the country. Most of the time I'd have a toy or something filled with drugs and I'd hold on to it while the border guards searched us. Other times... they put the drugs inside me." Simon finished in a pained voice as he clenched his eyes tightly shut.

"Up until I was about seven or eight, I was passed around to whoever needed me for hauling drugs, then after I hauled this really big load for a guy named Severin, he sold me to these porn guys for the movies... I was with them for about four years before the Clan rescued me."

"I know you never said anything about it, but I could see it in your eyes the first time we met that you know who I am and what I did. Hell, anyone whose ever signed on the Internet and even accidentally seen a kiddie porn site has probably seen at least one of my pictures."

"All that stuff is why I can't leave Camp Little Eagle. I can't go to the library with you or to the mall... it's just too dangerous. The CIA, FBI, ATF and Interpol are all trying to get me, not to mention that the drug smugglers and porno guys all want to get me first and shut me up... permanently." Simon said as a tear escaped his eye and dropped into the bowl of water.

"Don't worry about all of that. I'm here and I'm really happy. I never had a clue of what it would be like to be a normal kid. I'm still not sure what that means. But you're the one who has made everything possible."

"You take the time to talk to me and you really care about what I have to say. Since I met you I've made all kinds of friends and I finally have a real life. Even if I can't ever leave Camp Little Eagle, I'm happy and it was all worth it just because I got to know you."

Simon fell silent as he looked into the bowl of water, hoping that Arlo was understanding what he felt.

\* \* \* \* \*

The Shaman walked into the common room carrying Luke. Mouse trailed a step behind him.

"I tried to call Dr. Richardson, but he's having an unscheduled session with a patient right now. John said that he can interrupt if it's an emergency." Mr. T said seriously.

"That's fine. I don't think it's an emergency, what do you think Luke?" The Shaman asked the boy in his arms.

"Nope. No emergency. I can talk to Dr. Dan tomorrow afternoon at our usual time." Luke said with a smile at Mr. T.

"You talked!" Mr. T said joyfully as he bolted up from his chair and pulled Luke from the Shaman's arms and into a hug.

"I brought him the apple that made him better." Mouse said proudly.

"You must have found the perfect apple." The Shaman said with a smile.

"That reminds me, Mrs. Birch from the cafeteria called about Mouse bursting in and scattering a case of apples all over her

walk-in cooler. I told her that Mouse would be over to clean it up before dinner..." Mr. T said and looked at Mouse expectantly.

"Okay. I'll pick up the apples and apologize to Mrs. Birch for making a mess." Mouse said reluctantly.

"I'll help you. I mean, you made the mess so you could help me." Luke said with a smile as Mr. T sat him on the floor and released him from the hug.

"Yeah... it's weird hearing you talk. It seems funny." Mouse said in thought as he started walking toward the door.

"Yeah, for me too." Luke said with a smile as he followed.

"Call us if there's anything we can do to help Arlo." Mouse said seriously as he looked at the Shaman.

"I will." The Shaman said with a smile at the two friends walking out of the room.

\* \* \* \* \*

"He just woke up." Devon said as he rushed into the common room.

The Shaman hurried to follow Devon back to the bedroom where Arlo's body was resting on a bed.

Chief Tecumseh was sitting in the chair by the bed, watching silently.

The Shaman moved to the other side of the bed and looked into the wide, terrified eyes.

"It's okay. You're safe." Jerico said gently as he reached out to stroked the boy's cheek.

The boy flinched away in terror and scooted up in the bed, pulling himself into a ball.

"I promise that I'll do whatever I can to help you." The Shaman said gently as he sat on the edge of the bed and put his arms around the huddled boy.

Chief Tecumseh looked at the young Shaman with question. By all he knew, by all he had ever heard, a fox spirit needed to be defeated and cast out where it could cause no more harm.

The boy hesitantly put his arms around the Shaman to return the hug.

"That's right. You're safe." Jerico said peacefully.

Between one moment and the next the tentative hug turned into desperate clutching as the boy's body was wracked with sobs.

"I know, I know. That's all over now. You're here and you're loved." The Shaman said with pain in his voice.

"You *love* the demon that possessed one of my students?" Chief Tecumseh asked in a voice between disbelief and anger.

"I try to love all the children of the Great Spirit. This isn't a fox spirit or a demon, he's a lost and frightened child who, for whatever reason, has become separated from his body." The Shaman said in a gentle voice as he held the child to his chest.

"But how could the dislocated spirit of a child be powerful enough to overcome the eagle spirits?" Chief Tecumseh asked in challenge.

"He didn't. He was able to pass through the wards on this camp because he is a child in need. All children in need are welcomed here and will be protected by the eagle spirits."

"What about Arlo? Why wasn't he protected?" Devon challenged.

The Shaman considered the question before answering, "Sometimes it takes pain and loss to make us realize that something is wrong and needs to be changed."

Devon shook his head as tears of frustration filled his eyes and asked in a shaking voice, "Why can't you just answer the question? Arlo is one of the nicest people I've ever met, why did this happen to him?"

The Shaman shifted the boy in his arms and renewed his hug before saying, "You want an answer? I'll give you one. Arlo was going to be possessed sooner or later. He's a high level spirit medium without any training at all. I think that this little guy in my arms was sent here to make us aware of the problem before something possesses Arlo that we can't deal with."

Chief Tecumseh looked at the young Shaman cautiously before asking, "What do you intend to do with the spirit that inhabits Arlo's body now?"

The Shaman hugged the boy in his arms a little tighter as he said, "I don't know. I only hope the Great Spirit will provide a way that he can survive."

"What do you mean you don't know?" Uri asked carefully.

"This little guy was able to take over Arlo's body, but he can't stay. Even now I can feel him getting weaker. If I can't find a way to preserve him, his spirit will dissipate. He won't move on to an afterlife, he'll simply... stop being." The Shaman said sadly.

"What about the bowl of water?" Devon asked cautiously.

"It wouldn't help him. His soul would probably dissipate even faster. This little guy is... incomplete. He doesn't have consciousness or any real memory. He's a lost little boy that's scared and wanting very badly just to be loved." Jerico said then gave the boy in his arms another squeeze.

"What about Arlo's soul?" Chief Tecumseh asked quietly, finally beginning to understand.

"Arlo's soul is complete. His consciousness and memory, everything that makes a soul alive is with him. When I put him back in his body, he'll just feel like he had a very long, very strange dream." The Shaman said seriously.

"So what can we do now?" Devon asked as he looked at the boy clutched tightly to the Shaman's chest.

The Shaman looked up with tears in his eyes as he said, "Pray. Because if I can't find something to help him before morning, this little guy is going to be lost forever..."

## Chapter 3

"What's a fox spirit?" Devon asked timidly.

The young Shaman glanced over at Devon to find his honest curiosity and quietly said, "A fox spirit is a troubled spirit of violence and mischief. You would probably know of it as a poltergeist. It doesn't matter, that's not what we're dealing with here."

"What exactly ARE we dealing with?" Chief Tecumseh asked firmly.

"I'm not entirely sure. I thought it was a rogue spirit..." Jerico began to say, then saw the confused expressions on Devon and Uri's faces.

"That is to say, a ghost. A human soul that has for some reason lost its way to the afterlife and wanders the Earth. But it doesn't add up. This spirit doesn't have the traits of consciousness and intent of a Rogue Spirit." Jerico said in thought.

"Then what is it?" Devon asked in a small voice.

"I'm still working on that. I think I remember reading something about a boy who was possessed very much like this, but I can't remember for sure..." The young Shaman said in a distant voice.

"When I study, I make notes of the most important facts. Would you perhaps have it written down somewhere?" Uri asked cautiously, obviously hesitant to speak.

Jerico thought about the question for a moment, then his eyes went wide as he remembered.

"That's it. I wasn't reading it, I was writing it down. About three years ago I was collecting some of the oral history that had passed down in a family in Ireland. I remember right where it's written. It's at Uncle Aubrey's house!" Jerico said with excitement.

"Can you go get it?" Chief Tecumseh asked, sounding a little more relieved.

"I'd rather not leave this little guy. If he runs into trouble, I want to be close by to help him." Jerico said and hugged the boy in his arms more tightly.

"Is there someone who can bring it to you?" Devon asked hopefully.

"There's one way to find out. Will one of you guys hold this little guy for a while so I can make a call?" Jerico asked hopefully.

Uri reluctantly began to nod, when Devon quickly said, "I'll do it."

"Thanks Devon, I'll take him back as soon as I'm done." Jerico said as he shifted over so Devon could sit beside him on the bed.

With a little coaxing and effort, Arlo's body was finally shifted over to Devon's lap.

"I'll hurry." Jerico said as he rushed out of the room.

\* \* \* \* \*

Jerico dialed his uncle's number and waited impatiently for someone to answer.

As he heard his cousin Paul answer the phone, he saw Mouse rush into the cabin with a look of panic in his eyes.

A moment later Luke followed with a hesitant expression.

Jerico held up his hand to indicate the need for silence.

"Pauley, I need for you to get me a notebook from my room. It's in the stack of books in the floor beside my desk. It's the dark red one." Jerico said in concentration.

After a moment, Jerico rolled his eyes and said, "Yes Pauley, you're allowed to go in my room just this once. Please get the notebook, it's really important."

Jerico put his hand over the mouthpiece of the phone and asked, "What's up guys?"

Mouse quickly said, "Something's wrong with Luke! When we left he stopped talking again. I brought you another apple so you can fix him."

"I'm kind of busy right now. Luke, why don't you go ahead and explain it to Mouse. I'm right here, it'll be okay." The young Shaman said with assurance.

Luke nodded and turned to look Mouse in the eyes as he explained, "When I say something, especially when I'm excited, it can cause stuff to happen. Sometimes that stuff will hurt people,

I mean, like really bad. When I'm here with Jerico, he can make it so my words won't hurt you. But when we leave... I can't talk."

"Until he learns to control his special ability, he has to do it like this. The only time he'll really be able to talk freely is when he has someone to anchor him, like now." Jerico said seriously, then turned his attention back to the phone.

After a moment of listening, he said, "That's the one. Would you get your mom to drive it over here? I really need that notebook."

"Oh... What about Lucy?"

"Is there anyone there who can drive?"

"You can? Four months ago?" Jerico said in a reluctant voice.

"I guess so... If your mom has any problem with you using the car, I'll explain that it was an emergency."

"No, I really need that book right now. Just videotape it... Listen, they aren't going to get off the island today anyway. Gilligan is going to screw it up at the last minute, then when everyone is getting mad, something will happen that shows them that they wouldn't have gotten off the island anyway and they probably would have been killed." Jerico said seriously.

"...I know because I'm a Shaman." Jerico said, then glanced at Mouse and Luke with a helpless look.

"Pauley, you can drive through McDonald's on the way back. Just get over here to Camp Little Eagle right away... do you know where it is?" Jerico asked hesitantly.

He nodded as he said, "Good, just get over here right away. Someone will meet you in the parking lot."

Jerico hung up the phone, then gave Luke and Mouse an embarrassed look as he said, "My cousin is a great kid, but..."

Luke and Mouse couldn't help but smile at Jerico's expression.

"Is there any way I can do that anchor thing that you do for Luke?" Mouse asked quickly.

"I doubt it. I've never even met someone who could be an anchor, I've just heard the stories. The only reason I can do it is because I've had to learn how to anchor myself." Jerico said carefully.

"Can we at least try?" Mouse pleaded.

"Sure, it won't hurt to try." Jerico said in thought.

"What do I have to do?" Mouse asked with excitement.

"Luke, I need you to concentrate for a few seconds on something that causes you to be sad. Then say something that holds the essence of what you're feeling." The young Shaman said in concentration.

"Mouse, if you're an anchor you'll feel the power in the words, but instead of being effected by it, you'll be able to... take it into you and change it into something harmless." Jerico said with difficulty.

"And what if I'm not an anchor?" Mouse asked hesitantly.

"You might want to have a box of tissues handy." Jerico said weakly.

"Okay, let's do it." Mouse said as he turned to look at Luke.

Jerico concentrated so he was no longer shielding Mouse from Luke's words.

Luke thought for a second, then looked into Mouse's eyes as he whispered, "I **feel** so **alone**."

Jerico watched carefully as Mouse got a strange look on his face.

"I felt it!" Mouse said with excitement.

"How do you feel?" Jerico asked cautiously.

"I did it! That was so cool! I felt this sad feeling, like a hurting in my chest, then it was like it... it just turned upside down and twisted and then it wasn't sad anymore. Then it just kind of went away!" Mouse said happily.

"Does that mean that Mouse is an anchor?" Luke asked hesitantly.

"Hold on. Let me try something." Jerico said in concentration.

Luke looked at Jerico with question.

Jerico concentrated for a moment, then carefully said, "A crowd can be the **loneliest** place in the world when you're **different**."

Tears welled up in Mouse's eyes as he slowly crumpled to the floor then hugged himself and started crying.

"You're hurting him! Stop it!" Luke screamed as he knelt down to put his arms around Mouse.

Jerico quickly said, "Mouse, listen to me. Luke is your **friend**, you **never** have to be **alone** again."

Mouse looked up at Jerico, then looked at Luke with question, as if he'd just woken from a horrible nightmare.

"So what does that mean?" Luke asked as he helped Mouse to stand.

"It means that Mouse isn't an anchor, he's *your* anchor. You can talk to him without hurting him." Jerico said seriously.

"Really? That's so cool!" Mouse said happily as he wiped the tears from his eyes.

"I have to get this situation with Arlo sorted out, but when he's back to being himself, I can help you learn how to anchor Luke so he can talk to anyone he wants as long as you're around." Jerico said with a smile at Mouse and Luke's happiness.

"You'll be able to talk and play and do stuff like everyone else! This is gonna be so great!" Mouse said with excitement.

"Hold on guys. For now, you need to just talk with each other. Until you've had some training, you could still hurt other people if you talk to them." Jerico said seriously.

"Okay. I'll be careful." Luke said quietly.

"This is gonna be so awesome!" Mouse said as he nearly bounced.

Jerico smiled and said, "I've got to get back to Arlo now. You guys have fun."

\* \* \* \* \*

As Jerico walked into the bedroom, he saw Devon hugging Arlo's body tightly and gently rubbing his back.

"Thank you for holding him for me Devon. I can't do much else until my cousin Pauley arrives with my notebook so I can take him back now if you want." Jerico said quietly.

"I can keep holding him. I really don't mind." Devon said gently.

"Okay, but if you need a break, just let me know." Jerico said with a gentle smile.

"Did Derek call security to allow your cousin entry?" Chief Tecumseh asked casually.

"No, I didn't see him out there." Jerico said as he turned his attention to the Chief.

"I'll attend to that now. Otherwise Pauley will have to wait at the security gate when he arrives." Chief Tecumseh said as he slowly got up from his chair.

"Thank you. And I told him someone would meet him in the parking lot." Jerico said as he looked at Uri with question.

"I will be happy to bring your cousin when he arrives." Uri said, looking relieved at the prospect of being able to do something to contribute.

"Thanks Uri, I appreciate it." Jerico said honestly.

\* \* \* \* \*

Simon had watched and heard everything that had gone on with Mouse and Luke from his place by the window.

He smiled to himself, then said into the bowl of water, "I think you're going to be okay Arlo. It looks like this Shaman really knows what he's doing."

"Just hang on for a little while longer. I know how you always seem to be stressing out about school work and everything that needs to be done. Well now you don't have to do a thing but relax." Simon said with a smile.

"Maybe this was the only way to get you to take a vacation. I mean, it's really cool if you think about it. You get to just float and relax and there's nothing in the world for you to worry about." Simon said gently.

"I hope that when you get back into your body you'll feel rested. I sometimes worry about how you always seem so tense." Simon said in almost a whisper.

"I guess it takes one to know one, huh?" Simon said with a chuckle.

"Maybe that's why we're such good friends. We're both wound up to about the same tension level... That may be a weird thing to have in common, but I think that's part of why I feel so comfortable with you... you understand me. At least that part of me." Simon said in thought.

"You're the only one who knows me who doesn't give me that look... the one where they're thinking, 'Is this the day when he's going to snap?'. Even Chief Tecumseh does it. If you weren't here, I might have by now." Simon said distantly.

"When you get back... to yourself... I hope I have the guts to tell you some of this to your face. I'm pretty sure you already know how much I appreciate your friendship, but I think I need to tell you." Simon said in a whisper.

Chief Tecumseh and Uri walked into the room and Simon fell silent to see what was going to happen next.

\* \* \* \* \*

The little Ford Fiesta pulled into the parking lot and whipped into a parking place.

Uri watched as the lanky teenage boy extracted his long angular body from the tiny car.

"Are you the Shaman's cousin?" Uri asked, just to be sure.

Paul got a look of question for a second, then chuckled as he said, "I guess I am. I've never heard anyone call Jerico 'The Shaman' before. That's kinda cool."

Uri, who was usually hesitant to get to know new people, took an instant liking to the boy who was approaching him.

"I'm Paul." He said and extended his hand to shake.

"Hello. My name is Uri." Uri said as he shook the offered hand.

"It's nice to meet you Uri. Wow, you're big. I bet you're really good at football." Paul said casually as they began to walk.

"No. I do not care to participate in sports, although I do enjoy weight training." Uri said, surprising himself at revealing even that much personal information to a complete stranger.

"I don't like sports either, you just look like you'd be good at football. I've never lifted weights but I think it'd be cool. But I'd

need someone around who knew what they were doing... I don't have a clue." Paul finished timidly.

"Even when you are experienced, it is important to have another nearby. It is a matter of safety." Uri said seriously, then pointed to indicate which cabin they were going to.

"Yeah. Besides, it sucks being alone. I mean, unless you're watching TV, then I guess it's okay." Paul said in thought.

Uri was surprised to find that he was smiling at the statement. He usually kept a very controlled facade in place for the world to see. But somehow this stranger was able to make him drop whatever mask he might usually wear.

"Sometimes it is good to be alone. Taking time out to sit in a quiet room gives one time to think." Uri said quietly.

Paul seemed to consider the statement for a moment before shaking his head and saying, "When I'm alone and thinking about stuff I usually get depressed. So I just don't do it. If I'm alone, I have the TV or music or something going so I don't have to think."

Uri thought about Paul's words, then curiously asked, "So rather than deal with those issues that bother you, you simply ignore them?"

"Yeah. I mean I still get bummed out sometimes. But I don't sit and stew in it. When something bothers me I try to either fix whatever it is, or if it's something that I can't fix then I just tell myself, 'It's something I can't fix' and get over it." Paul said frankly.

Uri let a laugh escape at the statement, then stopped in wonder at the action. He was usually so guarded and solemn. He didn't laugh, he never laughed, and yet in the company of this stranger he felt free to express whatever he was feeling without restraint.

"What's so funny?" Paul asked with a smile.

"Your philosophy is very... basic. I envy your ability to cope with your life's problems so simplistically." Uri said honestly as he opened the door to the cabin and stood aside for Paul to precede him into the room.

"Yeah. Well most people think I don't have any problems because I don't let them drag me down. But everyone has problems, the only difference is how they deal with them." Paul said as he

looked around the common room of the cabin and noticed Simon talking into a bowl of water.

"Your cousin is right this way." Uri said as he gestured to the hallway.

"Just a second." Paul said as he hurried to Simon.

Simon looked up at the teenage boy approaching and abruptly stopped talking.

"It's okay, you don't have to stop. I have an aquarium at home and I talk to my fish all the time." Paul said with a casual smile.

"I don't have a fish." Simon said with confusion, as if it were the most ridiculous thing that anyone could have said.

Paul looked into the bowl and found that it was empty except for water.

"Your cousin is right this way." Uri said from behind Paul.

"Um, yeah." Paul said with a puzzled look, then turned to follow Uri out of the room.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Thanks Pauley. That's the one I needed." Jerico said as Paul and Uri walked into the room.

Paul handed the notebook to Jerico, then noticed an older boy holding a younger boy in his lap.

The younger boy was whimpering as the older boy was hugging him and rubbing his back.

"Is there anything I can do to help?" Paul asked hopefully.

"You've already helped by bringing me this book." Jerico said honestly.

"You know what I mean. Can I be here when you do your Shaman stuff?" Paul asked in a begging tone.

"Well, the only Shaman stuff I'm going to do right now is to study this notebook. Besides, weren't you wanting to drive through McDonald's and get something to eat?" Jerico asked in a leading tone.

"I'll stay here all night if it means I might be able to help you do Shaman stuff. I can go to McDonald's anytime." Paul said seriously.

Jerico gave a sigh of resignation, then said, "Okay, I guess so... but I'm not promising anything. If I find something you can do to help, I'll let you know."

"Thanks Jerico! What do you want me to do now?" Paul asked with excitement.

"Just hang out for a while. You can talk to the guys while I see if I can find something that will help in this notebook." Jerico said seriously.

Paul nodded hesitantly.

"Uri, is there someplace where I can read this without distraction? I really need to be able to focus on what I'm doing." Jerico asked and glanced at Paul cautiously, relaying the message that Paul was the distraction that Jerico was trying to avoid.

"You may use my room, it is right this way." Uri said formally, noticing the dark look that had come into Paul's eyes.

"Just send someone to get me if the little guy has any problems." Jerico said as Uri led him out of the room.

Paul looked around the room, at a loss as to what to do next.

\* \* \* \* \*

"It's good to see you Pauley." A voice said that broke him out of his wandering thoughts.

"Uncle Hawkeye?" Paul said in surprise as he watched his uncle walk across the room and take a seat by the bed.

"I didn't realize that you were old enough to drive." Chief Tecumseh said with delight.

"Yeah. I've been able to drive for four months now... but I don't really get to do it that much." Paul finished in a small voice.

"It seems like it was just yesterday that Aubrey was carrying you around on his hip." Chief Tecumseh said with a chuckle of fond remembrance.

Paul blushed at the statement, feeling distinctly uncomfortable.

"Perhaps I could show Paul around the cabin and introduce him to the others?" Uri said from the doorway.

"That's very kind of you Uri. Thank you." Chief Tecumseh said with an approving smile at the thoughtful gesture.

"Come with me Paul and I will show you the common room." Uri said, snapping Paul out of his thoughts.

"Um, yeah. Thanks." Paul said as he tried to force a smile onto his face.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Something is concerning you. Perhaps if you speak of it, you will be able to fix it or get over it." Uri said as he led Paul into the common room.

"Jerico doesn't want me here. I think I should probably leave." Paul said in thought.

Uri motioned for him to have a seat on the couch.

After they were both seated, Uri quietly asked, "Would he not tell you if he wanted you to leave?"

"Not really. He tries to be nice. The way it usually works is that he tries to be nice to me, then I bug him and bug him until he can't take it anymore and he tells me to go away. Then he ignores me for a while until he gets over it, then he tries to be nice to me and I start bugging him again." Paul said distantly.

"Why do you bug him?" Uri asked curiously.

"I don't know. It just kind of happens... I can't help it. Jerico is fun to be around. He's been all over the world and has some really cool stories to tell. He's a Shaman and knows all kinds of really awesome stuff because of that. I guess... I want him to pay attention to me... I want him to like me." Paul finished in a defeated voice.

"Does he?" Uri asked cautiously.

"I think he just tries to put up with me. I'm so much of a pest that he can't take it too long... no one can. I wish I wasn't like this." Paul finished on the verge of tears.

"You are not a pest to me." Uri said honestly.

Paul looked at Uri with hope, then the look fell as he said, "Sooner or later I'll bug you too. It's just the way I am."

"Perhaps. Perhaps not. Come and let me show you around. And if at some point you begin to 'bug me' I will simply let you know." Uri said seriously.

Paul thought about that for a second, then smiled as he said, "That sounds good."

Uri stood and made a sweeping gesture to include the whole room as he said, "This is the common room. It is the place where we can enjoy movies or share in group discussions. There is a separate television that is for the purpose of playing games."

Paul looked around with approval at the entertainment center.

"Although you have met Simon, I believe a more formal introduction is in order." Uri said as he walked toward Simon at the table by the window.

"Simon, I would like to introduce Paul, he is the cousin of Jerico, the Shaman." Uri said formally.

"It's nice to meet you." Paul said hesitantly and couldn't help but look at the bowl of water.

Simon followed Paul's gaze to the bowl and hesitantly said, "Um, yeah. It's nice to meet you too. This is... um, it's kind of a long story."

"The disembodied soul of Simon's best friend is being kept in the bowl. Your cousin is working to correct the situation." Uri said simply.

Simon looked at Uri with surprise, then glanced at Paul and said, "I guess it isn't that long of a story after all."

Paul looked into the bowl again, then turned to Simon and asked, "What's your friend's name?"

"This is Arlo." Simon said quietly and grasped the edge of the bowl in a protective gesture.

Paul looked into the bowl and gently said, "Don't worry Arlo. My cousin has traveled the world and studied the beliefs and customs of dozens of cultures. Having him here is better than having a Shaman, a Priest and a Medicine Man."

"Thanks Paul, I don't know if Arlo understood that, but it sure made me feel better." Simon said with an appreciative smile.

A knock on the door drew everyone's attention.

"Just a moment." Uri said as he walked to the door.

"Really Paul. Thanks." Simon said more quietly.

"I mean it. Jerico may be young, but he's been studying since he was younger than me to be a Shaman. He's been traveling since he was eighteen trying to learn as much as he can." Paul said seriously.

\* \* \* \* \*

Uri answered the door and was surprised to see Obie, one of the boys from cabin three.

"Hello Obie, please come in." Uri said courteously.

"Hi. I was wondering if Mouse and Luke are here?" Obie asked shyly.

"Yes. I believe they are in their room. Come and meet Paul, then I will take you to them." Uri said as he indicated Paul talking to Simon on the other side of the room.

"Okay." Obie said shyly as he walked with Uri.

"Paul, I would like to introduce Obie, he lives in cabin three." Uri said as he approached.

Paul turned to see the younger boy and immediately smiled when he saw the shirt he was wearing.

"Hi Obie. I really like your shirt. That's Takato's symbol isn't it?" Paul asked happily.

Obie looked down at his shirt, then up at Paul with a big smile as he said, "Yeah, no one has ever recognized it before. Do you like Digimon?"

"Yeah, it's one of my favorite cartoons ever." Paul said with a great smile.

"I love the way Rika is learning to be nice now that she's hanging around with Takato and Henry." Obie said with enthusiasm.

"Yeah, did you notice how their teacher has Kari's voice?" Paul asked, completely forgetting that Simon and Uri were in the room.

"Yeah. Especially in the episode on the camping trip when they had to fight the..."

"Right Big Chicken." Paul said in unison with Obie, then both broke into chuckles.

Uri and Simon shared an amused look at the bizarre conversation.

"Come and I will take you to Mouse and Luke." Uri said with a smile.

"Oh... Okay." Obie said with distraction.

"Come and I will introduce you." Uri said to Paul.

"Yeah, sure." Paul said, then turned to Simon and said, "It was nice to meet you Simon."

Then he looked into the bowl and said, "You too Arlo."

Obie looked at Paul with question, then followed as Uri led the way to Luke and Mouse's bedroom.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Do you need for me to take him for a while?" Chief Tecumseh asked quietly.

"No, I'm really fine. I don't think anyone has ever really needed me for anything before. It feels good to hold him and know that I'm helping him to feel better." Devon said peacefully.

"You are doing a very good job. He has quieted considerably." Chief Tecumseh said gently.

"I hope we can find a way to save him. He's so hurt... and all he wants is to be loved." Devon said distantly.

Chief Tecumseh looked at the scene of caring before him and nodded in agreement.

\* \* \* \* \*

Uri knocked on the closed door and waited for an answer.

Mouse opened the door with a look of question, then smiled when he saw Obie.

"Come on in guys. What's up?" Mouse asked happily as he opened the door wide.

"I wanted to introduce you to Paul. He is the cousin of Jerico, the Shaman." Uri said in a formal tone.

"Hi." Mouse said happily as Luke waved his greeting.

"Hi." Paul said with a curious look at Luke.

"Luke can't talk to you, but don't worry about it. I talk enough for both of us." Mouse quickly explained.

Paul smiled at the statement.

"I was just wondering if I could hang around with you guys for a while?" Obie asked hopefully.

"Sure. You can hang out with us whenever you want. You look worried, what's wrong?" Mouse asked frankly.

Obie glanced at Uri and Paul with a look of caution.

"We can leave to afford you privacy." Uri said in his formal way.

Obie seemed to come to a decision and said, "No, that's okay. You can stay if you want. Maybe you can help."

"Come on in and sit down so Obie can tell us what's going on." Mouse said as he plopped down to sit on the bed beside Luke.

Uri looked at Paul with question.

Paul gave a nod and waited to see what Uri was going to do.

Uri and Paul sat down on the other bed opposite where Mouse and Luke were sitting.

Obie looked around, then pulled a chair out from one of the desks between the beds and took a seat.

"Go ahead. Spill it." Mouse said and devoted his full attention.

"Well. I'm thinking about asking if I can leave." Obie said seriously.

Shocked silence fell over the room.

"Why would you want to leave? I mean, what's wrong? Is someone treating you bad?" Mouse exploded.

In a voice that was almost a whisper, Obie said, "No. Everyone is nice. It's just... I feel like I'm getting in Mike's way."

"Has your brother been telling you that?" Uri asked in a firm voice.

"No. It's just... It's like he can't have friends or do stuff with me always being around. Mike's stopped playing football and stays inside to watch TV with me but I can tell that he's bored and would rather be doing stuff with his friends." Obie said quietly.

"Have you told him how you feel?" Uri asked seriously.

"Yeah. Well, not about leaving, but I've told him that it's okay if he wants to go play football and stuff with the other guys." Obie said in thought.

"What did he say?" Paul asked with concern.

"He went ahead and went outside with them for a while, but he came back in and said he was worried about me being inside all alone." Obie said, looking like he was about to cry.

A moment of silence fell over the room as everyone thought about what Obie had said.

It was broken by Obie quietly saying, "I thought that if I left Camp Little Eagle, then Mike could have fun with his friends again and be happy."

"Mike wouldn't be happy if you left. Besides, where would you go?" Mouse said in thought.

Obie shrugged and said, "Into a foster home or something. I guess it doesn't matter."

"It matters." Mouse said in a firm voice.

Obie looked at Mouse with surprise.

"You matter Obie. You're our friend and we don't want you to go. We know you're safe here. If you left the camp, anything could happen to you. Mike wouldn't be happy. He'd be scared to death for you and he'd probably leave too so he could find you. He takes being your big brother very seriously." Mouse said almost sounding angry.

"I guess I didn't think of that." Obie said quietly.

"Obie, if you really want to get away from the camp for a while, you could come over to my house. We both like Digimon and I bet there's a lot of other stuff that we both like." Paul said seriously.

"Really? But you're like... old." Obie said hesitantly.

Paul laughed at the statement and said, "I'm sixteen. It's not that old. Besides, we're all the same age when we watch cartoons."

Obie smiled and nodded at the statement.

"Besides, I think I know what you're feeling. I'm feeling kind of the same way." Paul said honestly.

"Really? You have a big brother who thinks you need him to be around all the time?" Obie asked with disbelief.

"Well, no. I have a big cousin who thinks I'm a pest and a little kid. But I think it ends up being the same. Your brother sees you as being little and helpless, my cousin sees me as being little and worthless. We both end up feeling alone and like they'd be better off without us around." Paul said in thought.

"Yeah." Obie said darkly.

"So you're not alone. If you need to talk about stuff, I'll understand. You can call me and I'll come over and get you whenever you need to talk about something... or even if you just feel like getting away from the camp for a while... Or the next time they have a Digimon marathon." Paul finished with a smile.

Obie giggled and nodded his agreement.

"And when you're not visiting Paul, you could maybe spend some time here with us." Mouse said hopefully.

"Yeah. I like it here with you guys." Obie said shyly.

Luke shook Mouse's arm and urged him to lean over so he could whisper into Mouse's ear.

After a moment of thought, Mouse sat back up and said, "Luke just had a really good idea. Why don't you move into cabin one with us? We have one empty room and everyone likes you here."

Luke nodded his wholehearted agreement.

"That would allow your brother to be with his friends in cabin three and you could be with your friends here. He would not have to worry about your well being, but would also be free to pursue his own interests." Uri said reasonably.

Obie thought about it for a second, then quietly asked, "Do you think Chief Tecumseh would let me move?"

"He's in Simon's room. Let's go ask him." Mouse said as he hopped up off the bed.

Obie slowly stood, then said, "Thanks guys. I think this is going to be good."

"It's going to be great! Trent is going to be really excited. He wanted you to move in here when you and Mike first got here." Mouse said as he was nearly bouncing, waiting for everyone to get to the door.

Obie smiled at Mouse's enthusiasm, enjoying the feeling of being wanted.

\* \* \* \* \*

The group of boys nearly fell into a pile when Mouse stopped suddenly just inside Simon's room.

Chief Tecumseh looked on with amusement as Mouse approached him cautiously, obviously about to ask for something.

"Chief Tecumseh, we was all just wondering..." Mouse began to say.

"Were." Chief Tecumseh corrected.

Mouse nodded and carefully said, "We were all just wondering if there's any way that Obie could move into Cabin One with us?"

Chief Tecumseh's eyebrows went up in surprise at the request, then he turned his attention to Obie and said, "Obadiah, would you come over here and discuss this with me?"

Obie hesitantly walked to stand beside Chief Tecumseh.

"Do you want to change cabins?" Chief Tecumseh asked in a softer voice.

Obie nodded hesitantly.

"Can you tell me why you want to move?" Chief Tecumseh asked gently.

"Because Mike can't do stuff with his friends when I'm always around. If I was in this cabin, then he wouldn't have to worry about me and he could have fun again." Obie said in almost a whisper.

"So you believe Micah's friendships are suffering because he feels an obligation to watch after you?" Chief Tecumseh asked carefully.

Obie nodded seriously.

"I assume that the rest of you won't have any problem if Obadiah moves in here." Chief Tecumseh said as he looked around the room.

"We all like Obie. Besides, he should'a moved in here to begin with." Mouse said firmly, then a shy expression came over his face when he suddenly remembered who he was talking to.

"Would you care to explain what you mean Harold?" Chief Tecumseh asked curiously.

Mouse winced at the use of his real name, but quickly got over it and said, "Obie likes to watch TV and play board games like we do. The guys in cabin three like to play football and soccer and video games and stuff like that."

"Have you discussed this decision with your brother?" Chief Tecumseh asked as he turned his attention back to Obie.

"N... no. At first, I was just gonna ask if I could leave Camp Little Eagle, but the guys thought that if I just moved here instead, then Mike wouldn't have to worry if I was okay, but could still have his friends." Obie said with a slight tremble in his voice.

"I see." Chief Tecumseh said, hiding his surprise at the fact that Obie was considering leaving.

After a moment to consider everything, Chief Tecumseh stood and said, "I'm going to call cabin three and ask your brother to come over here so we can have a talk with him. After that, I see no reason that you can't move in here tonight."

Obie rushed to Chief Tecumseh and hugged him tightly for an instant before he realized what he was doing.

"Sorry." Obie whispered as he backed away cautiously.

"Quite alright. Come along into the common room so we can call your brother." Chief Tecumseh said with a gentle smile.

\* \* \* \* \*

Paul followed the group out into the common room, feeling somehow a part of everything that was going on.

As Chief Tecumseh walked to pick up the phone, a buzzer sounded and a red light started flashing on the wall.

"What's that?" Paul asked loudly as he looked around for any sign of danger.

Uri walked to Paul's side and said loud enough to be heard over the buzzer, "It means the camp has just gone to Security Red."

\* \* \* \* \*

Chief Tecumseh walked to the front door and slid the slide bolt closed, then took a clip board off the hook beside the door.

After a moment of checking down the list, Chief Tecumseh asked, "Does anyone know where Trent and Jose are?"

"Yeah. They're helping in the cafeteria today. We saw them there just a few minutes ago." Mouse said loudly.

Chief Tecumseh marked down that information, then asked, "Do any of you know where Derek might have gone?"

Everyone looked around at each other with question.

Simon finally said, "He got a phone call and left a little while ago. He didn't say where he was going."

Chief Tecumseh shook his head at the information, then looked over the list one last time before picking up the phone.

"This is Chief Hawkeye Tecumseh calling in for Cabin One. We are missing three. Trent Richards and Jose De La Cruz, both believed to be in the cafeteria, and... Derek Tecumseh, location unknown. We have three extras, Obadiah Jeffries from Cabin Three and two visitors Jerico Foote and Paul Foote." Chief Tecumseh said seriously.

A moment later the buzzer stopped, but the red light continued to flash.

"Thank you. Can you tell me what's going on?" Chief Tecumseh said with relief at not having to talk over the buzzer.

"I see. Please call Cabin Three immediately and let Micah Jeffries know that his brother is safe and well. Call me if there is anymore information." Chief Tecumseh said firmly.

"Yes, thank you. Goodbye." He said, then hung up the phone.

Everyone in the room looked at Chief Tecumseh with question.

"Director Short from Federation Youth Services called for a 'Security Red' condition from the Southcrest Ranch. We have no other information at this time. Uri, will you please see to making sure the building is secure. Harold, will you and Luke be in charge of the door?" Chief Tecumseh asked in thought.

Uri motioned for Paul to follow him down the hallway.

Mouse and Luke hurried to the door and waited anxiously.

"Is there anything I can do?" Obie asked as he looked around.

Chief Tecumseh smiled and said, "Yes Obadiah. You can help Harold and Luke."

The three boys watched as Chief Tecumseh walked down the hallway to Simon's room.

\* \* \* \* \*

"What are we doing?" Paul asked as he followed Uri into a bedroom.

"We are checking to see that all the windows are securely locked and that there is no evidence that anyone has gained entry to the building." Uri said seriously as he checked the window.

"You mean that there might be someone in here?" Paul asked as he quickly looked around the room.

"No. Probably not. But since we don't know the nature of the security alert, it is best to be cautious. We had a security yellow alert just last week because a private plane went off course and flew too close to our airspace and triggered the alarm. " Uri said as he looked in the closet.

"This room is clear, lets move on to the next." Uri said seriously.

Paul silently followed.

Chief Tecumseh walked into the bedroom to find both Devon and Jerico comforting Arlo.

"The buzzer scared him." Jerico said softly.

"It will sound again in three short bursts when the security alert is over." Chief Tecumseh said as he walked to the chair.

"Do you know what's wrong?" Devon asked with concern.

"No. Director Short called the alert from Southcrest. That's all I know." Chief Tecumseh said quietly.

"I have some good news." Jerico said as he carefully moved away from Arlo and Devon.

"I could use some." Chief Tecumseh said in a tired voice.

"I found what I was looking for in the notebook." Jerico said, then picked up the spiral bound book from the nightstand beside the bed.

"So does it tell how to help Arlo and... the 'Little Guy'?" Chief Tecumseh asked hesitantly.

Jerico smiled at the Chief's use of the name, then said, "It's not written like a cookbook. What I have are the accounts of several different family members of an event that happened about one hundred fifty years ago. The story has been passed down through the generations from parent to child, so I'm having to deal with some conflicting information to find the seeds of truth that lie underneath."

"I see. So have you found anything useful?" Chief Tecumseh asked hopefully.

"I think so. Let's see... I guess the story begins with a little girl named Mary Margaret O'Hara." Jerico said as he looked carefully at his notes.

"Was she possessed like Arlo?" Devon asked quietly as he gently stroked the boy's hair to soothe him.

"No. She was a little girl who had a difficult life. Her mother died in childbirth and her father was killed in a mining accident when she was less than two years old. She was sent to live with a

spinster aunt who, by all accounts, was a bitter and hateful old woman." Jerico said quietly.

"What does this have to do with Arlo?" Devon asked desperately.

"I'm getting there. Just give me a minute." Jerico said, then flipped a few pages.

"Here. The aunt died when the girl was ten years old and was sent to live with the family of a distant cousin in... Balehollow? I don't know. I can't read my own handwriting. I guess it doesn't matter. Anyhow, the family fell in love with her and showered her with affection." Jerico said, then flipped a few pages back.

"One day when she was helping to make dinner, she did something, made some kind of mistake and caught the kitchen on fire. She nearly burned down the family's home. They understood that it was an accident, and didn't blame her. But the little girl was frightened that they were going to send her away. Nothing they did could console her and they were frightened for her well-being when suddenly... she was fine." Jerico said in thought.

"I still don't see what this has to do with Arlo." Devon said seriously.

Jerico looked at Devon with exasperation and said, "In the village where they lived, a boy named... Sean Patrick McClure suddenly fell ill. The local doctor could find nothing wrong with him. The family called on the aid of an old woman who was said to be a witch. She said that the boy was possessed by a 'spirit of fear'."

"Okay, that sounds like what we've got here." Devon said seriously as he hugged the boy in his arms again.

"Apparently the witch had also been called to look at the condition of Mary Margaret. The timing was her first clue. Within minutes of Mary Margaret's loss of fear, Sean Patrick had been overcome with fear." Jerico said in thought.

"So someone did this to Arlo?" Devon asked with anger.

"No. At least, not intentionally. But this gives me a clue as to what we're dealing with. This is a spirit fragment." Jerico said carefully.

"Perhaps you could explain that?" Chief Tecumseh asked in thought.

"Well, the best way I've seen it described is in Egyptian mythology. The spirit is like the body in that it has clearly definable parts." Jerico said as he turned to a completely different section of the notebook.

"Let's see, the Ba is the personality. The Ieb is the logical mind. The Akh is the immortal soul. The Sahu is the spiritual body. The Aifu, the Haidit, the Ka... the list goes on and on. My point is that all the components of the spirit don't always move on. It's possible for some to be left behind. Things like cold spots, unexplained feelings of dread in certain places, and stuff like that are usually not active 'ghosts', but fragments that didn't pass on with the rest of the spirit body. And in extremely rare cases, it's possible for a spirit fragment to become detached before death." Jerico said seriously.

"Okay. Wow. If anyone asks you to write a 'Ghosts for Dummies' book, do it. Because I completely understood that. So does this mean that a piece of someone's soul ran away from home?" Devon asked cautiously.

"That's the way it looks. The owner of this spirit fragment must have been in great turmoil and despised this part of himself for this to happen." Jerico said in thought.

"If that's the case, isn't he better off without it?" Chief Tecumseh asked carefully.

"Not at all. If we don't reunite this spirit fragment with the primary soul, the fragment will cease to be and the person who he belonged to will be... incomplete." Jerico finished in nearly a whisper.

"Missing part of his soul." Chief Tecumseh said in understanding.

"He would be condemned to carry the emptiness for the rest of his life. Without this little guy, I'm guessing that he'll lose much of his fear, his desire for the approval of others, and probably his capacity for childish wonder." Jerico said in thought.

"I understand. So how do we find the person that this spirit fragment belongs to?" Chief Tecumseh asked seriously.

"I have no idea."

\* \* \* \* \*

A knocking on the door made Mouse, Luke and Obie all jump.

Luke looked through the peephole and saw that it was Mr. T.

He nodded at Obie who was already holding the slide bolt.

Luke backed away as Mouse cautiously opened the door.

"Is everyone okay?" Mr. T asked with concern as he hurried into the room.

"Yeah. Chief Tecumseh already called security for us." Mouse said seriously as he closed the door.

Obie pushed the deadbolt firmly in place.

"Is the building secure?" Mr. T asked as he looked at the checklist by the door.

"Uri and Paul are taking care of that." Mouse said seriously.

"Paul?" Mr. T asked curiously, then smiled when he saw the name on the clipboard.

"Little Pauley's here?" Mr. T asked in delight.

"He's not little." Obie said firmly.

Mr. T looked at Obie with surprise at the statement.

Mouse took over, "Yeah. He's a really nice guy. But you and Jerico and Chief Tecumseh talk to him like he's eight years old..."

"It sucks. People do that to me too." Obie said in a grumble.

"Um, that's because you *are* eight years old. Paul is sixteen. He can drive. He wants to do things to help out but people treat him like he's little and helpless and useless." Mouse said firmly.

Luke nodded his agreement.

"Guys. I think it's nice that you like Little Pauley, but you haven't known him as long as I have..." Mr. T began to say.

Luke looked at Mouse with question.

Mouse moved behind Obie and put his hands over Obie's ears.

"You need to know what it's like to feel *little*... and *helpless*... and *useless*." Luke said as he concentrated on the feelings.

Mr. T's eyes went wide as the flood of emotions washed over him.

Mouse let go of Obie's ears and said, "That's what you're making Paul feel like. Every time you call him 'little' you make him feel a little bit worse."

"Make it stop." Mr. T said in a whisper as he fought to maintain his self control.

Luke looked at Mouse with question.

Mouse responded by putting his hands over Obie's ears again.

"Mr. T. We all *like you*. You're our *teacher*. We all know you're very *wise* and *smart*. Please *help Paul* to feel that way too." Luke said desperately.

"I... I think I understand now." Mr. T said in a shaky voice.

Luke looked to Mouse. Urging him to explain.

"I'm sorry we did that Mr. T but we thought Paul was important enough that someone needed to stand up for him." Mouse said in an imploring voice.

Mr. T finally calmed himself from his emotional revelation and said in a more steady voice, "You made your point. If that's really what Lit... Paul has been feeling. Then I'm sorry that I ever had a part in making him feel that way. And I'll do whatever I can to see that he doesn't have to feel that way again."

"Thanks Mr. T." Mouse said with a big smile.

Mr. T smiled in return for a brief moment, but then he let the smile drop as he firmly said, "We're going to talk later about what you just did."

Mouse looked at his feet as he nodded his understanding.

He was surprised to feel a hand on his shoulder.

Hesitantly he looked up into Mr. T's eyes.

"I'm not going to yell at you or punish you. But we're going to have a talk about what you just did and how to use such a gift responsibly." Mr. T said seriously.

"Okay." Mouse whispered.

Mr. T looked at Luke to see if he understood.

Luke reluctantly nodded.

Mr. T looked at Obie who had a look of complete confusion.

"I'm going to go back and check in with my father. He probably needs to get to his office since the camp is locked down." Mr. T said, now back to his usual, casual mood.

\* \* \* \* \*

Paul and Uri finally finished with the last unoccupied bedroom, then hesitantly walked into Simon and Arlo's room where Jerico, Devon and Chief Tecumseh were all looking very serious.

"From your expressions, I would guess that no breakthroughs have been made." Uri said as he walked to check the window.

"I just stepped out for a few minutes and got caught at cabin four when the security alarm went off." Mr. T said as he walked into the room.

"What was so dire that you had to leave without informing anyone of your whereabouts?" Chief Tecumseh asked in a challenging voice.

"A pair of students... got their braces locked together." Mr. T said shyly.

Chief Tecumseh shook his head and said, "Not again. Those two are going to pull their teeth out rather than get them straightened at this rate."

Mr. T nodded with a smile of agreement.

Paul jumped as he saw something out of the corner of his eye.

"What's wrong?" Jerico asked curiously at Paul's reaction.

"I thought I saw someone standing over there in the corner... in the shadow..." Paul said slowly.

"Did you see that? It just moved!" Paul said as he took a step closer to the group gathered around the bed.

Jerico looked at Paul carefully, then stood and walked to face the corner.

"I call upon the spirit that hides in the shadows of this room."

"*Show yourself* in revealing light to our eyes."

"*Raise* your *voice* to be heard above the whispers."

"*Expose* your true *intent* that we may know your heart."  
"*I command you to come forth now!*"

The shadow moved and stepped forward into the light.

The transparent image of a man looked down at himself in wonder, then up at Jerico with question.

Uri automatically walked to stand in front of Devon.

"What is your name?" Jerico asked firmly.

"In life I had a name, now I am only a spirit, a shadow of my former self. Please ask what you want of me so I may continue my work." The faint image said in a whispery voice.

"You can't be here. This is the plane of the living. You need to cross over to the spiritual plane so you can continue your journey. Go into the light." Jerico said, now sounding more concerned than commanding.

"I have crossed over. I have been in the light. I was brought back to perform a task. When it is done, I will leave." The spirit said frankly.

Jerico thought about the words, then said in a quiet voice, "If you'll tell me what you need to do, maybe I can help."

The spirit gave a smile and said, "My duty is to protect my son."

"Who is your son?" Jerico asked hesitantly.

"The spirit that inhabits that boy." The spirit said and pointed his insubstantial hand at Arlo.

Jerico quickly asked, "Where is the rest of his spirit?"

"Being guided here. But it may not matter." The spirit finished with a tone of regret.

"Why not?" Jerico asked with concern.

"I don't think my son will be able to accept this part of himself. Not only would he be willing to let it die, but he would gladly try to kill it." The spirit said sadly.

"No wonder this little guy ran away." Devon said as he hugged Arlo's body tightly.

"He didn't run away. I helped him escape." The spirit said with a loving look at Arlo.

"Why?" Jerico asked cautiously.

"My son was in such anguish and harbors so much hatred for this part of himself that there was no way it could continue to survive. When I saw what was happening, I asked for help. I begged to be allowed to do something to save my son from growing into a hollow shell of a man with no hope of ever knowing a moment of contentment or fulfillment in his life." The spirit said in a desperate voice.

"Your son is very lucky to have a father who loves him so much." Uri said in a respectful tone.

"We'll see. If this doesn't work, he won't care. I was never able to do anything for him when I was alive. If I can do this for my son now, then I can rest in peace." The spirit said in a quiet whisper of a voice.

"Please tell us what we can do to help him?" Jerico asked hopefully.

"When my son's body arrives, find a way to convince him that he needs this part of his spirit. He has to want it back. If you can do that, this piece of his soul will return. But whatever..." The spirit trailed off, obviously reluctant to say the next part.

"Go on." Jerico whispered.

"Whatever happens, please don't blame him for all this. He didn't cause this to happen, I did." The spirit asked in a begging whisper.

Jerico smiled and said, "Please, just one last thing, then I'll let you go. What is this little guy's name?" Jerico asked hopefully.

The spirit looked at Arlo with a smile and said in a loving voice, "That's my son, Kevin."

## Chapter 4

"*Go in peace*. I *release* you." Jerico said in a gentle voice.

"Thank you." The spirit said in a whisper as he faded from sight.

"So what do we do now?" Devon asked into the ensuing silence.

"We wait." The young Shaman said simply.

"Father, do you need to get to your office to take care of the security red?" Mr. T asked in a subdued voice.

"No. All I would be doing in my office is awaiting a call from the security team. I can do that just as easily from here." Chief Tecumseh said in concentration.

Paul looked around the room, then turned to Jerico and opened his mouth to ask a question.

Before Paul could utter a word, Jerico quickly said, "Uri, would you mind if I use your room again for a few minutes? I need to study this a little more."

"Of course. You may use my room whenever you wish." Uri said as he looked at Paul's deflated expression.

"Thanks." Jerico whispered, then picked up his notebook and rushed out of the room.

"Did I do something?" Paul asked with a pained look at Uri.

"No, you did not." Uri said with assurance.

"Then I guess it's just because I'm here. He had the same look that he gets at home." Paul said in a defeated whisper.

Mouse looked at Luke with concern, and saw the expression reflected back at him.

"Come on." Mouse said quietly and gestured to the door.

Luke nodded and followed Mouse out of the room.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Can we talk to you for a minute?" Mouse asked from Uri's bedroom door.

Jerico looked up from his notebook and hesitantly nodded.

"Why did you just leave the room?" Mouse asked as he led Luke into the room.

"Because I need to reread this notebook." Jerico said carefully. Luke shook his head.

"You can talk now Luke." Mouse said seriously.

Luke glanced at Mouse, then back to Jerico before saying, "Your cousin thinks that you can't stand to be around him. When you left, he was sure that it was because of him."

Jerico's expression became distant.

"He thinks that you don't like him and that you think he's just a useless little kid." Mouse said firmly.

Jerico's attention came back to the present and he looked at Mouse with a tired, very old, look in his eyes.

"What's going on?" Luke asked with concern.

Jerico sat quietly thinking for a minute, then noticed the expectant look in both boys eyes.

"It takes a lot of concentration to anchor myself and protect other people from my abilities. If I do it for very long, I get tired and start to lose control of it." Jerico said quietly.

"So you needed to get out of there so you could stop anchoring for a while?" Mouse asked in thought.

"That's right. I can't afford to let my concentration slip for even a minute or I could hurt someone." Jerico said in a pained voice.

"What do you do at home? I mean, when Paul's around?" Luke asked cautiously, feeling like he was on the verge of understanding something.

Jerico looked at Luke with question, then stopped for a moment to think before answering, "I spend what time I can with Pauley, he's really a great kid. But when I start feeling tired, I make up an excuse to get away. I don't want to hurt him."

Luke and Mouse shared a look for a moment before Mouse said, "That must mean that you really suck at making excuses."

"What?" Jerico asked slowly.

"Paul thinks that you don't want him around. That you think he's worthless and you only put up with him because you have to." Mouse said seriously.

"Yeah, and when you make up an excuse, he knows that you're just trying to get away from him." Luke added.

Jerico looked at the floor for a moment, remembering the times he had made excuses to get away from his cousin and realized how much he was hurting Pauley.

Finally Jerico said, "I knew it was a mistake to move in with Uncle Aubrey's family. I knew when I moved here that I would end up hurting someone... I always do."

"You didn't hurt him by moving in. You hurt him by lying to him. If you just tell him the truth and let him know why you need to be alone sometimes, then it won't be a problem." Mouse said seriously.

"Yeah. I thought a Shaman would be smart enough to know that lies hurt people." Luke said firmly.

Jerico looked at Luke with question, then broke into a slight smile as he said, "When I found out you were chosen, I naturally assumed that I'd end up teaching you. It looks like the teaching is going to be going both ways."

Luke smiled at the statement, then became serious as he said, "Then your next lesson is about telling the truth and fixing things when you screw up."

Jerico nodded and said, "Later, when all this stuff with Arlo is taken care of, I'll sit down with him and have a long talk to explain everything."

Luke gave Mouse an urging look that spoke volumes.

Mouse nodded and ran out of the room.

Jerico gave Luke a hesitant look of question.

"Later is a wish. It doesn't exist. There is no later, there is only now." Luke said seriously.

Jerico looked at Luke with wide eyes.

Luke smiled at Jerico's expression and said in his best Yoda voice, "Learn well the ways of the force young Jedi."

Jerico couldn't help but break into laughter at the statement.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Shhh. It's okay Kevin. You're fine." Devon whispered as he held the boy closely.

"I wish there was something I could do to help." Paul said with a look of concern.

"There are times when waiting is the most difficult thing to do. Please sit down and tell me what's going on with you. We haven't spoken for quite a while." Chief Tecumseh said gently.

"Well, there's not much to say. I just go to school and help mom and Lucy around the house." Paul said reluctantly.

"What about Jerico? I recall Aubrey mentioning that he lived with you once before but I don't really know much about him." Chief Tecumseh asked with interest.

"Oh, well I don't know that much either. Jerico is like my second cousin or something. His grandfather and my grandfather are brothers, Uncle Aubrey's brothers. I guess when Jerico wanted to be a Shaman he came to stay with us for a while so he could learn from Uncle Aubrey. He was really quiet and I don't remember much about it because it was so long ago. After a while he left, then a couple months ago he moved in with us again." Paul finished with a shrug.

"It sounds like you don't know very much about your cousin. Why is that?" Devon asked curiously.

Paul thought about it for a second, then said, "He doesn't talk to me that much. I mean, when we're together I do most of the talking."

A moment of silence fell over the room as everyone was just as happy to let the subject drop at that point.

Suddenly Mouse ran into the room and said, "Paul, I need you to come with me."

"What's wrong?" Paul asked with concern as he stood.

"I'll tell you in a minute. Come on." Mouse said as he took hold of Paul's arm and literally dragged him out of the room.

A moment of silence fell over the gathering before Mr. T said, "Does anyone else remember when Mouse first arrived and was so shy and quiet that you would forget he was in the room with you?"

A chuckle ran through the room as Chief Tecumseh said, "It is a good indication that he is becoming comfortable in his new home."

"If he gets much more comfortable he could dislocate someone's arm." Mr. T said absently.

\* \* \* \* \*

Paul walked into the room to an unusual sight.

Jerico and Luke were caught up in a fit of giggles, looking like a pair of carefree kids.

Suddenly Paul realized that he hadn't heard Jerico laugh before.

He felt his heart sink as the thought came to him that Jerico could laugh and have fun with this stranger, but couldn't stand to be in the same room with him.

As Paul turned to leave, he felt Mouse's hand on his arm.

"You need to stay." Mouse said quietly.

Jerico and Luke looked up and the laughter stopped as they saw Paul's pained expression.

"Come over here Pauley. I have something to tell you." Jerico said and patted the bed beside him.

Paul gathered his courage and felt a knot of anxiety swell in his stomach as he sat on the bed.

From the way that Mouse had dragged him out of the room where everyone else was, he knew it was something serious.

"Would you guys mind if I told him in private?" Jerico asked carefully.

"Do you think you can do it without screwing it up?" Mouse asked in challenge.

Jerico looked into Paul's frightened eyes, then turned to Mouse and said, "You'd probably better stay."

"Thought so." Mouse said seriously and plopped down on the other bed.

Luke smiled at the statement and took a seat beside Mouse.

"Pauley..." Jerico began.

"Paul." Mouse corrected firmly.

"What?" Jerico asked as he looked at Mouse with confusion.

"His name is Paul. When you call him Pauley you're saying that he's less than you, just a kid." Mouse said seriously.

"Really?" Jerico asked as he looked at Paul.

After a moment of thought, Paul said, "Sometimes I feel like that, but I know you don't mean it that way. You can call me Pauley if you want."

Jerico shook his head and said, "Paul, I haven't been honest with you and these guys made me see that I've been hurting you by lying to you."

A feeling of apprehension exploded within Paul as he became certain that Jerico was about to tell him that he didn't want him around anymore.

"Do you remember when you were about four or five and I came to stay with Uncle Aubrey for a while?" Jerico asked quietly.

"Not really. I mean, I sort of remember, but not too much." Paul said hesitantly.

"Well, back then I was like Luke. I couldn't really talk to anyone because if I did, my words would hurt them." Jerico said carefully.

Paul looked at Jerico with confusion and finally said, "I don't understand."

"You need to show him. You can explain it all day, but he won't really understand until he sees it." Luke said carefully.

Jerico nodded at the statement.

"You can do it to me if you want. I don't mind." Mouse said timidly.

"No. It's better if he does it to Paul so he can feel it." Luke said seriously.

"Do what?" Paul asked with renewed fear.

"I'm going to say something to you. It might make you feel sad for a minute, but I think the guys are right, it's the only way you can really understand. Can I do it?" Jerico asked quietly as he looked into Paul's eyes.

"Yeah. I guess so." Paul said hesitantly.

"When I'm at home, *alone* in my room, I can hear your family and I know that I can *never be a part* of that." Jerico said in a pained voice.

Paul looked at Jerico with question, then said, "That sucks. Why can't you be a part of it?"

Luke, Mouse and Jerico looked at each other with surprise.

"Pauley... I mean Paul, how do you feel?" Jerico asked cautiously.

"Um. Fine. I felt a little sad when you said that, but I still don't understand." Paul said carefully.

"Luke, you try." Jerico said with the beginning of excitement in his voice.

"My parents wanted to *use me* to do *bad things* and *hurt people*." Luke said in concentration.

Paul gave Luke a strange look, then hesitantly said, "Um, I'm sorry to hear that..."

"He's an anchor." Mouse said with a great smile.

"I can't believe it." Jerico said in wonder as he looked at Paul with wide eyes.

"Okay, you guys are freaking me out here. What's going on?" Paul asked as he looked at everyone's excited expressions.

"Paul, Jerico has been keeping away from you because if he's not careful his words could hurt you. He was trying to protect you." Luke said seriously.

"It's the same reason that Luke can't talk when we're around other people. If he says the wrong thing he could make someone feel sad or mad or something." Mouse tried to explain.

"Worse than that, he could make someone sick or go insane. Our words can cause the subconscious to make a person believe that they're blind, or deaf or an infant... or a tequila worm... or a doorknob..." Jerico trailed off.

"Really? You can do that?" Paul asked in wonder.

"It's not as cool as it sounds. You have to watch every single thing that you say and it's usually best if you don't say anything at all." Luke said with a pained expression.

"I learned how to keep my words from hurting people, but it takes a lot of concentration and makes me really tired." Jerico said regretfully.

"So he has to stay by himself a lot so he doesn't accidentally hurt someone." Mouse interjected.

"That's why you make excuses to get away from me?" Paul asked with wide eyes.

"That's why. I was afraid that if I relaxed around you that I would accidentally hurt you. It was really difficult because I enjoy spending time with you. You're a lot of fun to talk with." Jerico finished timidly.

Paul was speechless at the statement.

"But you're an anchor, so Jerico doesn't have to do that anymore." Mouse said happily.

"I don't understand... I'm a what?" Paul asked as he tore his gaze away from Jerico.

"It means that Jerico's words don't hurt you. And with practice, you can protect other people from his words too so he doesn't have to anchor himself and be tired and concentrating all the time." Mouse said with a grand smile.

Jerico looked at Paul with an overwhelming feeling of peace welling up inside him.

Paul saw the expression of relief on Jerico's face and said, "I'm glad I can finally do something to help you."

"If you'd be willing, you can do a lot more than help me. What I haven't told any of you is that our gifts become more powerful over time. I'm almost to the point where I can kill with a word.

Before very much longer, I won't even need to speak. I'll be able to kill with a thought. People like Luke and I usually end up moving to remote places and living out our lives as hermits to protect others from our abilities. I already have a place picked out in Peru..." Jerico trailed off.

"Why didn't you tell me?" Luke asked with wide eyed horror.

"I was going to when I started your training, but it doesn't matter now. You've found your anchor. With just a little training, Mouse will be able to negate your abilities and protect everyone around you. You won't have to face that decision." Jerico said honestly.

"Wow. I mean, I thought it was cool that I could do the anchor thing but I didn't know it was going to be so important. That's really awesome." Mouse said with excitement.

"Yes. I think awesome sums it up fairly well." Jerico said with a smile.

"So what do you want me to do?" Paul asked in deep thought.

Jerico turned his full attention to his cousin and said, "Paul, I've nearly reached the end of what I can do by myself. I've searched the world to find a way to avoid it, but what it boils down to is that I'm becoming too dangerous to be around people. I've only got a few years left before I won't be able to anchor myself anymore. I don't even know if I can ask this. I'm asking you to commit to something for the rest of your life."

Paul looked at Jerico with concern and waited for him to finish.

"You don't have to answer now because this is a very big thing and you need to think seriously about it. You should talk with your mom and Uncle Aubrey before you answer. But what I'm asking is if you would be willing to accept me as, kind of like a partner. We've never really discussed what your plans are when you get out of school, but if you'll do this, I'll be a part of those plans. I'll work along side you and do whatever I can to help you. It's the least I can do to repay you for allowing me to stay around people." Jerico trailed off in thought.

"I've been thinking about becoming a stripper in a gay nightclub. I think that would be fun." Paul said seriously.

Jerico's eyes went wide at the statement and he looked like he was about to pass out.

"Got'cha. You were sounding way too serious." Paul said with an impish grin.

Luke and Mouse burst out into laughter as Jerico slumped and started to giggle.

After waiting a moment for the laughter to die down, Paul finally asked, "What about your Shaman thing? Are you planning to give that up?"

"Pauley... Paul, it wouldn't be fair to ask you to give up your future for me. I'll still follow the ways of the Shaman and help people when I can. It's bad enough that I'm asking you to include me in the rest of your life, I wouldn't ask you to give up your dreams for me too." Jerico said honestly.

"You've never asked me about my dreams. Do you know what I want to be when I grow up?" Paul asked with a note of challenge in his voice.

Jerico thought for a moment before saying, "I have no idea."

"I've always wanted to be like you and Uncle Aubrey. I've asked him about it before, but he always said that I wasn't destined to be a Shaman, I have a different path to follow. There was never anything else that I wanted to do. I've only had that one dream and now it looks like I'll have the chance to get it. You know how a doctor has a nurse or a businessman has a secretary. I want to be like that for you. You can be the Skipper and I'll be the Gilligan." Paul finished with a grin.

"I can't ask you to do that..." Jerico said in wonder.

"Um. You didn't ask, he told you what he wanted. It sounds like it's the same thing you want. So what's the problem?" Mouse asked seriously.

Jerico glanced at Mouse, then looked at Paul again and asked, "Really?"

Paul rolled his eyes and turned to Luke and Mouse and said, "He just won't take yes for an answer."

"I mean, are you really sure? This is a really big decision." Jerico asked carefully.

"I see what you mean." Luke said with a chuckle.

"Jerico." Mouse said firmly, dragging Jerico's attention back to him.

"Let us show you how it's done." Mouse said, then turned to look at Luke.

"Will you be my anchor and partner from now on?" Luke asked with a happy little smile.

"Yes, from now on." Mouse said with a grin.

Jerico smiled at the production and felt joy at the prospect of having all his dreams handed to him.

"Now it's your turn young Jedi." Luke said with a grin.

Jerico chuckled before saying, "Will you be my anchor and partner?"

Paul smiled and said, "Yes, from now on."

"I now pronounce you Chosen and Anchor." Luke said in a dramatic voice.

Everyone broke into laughter filled with relief and happiness.

\* \* \* \* \*

Three short bursts of the buzzer sounded, drawing everyone's attention.

"Shhh Kevin. Don't worry, it just means that the security red is over." Devon said in a gentle voice.

"I need to call security and find out what just happened." Chief Tecumseh said as he stood.

"I suppose I'd better get everyone together so we can go to dinner, it's past time." Mr. T said with distraction.

"Yes. That's a good idea." Chief Tecumseh said before leaving the room.

"I will bring something for you and Kevin." Uri said gently to Devon who was still soothing Kevin in his arms.

"Thank you. I wouldn't want to try and take Kevin to the cafeteria." Devon said quietly.

Uri nodded then noticed Obie sitting alone on the far side of the room.

"Would you like to join me for dinner Obie?" Uri asked in a friendly tone.

"Um. I think Chief Tecumseh is going to call Mike and we're going to talk first." Obie said hesitantly.

Uri nodded and said, "When you are done, you will be welcomed to join me in the cafeteria."

Obie smiled and said, "Okay. Thanks Uri."

Uri nodded and walked out of the room.

\* \* \* \* \*

"That means the security red is over. We can go have dinner now." Mouse said at Paul and Jerico's looks of question.

"Oh, I'd better go check on the little guy to see if that scared him." Jerico said as he stood.

"Do you need me to go with you?" Paul asked immediately.

"Not this time. I know you're hungry, go with the guys and have dinner." Jerico said with a peaceful smile.

"I'll bring you something back." Paul said seriously.

"Thanks Paul." Jerico said as he started walking toward the door.

"You can call me Pauley if you want. Now that I understand things, I really don't mind at all." Paul said honestly.

"Paul, you've just given me my life back. You've given me a reason to hope for the future. I'm going to call you Paul because it's a sign of my respect for you." Jerico said with intensity.

"You need to teach your chosen how to lighten up. He's way too serious. Call me if you need some help, us anchors have to stick together." Mouse said to Paul with a playful grin.

Paul nodded and said, "I'll probably be calling you a lot."

Jerico shook his head in amusement as he broke away from the group to go into Simon's room to see how Kevin was doing.

\* \* \* \* \*

Obie walked out of the bedroom and nearly ran into Mouse and Luke in the hallway.

"Hey Obie, do you want to have dinner with us?" Mouse asked cheerfully.

"No thanks. I think Chief Tecumseh is going to call Mike..." Obie trailed off nervously.

Luke gave Mouse a significant look and Mouse nodded with agreement.

Next, Luke looked at Paul with question and received another nod as his answer.

"How do you guys do that? Are you all telepathic now?" Obie asked after witnessing the scene.

Mouse giggled and said, "No. We're all just thinking the same thing at the same time. We all want to stay here and wait until you're done with your talk."

"Really?" Obie asked slowly.

"Yeah, that's exactly what I was thinking." Paul said with a smile.

Luke nodded his agreement.

"You guys are going to have to show me how you do that... are you sure you don't mind waiting with me?" Obie finished with concern.

Mouse raised one eyebrow and gave Obie his most incredulous look.

"Okay, stupid question." Obie said with a smile.

Luke and Paul both broke up in laughter.

"What?" Obie asked defensively.

"You just did it." Paul said through his chuckles.

Obie thought about what had just happened, then smiled.

\* \* \* \* \*

"How are you holding up Simon?" Mr. T asked as he walked into the common room.

"I'm okay. What's going on?" Simon asked with concern.

"Something at Southcrest. Father is finding out about it now. It probably has nothing to do with us." Mr. T said as he glanced at his father talking on the phone.

"I thought it was something like that. I watched the security team patrol the area a few times, but that's all that happened out here." Simon said as he glanced out the window.

"Would you like me to stay with Arlo while you go and get something to eat?" Mr. T asked quietly.

"No thanks. I'd rather stay here." Simon said in a considering voice.

"I'll see that someone brings you some food then. Don't worry, it shouldn't be too much longer." Mr. T said in comfort.

"Why? Did something happen?" Simon asked hopefully.

"Yes and no. We found out some more about what happened to Arlo and why. But we still have to wait for whatever is going to happen next. It's still like Jerico said before, no matter how things work out with Kevin, Arlo will be back in his own body before morning." Mr. T said seriously.

"Kevin? You mean the guy who visited our class this morning? What does he have to do with this?" Simon asked with confusion.

Mr. T's eyes went wide in realization.

"If anyone asks, I'm going to be in my office for a few minutes." Mr. T said quickly.

"Um. Okay." Simon said slowly.

Simon watched as Mr. T hurried out the door.

"Why do I get the feeling that he left something out?" Simon asked into the bowl of water, then looked up as a very timid looking Obie approached Chief Tecumseh at the phone.

\* \* \* \* \*

"I have already called Cabin Three and your brother will be here shortly." Chief Tecumseh said seriously.

"Thank you." Obie whispered and looked at the cabin door with apprehension.

"Did you find out what happened to make us be at security red?" Mouse asked with excitement.

"Only bits and pieces. From what little I've been able to put together, the security alert was primarily for Southcrest. It's just procedure to lock down all three locations when a security alert is called." Chief Tecumseh said seriously.

"Are Justy and Jacob and Jamie okay?" Mouse asked hesitantly with concern filling his voice.

Chief Tecumseh gently smiled and said, "Please don't worry Harold, I have been assured that no one at Southcrest was hurt. I will make an announcement when I have enough information to tell you more."

A knock on the door stopped any further questions.

"Do you want me to get it?" Paul asked Obie in nearly a whisper.

"No. I'll do it." Obie said and forced himself to walk to the door.

Obie quickly peeked through the peep-hole, then opened the door for his brother.

As soon as the door was opened, Mike lunged forward and pulled his brother into a tight desperate hug.

"Tell me when you're going to leave the cabin. You scared me to death." Mike said with tears in his eyes.

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to scare you." Obie said into his brother's shoulder.

"Micah, please come over and sit down, we have a matter to discuss." Chief Tecumseh said as he walked to the brothers.

Mike looked up at the chief and nodded hesitantly, then shifted Obie to his side and guided him to the couches at the other side of the room.

Mouse, Luke and Paul automatically followed.

"Boys, I think it best if this discussion be just the three of us." Chief Tecumseh said in a tone that did not invite argument.

"Let's see if Simon and Arlo need some company." Paul suggested quietly.

Mouse and Luke both nodded their agreement.

"Obadiah, this is your decision, therefore you should be the one to tell your brother." Chief Tecumseh said seriously.

Obie nodded and took a deep breath for courage before saying, "I want to move into Cabin One."

Mike looked at his brother with confusion for a moment, then casually said, "Okay."

Obie looked at Mike with surprise, then sagged a little with relief.

"If they've got a room for us, we can get moved in tonight." Mike said seriously.

Obie looked at Chief Tecumseh and received a nod of encouragement.

"Not we. Me." Obie said quietly.

Mike looked at Obie with pain and asked, "Why?"

"Because you can't have fun with your friends with me always hanging around." Obie said as tears filled his eyes.

"I don't care about that. You're more important to me than those guys." Mike said softly.

"I care. Think about it Mike. You can't be with your friends, I can't be with my friends. Neither one of us gets to do the stuff we really want to do because we don't like doing the same things." Obie said in an increasing voice.

Mike stared at Obie for a moment, then looked at the group of four boys at the table by the window looking back at him.

"You really want to move away from me?" Mike asked cautiously.

"Not away, away. Just to another cabin. We can still do stuff together and hang out when we want to, we just don't have to be together all the time. You can play football and watch gory movies and all that other stuff you like to do with your friends. And I'll be right over here in Cabin One when you want to check on me." Obie said in an imploring voice.

Mike nodded his understanding and quietly said, "Got it Obe. You need your space. Give me a minute, I'll be right back."

Obie nodded and watched as Mike walked over to the table where Mouse, Luke, Paul and Simon were gathered.

"I think your brother is accepting this pretty well." Chief Tecumseh said in a considering voice.

"He's probably threatening to beat all of them up if anyone picks on me." Obie said as he glanced at Chief Tecumseh with concern.

"I realize that Obadiah. It is his way of protecting you. There are several in this camp who would give everything they own to know that someone loved them that much." Chief Tecumseh said quietly.

"Am I doing the right thing?" Obie asked with concern.

Chief Tecumseh smiled and said, "Yes. I believe you are doing the right thing for both you and your brother. And beyond that, I believe you are doing it for the right reasons."

Obie nodded, then turned his attention to Mike as he joined them again.

"Is everything okay?" Obie asked hesitantly.

"Yeah. I just needed to be sure that these guys were going to watch out for you." Mike said seriously.

Obie smiled and said, "Thanks. I think the guys would've watched out for me anyway, but it's cool that you asked first."

"Um... yeah... asked... that's what I did." Mike said reluctantly.

\* \* \* \* \*

"We'll bring some food back for you Simon." Mouse said as the group approached the door.

"Thanks Mouse." Simon said with a slight smile.

As the group walked out the door they were surprised to find Uri standing just outside.

"Why are you hanging around out here?" Mouse asked curiously.

"I have become accustomed to walking to the cafeteria as a group. How was your talk Obie?" Uri asked cautiously.

Obie smiled at Uri's concern and answered, "It went fine. Mike is cool with it."

Uri glanced at Mike's timid posture and quietly said, "There is no need to worry for your brother Mike. We all enjoy his company and he is welcomed here."

"Okay." Mike said timidly as he looked up into Uri's eyes.

"I'm starving, let's go." Mouse said with a big smile.

Uri gave a single nod and began to walk toward the cafeteria.

\* \* \* \* \*

"...Please leave a message after the tone.... \*beep\*" Mr. T heard the automated voice say.

"Mr. Pierce, this is Derek Tecumseh, we met earlier today. Please call me back as soon as possible." Mr. T said with frustration.

He had been through the phone numbers for all three of the parents and none of them had answered.

With a sigh of resignation, Mr. T scooted his chair closer to his desk and initiated a call on his terminal.

A window opened immediately and a familiar face greeted him.

"Southcrest Ranch. This is Commander Martin. Oh Derek, it's you. Is everything okay?" John asked seriously.

"Hi John, yes. Everything is fine here. I was just wondering if Cory might be over there?" Mr. T asked hesitantly.

"No. He took a group on a mission before everything went crazy. I'm not sure where he is at the moment but I can find out if you need me to." John said with distraction.

"No. That's alright. It was a long shot anyway. Is everything okay there?" Mr. T asked with concern.

"Right this minute I have teams working at three different locations trying to sort out this mess, so I'll have to get back to you on that one." John said frankly.

"Let me know if there is anything we can do to help." Mr. T said seriously.

"Just keep your kids safe. That's the biggest help you can give me right this minute." John said honestly.

Mr. T smiled and said, "I'll do that. I won't keep you from your work any longer. Tecumseh out."

"Martin out." John said and closed the transmission.

Mr. T thought for a moment and realized that there was nothing more he could do but trust that the Great Spirit would guide everything to work out as it should.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Wow. That smells great." Paul said as they walked into the cafeteria.

"Yeah. This place has the best food I've ever eaten." Mouse said happily as they walked to the serving line.

Paul noticed that when Uri got into line he took a tray, but didn't get a plate.

"Hi Uri. Trent's got your plate almost ready." Jose said from the other side of the serving line.

Paul felt a tug on his shirt and bent down so Mouse could whisper in his ear.

"Uri gets special food. Don't ask him about it." Mouse said quietly.

Paul nodded as he stood back up.

"Jose, this is Paul. Him and his cousin are visiting us for a while." Mouse said across the serving line.

"It's nice to meet you Paul. If you like lamb, the lamb chops are really good today." Jose said as he pointed at the tray of meat.

"Yeah. Thanks." Paul said happily.

"Yyyyour ffffod." Trent said as he handed Uri a plate across the serving line.

"Thank you Trent. It looks very good." Uri said gently.

Trent smiled with accomplishment at the praise.

Paul took two of the lamb chops, then a large helping of steamed green beans.

"If you like mashed potatoes, you'll want some of these. They're real, not powder stuff." Obie said from Paul's other side.

"They must have to peel potatoes for days to make enough for everyone." Paul said in surprise as he took a good sized scoop of potatoes.

"They have a machine to do the peeling. It doesn't take that long. Waiting on them to boil is the hard part. It's really boring." Obie said frankly.

"You work in the kitchen?" Paul asked with surprise.

"Yeah. We all take turns helping in the kitchen. There's enough guys here that you don't have to do it that often so you don't get sick of it." Obie said happily.

Paul smiled at Obie's happiness and walked with the group to a nearly empty table.

He noticed that there were glasses of water already poured and set out around the table.

Just as Paul was setting down his plate he heard a voice from behind him.

"Pauley? Is that you?"

Paul turned around to find his cousin Charles.

"Yeah. How are you doing Charlie?" Paul asked with a smirk.

Charles winced at the name and said, "Touché. What are you doing here Paul?"

"My cousin Jerico needed something from home, so I brought it to him. I guess you're here with your dad and your brother." Paul said with a smile.

Charles leaned in and whispered, "Actually, I'm here for the food."

Paul laughed, then asked, "Would you like to join us for dinner?"

"No thanks. I'm sitting over there. Besides, I'm almost finished. Just when I saw you I had to come by and say hi." Charles said with a smile.

"Well you still remember where I live don't you? Come over and visit sometime. We'll hang out." Paul said casually.

"Yeah. I'll do that." Charles said happily and walked back to his table.

"You know Charles?" Mouse asked with surprise.

Paul took his seat and said, "Yeah. He's kind of like my cousin."

"How is he 'kind of like' your cousin?" Mouse asked curiously.

"Well, Jerico and I are real cousins, second cousins actually. As far as I know Charles and I aren't related by blood, but our families have been friends since before anyone can remember so we just call each other cousin." Paul said, then took a bite of his food.

"Oh. That makes sense. Wait. Where did Mike go?" Mouse asked as he looked beside Obie to find Mike's plate of food, but no Mike.

"He went to table three to tell the guys that we're going to eat over here tonight. I told him I'd eat with him over at table three tomorrow night... you guys don't mind do you?" Obie asked quietly.

"Mind? I think that's great. This way you two will get to have some time every day when you can talk about what you've been doing and stuff." Mouse said cheerfully.

Paul thought about what Mouse was saying and nodded his agreement.

"Sorry about that. I just wanted to let the guys know what's going on." Mike said as he quickly took his seat beside Obie.

"Did they give you any trouble about me moving out?" Obie asked cautiously.

"Are you kidding? They thought it was a great idea. They could all see how much trouble we were having the way things were." Mike said, then took a large bite of his food.

"Please excuse me for a moment. I am going to ask Trent and Jose to make a plate for Devon and Kevin." Uri said as he stood.

"Oh. I need to get one for Simon." Mouse said as he also stood.

"And Jerico." Paul said as he also stood.

"I will tell Trent and Jose of our needs. You will simply need to stop by the serving line before leaving." Uri said with assurance.

"Thank you Uri." Paul said quickly to his retreating form.

"Yeah, thanks." Mouse called out, then took his seat again.

"You seem to be quite a few people short at your table tonight. Is something wrong?" Mike asked cautiously.

"Trent and Jose are working in the kitchen. Arlo is kind of sick. Simon and Devon are staying with him." Mouse said hesitantly.

Paul smiled at Mouse's distorted version of the truth.

Obie looked curiously at Mouse, then said, "You can tell Mike about it. He won't get funny or think you're crazy or anything."

"Okay, but I'd rather not talk about it in here." Mouse said seriously.

"Yeah. Um. I didn't think to ask you before, but would you guys help me move my stuff over from cabin three?" Obie asked shyly.

"I already asked the Three guys to help us. If the One guys help too, we'll have to split up your pairs of socks so everyone will have something to carry." Mike said with a grin.

Mouse chuckled and said, "Then we'll help Obie unpack when he gets is stuff into the cabin."

Paul looked around and noticed that everyone was finished with their meals.

"If you want something for dessert, there's fruit over there at the end of the serving line." Obie said quietly.

Paul looked at Obie with question.

"They say that too much sugar is bad for us so we have water with our meals and we only get stuff like cake and ice cream for holidays and birthdays." Obie explained quietly.

"It's okay. My mom is the same way. She says that too much sugar makes me hyper." Paul said with a smile at Obie.

"Well, if we're all done, let's get the plates of food for everyone back at the cabin then get Obie moved in." Mouse said happily.

Everyone seemed to be in agreement and took their plates to the window beside the serving line to stack them.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Can I come in? I brought your food." Paul asked quietly from Uri's bedroom door.

Jerico looked up to reveal the tears in his eyes.

He quickly wiped his eyes and said, "Thanks Paul. I really appreciate it."

"What's wrong?" Paul asked with immediate concern.

"Nothing. I was just thinking about how wonderful everything is going to be now that you can anchor me." Jerico said with a hesitant smile.

Paul sat the food on the bedside stand and carefully took a seat beside Jerico on the bed.

"I don't think I can explain it Paul. I was just about ready to give up. I could see my last day of being around other people coming and no matter how hard I worked, no matter how many books I read there was nothing I could do to prevent it. You really saved me." Jerico trailed off in a whisper.

"Eat your food before it gets cold." Paul said seriously.

Jerico nodded then pulled back the foil to reveal a heaping plate of food.

"You saved me too Jerico. I've been looking at my future spread out in front of me with no idea of what I wanted to do. As far as I knew my one big dream was gone. Mom and Uncle Aubrey have been pushing me to go to college, but... I couldn't see a point. Being your partner gives me a purpose. I can be what I've always wanted to be." Paul said honestly.

"But you won't be a Shaman." Jerico said softly.

"It's not about being a Shaman. I never wanted the mystical power or the title. I just wanted to help people. And being your partner will let me do that. I can help you help them. I can't imagine a more perfect future." Paul said happily.

Jerico stopped eating and looked at Paul with a contented smile.

"It's going to be great." Paul said happily.

"No. It's already great. We've already said the words. We're partners." Jerico said gently, then took another bite of food.

"There's one thing I was kind of wondering about..." Paul trailed off with indecision.

"What is it? You can ask me anything." Jerico said quietly.

"Well. What happens when you um... get a girlfriend? I mean, if you're not going to be able to anchor yourself..." Paul said uncomfortably.

"Oh that. I'm celibate. That's not something you have to worry about." Paul said with a peaceful smile.

"Celibate? You mean that you've never?..." Paul asked with a wide eyed expression of disbelief.

Jerico chuckled and said, "No. It doesn't mean that. I've had several sexual relations in the past. Too many to tell you the truth."

"I don't understand." Paul said cautiously.

"I know. And it's hard to explain. Try thinking about it like this. When someone has an addiction it drives them and consumes them until they self destruct." Jerico said in thought.

Paul nodded hesitantly.

"I'm like that with sex. It consumes me. I can't think about anything else. The more I get, the more I want. And the more extreme I want it to be." Jerico said with pain in his eyes.

"So you just stopped?" Paul asked in a small voice.

"Yes. I just stopped. There's no half-way with me. Either I'm celibate or I'm on a path to destruction. I lose the ability to reason when I'm like that. I really can't explain it any better than that." Jerico finished quietly.

"I think I understand. Well, at least a little. Are you okay with it?" Paul asked quietly.

Jerico considered for a moment, then said, "I really am. But what about you? How do you want to deal with it when you find a girl you're interested in?"

Paul looked at Jerico with indecision and finally said, "I don't know if that's ever going to happen."

"It's okay Paul. You're sixteen. There's plenty of time." Jerico said with assurance.

"No. You don't understand. It's not that I can't find a girl. It's that I haven't wanted to." Paul said in anguish.

"Oh." Jerico said in a whisper.

"I don't know what's wrong with me. I'm sixteen. All the other guys in my class have been dating for years and most of them have had sex and I... I haven't." Paul said with tears in his eyes.

"Have you been to a doctor about it?" Jerico asked quietly.

Paul nodded his head.

"What did he say?" Jerico asked with sympathy.

"Not much. He just had me pull down my pants. Then he said, 'You got some hair down there. That means your hormones are fine'. then he started asking questions about if I liked looking at naked guys." Paul said in desperation.

"He must have thought that you might be gay." Jerico said quietly.

"But I'm not! I don't think about guys that way either. What's wrong with me? I'm such a freak." Paul said as the tears started falling down his cheeks.

Jerico pulled Paul into a hug and said, "I don't know Paul. But we'll figure it out together. I'll talk to a few people and find the right doctor to go to about something like this."

Paul nodded into Jerico's shoulder.

"Physically, how do you feel?" Jerico asked quietly.

"What?" Paul asked as he pulled back to look in Jerico's eyes.

"I just want to know if you have any medical problem that you're aware of. A lump or a growth or anything that's just uncomfortable or doesn't feel right?" Jerico asked with concern.

Paul thought for a moment, then shook his head.

"Okay. I just thought I'd ask. Come here." Jerico said and pulled Paul into a comforting hug.

"What do you think is wrong with me?" Paul asked from the hug.

"I really don't know. It may be nothing. On the other hand, it may be a symptom of a bigger problem. That's why it's important to take you to a doctor and find out for sure." Jerico said quietly.

"But what if they can't find anything wrong? What if this is just the way I am?" Paul asked with deep concern.

"Then you'll probably have to make a decision." Jerico said in thought.

"What decision?" Paul asked cautiously.

"If it turns out that this isn't a symptom of something else and you just have an unusually low sex drive, you'll have to decide if you want to change it or not." Jerico said carefully.

"Of course I want to change it! I want to be like everyone else." Paul said immediately.

"Please think about what you're saying. Doing something to make yourself be like everyone else is a way of rejecting the gifts the Great Spirit has given you. Being different isn't a bad thing, it isn't wrong." Jerico said softly.

"So you want me to stay like this?" Paul asked in confusion.

"No. I want you to make up your own mind and choose what's best for you. And no matter what you choose, I'll be right there to help you. I just want to be sure that when you make your decision you're doing what's best for you, not what you think other people expect of you." Jerico said with sympathy for the pain of his cousin.

"Okay. I guess I get that. I really need to think about what's best for me." Paul said in thought.

"If you want to talk about it some more, I'm here whenever you need me Paul. If anything is bothering you, just come to me and we'll take care of it together." Jerico said as he held his cousin in a firm hug.

"I'm here for you too." Paul said in a small voice.

"What?" Jerico asked, barely hearing the words.

"When you need me, I'll be here to help you too." Paul said in a stronger voice.

Jerico smiled and whispered, "Thank you Paul."

\* \* \* \* \*

"How has he been?" Uri asked as he walked into the room carrying two plates.

"He's fine. I'm not sure how we're going to feed him." Devon said in thought.

"May I suggest that you put the plate before him and see if he can figure it out for himself." Chief Tecumseh said carefully.

"It's worth a try." Devon said hesitantly.

"I'm sorry I didn't bring you a plate Chief Tecumseh. If you would like this one I can get another." Uri said apologetically.

"No need for that Uri. When my son returns I will go to the cafeteria where I may enjoy a relaxing dinner." Chief Tecumseh said with a smile.

"Go ahead and put the plate in front of him." Devon said as he loosened his hug on Arlo/Kevin.

Uri sat the plate on the bed and backed away.

Arlo/Kevin saw the food and reached for it but wouldn't move out of Devon's lap.

"Go on. it's for you." Devon coaxed.

"Perhaps if you give it to him, he might know what to do with it." Chief Tecumseh said carefully.

Uri stepped to the bed again and picked up the plate.

Arlo/Kevin looked at Uri with fear and huddled into Devon's side.

"Give it to me." Devon said and held out his hand.

Uri handed the plate to Devon then stepped away.

"Are you hungry little guy?" Devon asked as he held the food before Arlo/Kevin.

Hesitantly, Arlo/Kevin brought his hand up to the plate, watching Devon carefully as he did.

"He fears that he will be punished for eating." Uri said quietly.

"Perhaps." Chief Tecumseh said at the heartbreaking sight.

"Go on. It's all for you." Devon said past the lump in his throat.

Arlo/Kevin finally took a piece of food off the plate, then quickly stuffed it into his mouth.

Uri turned away from the sight as Devon whispered, "It's fine. It's just for you. Have all you want."

Arlo/Kevin looked at Devon with question, then after a moment, he started reaching for another piece of food.

Uri looked at Chief Tecumseh with fire in his eyes and said, "This child MUST survive."

Mr. T walked into the room and said, "I'm sorry I took so long. I just had an idea of something that might help."

"Did anything come of it?" Chief Tecumseh asked quietly, not finding any reason to hope in his son's expression.

"No. Just answering machines." Mr. T said as he sat on the unoccupied bed.

"I'm going to get something to eat. Call me immediately if I'm needed." Chief Tecumseh said as he stood.

"I will." Mr. T said with a pained expression as he watched Arlo/Kevin snatch a morsel of food from the plate that Devon was holding.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Trent said he made this just for you." Mouse said as he presented Simon his plate of food.

"Thank you Mouse. I'll make sure to thank him when he gets back." Simon said quietly.

"Did you notice if Paul came in? We were talking with Trent and Jose and he was gone." Mouse said quickly.

"Yes. He came in the same time Uri did. I think he went into Uri's room." Simon said carefully.

"Oh. He's probably talking to Jerico then." Mouse said as he took a seat across from Simon at the table.

Simon nodded his agreement, then chewed his bite of food.

"I can't believe what kind of a crazy day it's been. Arlo gets possessed and then we see a real ghost..." Mouse said with amazement.

"Wait. You saw a ghost? I didn't hear about that." Simon said seriously.

"Oh yeah. Um. Well it's the ghost of the father of the guy that possessed Arlo." Mouse said in thought.

"Is their whole family moving in?" Simon asked with concern.

Mouse smiled and said, "He's not moving in. He's just trying to protect his son."

"Oh. Okay." Simon said reluctantly, then took another bite of food.

"Anyway, so Paul sees something move in the shadows of your bedroom and then Jerico tells it to 'come forth' and it, like, has to do what he says and there it was, a real live ghost... or not-alive... whatever, it was soooo kewl." Mouse said with excitement.

Simon noticed movement and saw Luke standing away from them.

"Would you like to sit with us Luke?" Simon asked carefully.

Luke nodded hesitantly.

"I don't know why you're scared of me. I promise that I'd never do anything to hurt you." Simon said honestly.

Luke leaned over to whisper into Mouse's ear.

Mouse smiled and nodded, then turned to face Simon.

"Luke said that he's not scared of you. He's just worried that he'll accidentally touch you so he tries not to get too close." Mouse said seriously.

"Oh. I didn't think of that. Thank you Luke. And if you ever do accidentally touch me, I'll try not to freak out too bad." Simon said weakly.

Luke smiled and nodded.

Simon returned the smile, then took another bite of his food.

"So how's Arlo doing?" Mouse asked as he looked in the bowl.

"I don't know. I'm not a telepath or empath or anything so I don't know how he's feeling. I've just been talking to him letting him

know that everything is going to be okay." Simon said as he looked into the bowl.

"We could stay with him if you need to go to the bathroom or anything." Mouse said as he looked up.

Simon thought about it for a second, then said, "Yeah. Thanks Mouse. I could use a bathroom break."

Mouse nodded and watched as Simon hurried away from the table.

"Arlo, it's Mouse. Simon needs you so you've got to be okay when you get back into your body. You got that?" Mouse asked seriously.

Luke smiled at him.

"Do you want to say anything while Simon's out of the room?" Mouse asked curiously.

Luke shook his head and pointed at the bowl of water.

"Yeah. I guess you're right. It's best not to take the chance." Mouse said with a smile.

"Thanks guys." Simon said as he hurried back to the table.

"Anytime. Just call one of us if you need a break and we'll be happy to do it." Mouse said happily as he stood.

"I'll remember that. Thanks again for the food, it was great." Simon said as he got comfortable.

"No problem. Just yell if you need anything." Mouse said as he and Luke headed for their room.

"I will." Simon said to the pair, then in a more quiet voice he said into the bowl, "I bet it won't be too long now. If there was a ghost here, that probably means that there's something big happening. We just have to wait for it to happen then everything can go back to normal."

\* \* \* \* \*

"Where is my room?" Obie asked with a glowing smile, carrying a backpack into the room.

"The one beside the bathroom." Simon said with a smile.

"That's just like my old room." Obie said happily and walked to the room leading a long line of older boys all carrying various items.

"Is Obie moving in?" Jose asked as he rushed into the room with Trent at his side.

"Yes. From the look of it, they probably got all his stuff in one load." Simon said seriously.

"Ccccan wwwwe help him?" Trent asked hopefully.

"I bet he'd like it if you helped. Go ask him." Simon said with a gentle smile.

In the space of a heartbeat, both boys were out of the room.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Chief Tecumseh?" A woman's voice said hesitantly.

"Yes Mrs. Birch, what can I do for you today?" Chief Tecumseh asked with a peaceful smile.

"I just received a message that a group is transporting in from the Enterprise." Mrs. Birch said quietly.

"Oh. Then I suppose I should greet them." Chief Tecumseh said as he stood.

Mrs. Birch nodded and began to walk away.

"It was an outstanding meal as usual. My compliments to you and your staff." Chief Tecumseh said as he walked to the connecting door to the administration offices.

"Thank you." Mrs. Birch said shyly, then hurried back to tell the rest of the kitchen staff.

\* \* \* \* \*

Moving Obie into Cabin One had taken more trips than anyone would have guessed. Boys had been running in and out for nearly fifteen minutes but finally silence fell over the common room as the Cabin Three boys had returned to their cabin and everyone else was in Obie's room helping him get settled in.

A loud knock on the door made Simon jump.

He looked across the room and noticed that the last person in must have pulled the slide bolt closed.

Reluctantly, Simon stood and walked to answer the door.

"Who is it?" Obie asked as he ran out of his new room, followed by Trent and Jose.

Simon looked through the peep hole then said, "Chief Tecumseh and one of the guys who visited our class today. I think his name is Kevin."

## Chapter 5

Mouse and Luke walked into their room and each automatically went to sit on his own bed.

"Do you want to talk about what it was like for you before you came here?" Mouse asked cautiously.

"Not really." Luke said quietly.

"Okay. I don't really want to talk about mine either. I just wanted you to know it's okay if you feel like talking about it." Mouse said awkwardly.

Luke nodded, then said, "Yeah. Same here."

"What do you feel like doing now?" Mouse asked in an obvious effort to change the subject.

"Let's see how Paul is doing. I don't want him to feel left out or alone." Luke said in a considering tone.

"Yeah. That sounds good to me." Mouse said with a smile.

Luke returned the smile and stood to follow Mouse out of the room.

\* \* \* \* \*

As the name Kevin came out of Simon's mouth, he remembered that it was the name that Mr. T had said earlier.

Simon quickly opened the door and stood back so Chief Tecumseh and Kevin could enter.

Cory and another of the guys Simon had seen that morning hurried past him and followed Chief Tecumseh into his bedroom.

As Simon was about to close the door, the cute guy from that morning walked in followed by a Starfleet Lieutenant and an Asian guy with a bandage covering half his face.

"Um, I'm sorry but I don't remember your name. I'm Jake, I met you this morning. Um... where's the bathroom?" Jake asked timidly.

Simon smiled at Jake's casual nature and pointed as he said, "I'm Simon and the bathroom is right over there."

The Asian guy started toward the bathroom but the Starfleet officer stopped him by putting a hand on his shoulder.

Simon inwardly flinched at the sight of the casual contact and moved back to the table where Arlo's soul was in the bowl of water.

"Please let me check first." Simon heard the Lieutenant say before he walked into the bathroom.

Simon was surprised by the gesture then realized that the Lieutenant was probably security and he was protecting this hurt guy.

"It looks like another new guy might be moving in." Simon said into the bowl.

A moment later Simon saw the Lieutenant give the new guy the okay to go in the bathroom, then stand by the doorway in a protective stance.

"Either this new guy is someone really important, or he's been hurt really bad and needs someone around to protect him to make him feel safe." Simon said into the bowl in a contemplative tone.

Simon watched as Jake talked with Obie for a few seconds, then said something to the Lieutenant before walking down the hall, probably to his bedroom.

Obie walked out into the common room and hesitantly asked, "What's going on?"

"I'm not really sure, but would you get Trent and Jose out here? I think that maybe there's something important that you guys can help with." Simon said carefully.

Without a second's hesitation, Obie ran to gather the other two boys.

"I'm going to tell the guys what I'm thinking. You can sit this one out." Simon said with a smile into the bowl.

After a moment, Simon said, "Don't give me that look. Don't worry about how I know, I just do. This once we're going to let the other guys handle things."

\* \* \* \* \*

Obie, Trent and Jose hurried to Simon and waited expectantly.

"You guys remember what it's like to be new here. You know, what it felt like on your first day?" Simon asked carefully.

"Yeah. I was almost nuts from everything that was happening around me." Obie said quietly.

"We all were Obie. I think we've got a new guy in the bathroom. He's all bandaged up and probably not sure about everything that's going on. To top it off, he's got a guy who looks like Starfleet security watching out for him. That tells me that something pretty bad was probably done to him if he needs an armed guard to make him feel safe." Simon said seriously.

"What should we do?" Jose asked cautiously.

"Help him. Make him feel at home. Don't crowd him too much, but make sure he knows that he's welcomed.... there he is." Simon finished abruptly as the new guy walked out of the bathroom.

"Don't worry. We'll take care of him." Obie said seriously and led Trent and Jose to meet the new guy.

\* \* \* \* \*

Mouse and Luke walked into Simon's bedroom and hurried to Paul's side.

"What's going on?" Mouse asked as he looked around.

"No clue." Paul said frankly.

The three stopped their conversation abruptly as Chief Tecumseh and a young boy ran into the room.

"You!" The young boy said with a look of such hatred and disgust on his face that Paul felt an instinctive urge to crawl up on the bed and protect Kevin, who was still in Devon's arms.

Two more boys ran into the room and as soon as the younger one saw the boy in the bed, he said, "Kevin! There you are!"

Paul's eyes went wide as he watched the boy climb up on the bed and give Kevin a warm hug.

Jerico walked cautiously to the angry young boy just inside the door and said, "I'm guessing you must be Kevin."

Paul looked from Arlo/Kevin in the bed to the young boy standing by the door and realized that this was the little boy who was filled with so much hate that even his own soul couldn't stand to be around him.

In a firm voice, the little boy said, "Yes, I'm Kevin Thompson."

"It's nice to meet you Mr. Thompson." Jerico said formally, then continued, "My name is Jerico Foote, I'm a Shaman... that's kind of like a priest."

Paul was puzzled at his cousin acting so courteously to the horrible little boy.

"You can call me Kevin." The boy said with a giggle, then said, "Nobody ever called me Mr. Thompson before."

Paul looked at Kevin curiously and realized that he wasn't an evil hateful person after all. He was just a boy.

"Okay Kevin, and you can call me Jerico or Jerry if you want." Jerico said gently.

"Okay Jerry." Kevin said with a smile.

"Kevin, you know who that is over there in the bed don't you?" Jerico asked as he pointed to Arlo/Kevin being held by a boy.

"Yeah. I mean, I don't know who he is outside, but inside it's the whining crybaby fraidy-cat thing that I used to have inside me. It looks like it found someone else to live off of." Kevin said seriously.

Paul was shocked at the description, but decided to wait and see what was going to happen.

"You're wrong." the boy holding Arlo/Kevin called out from the bed, "This is my brother. I don't know what you are, but somehow I'll find a way to undo whatever you did and get Kevin back."

"You think I'm not your brother!?" Kevin said with disbelief.

"I'm the one who fought to protect you in the alley, not him! The only thing he'll ever do is take from you, he'll never give you anything back. He's nothing but a leech." Kevin said in an increasing voice, looking like he was about to cry.

Paul could see that Kevin really did love the boy, his brother, and being denied by him had hurt him deeply.

"I really am your brother and I really do love you Kenny. The difference is, that thing you're holding NEEDS you to love him. I can love you and not want anything in return." Kevin said in a voice that was trying to sound reasonable.

"I'm sorry Kevin... I saw him hurting the way you did when I met you and I thought..." The boy, Kenny, trailed off.

"So you believe me?" Kevin asked cautiously.

"Yeah. I do." Kenny said quietly.

"Guys, we have a problem here. We have to find a way to get Kevin to take this part of his spirit back. Otherwise this little guy is going to die." Jerico said, breaking the silence that had fallen over the room.

"No way. I don't know what that thing is, but you should let it die so it can't hurt anyone else." Kevin said in a defiant voice.

"It's part of you Kevin. It's part of your true self." Jerico said in a tone of voice that was begging for him to understand.

Kevin shook his head and said, "So what? Just because it used to be part of me doesn't mean I should take it back. It's like a tumor or cancer or something."

Paul was startled at the statement and looked carefully at Arlo/Kevin in thought. Just a few minutes ago he was so sure of what was the right thing to do. The spirit fragment needed to go back where it belonged... but now.

Paul could see the reasoning behind Kevin's argument and didn't know what he would do if he had to face the same choice.

A movement caught Paul's attention and he saw a tall thin boy with dark blond hair walk into the room and stand just inside the door.

"You really don't want him back, do you Kev?" Kenny asked quietly as he looked across the room at his brother.

"No. I don't even want to be in the same room with that thing." Kevin said honestly.

Paul noticed that Jerico was looking at his Uncle Hawkeye, silently asking him to step in and straighten things out.

"You said that he's going to die if Kevin doesn't take him back, right?" Kenny asked into the silence that had fallen over the room again.

"That's right. Arlo's body is rejecting him and he's too weak and incomplete to survive as a disembodied spirit." Jerico said softly.

"What would happen if I took him?" Kenny asked in a voice of deep concentration.

Paul felt his eyes go wide at the question.

"You can't. This is part of your brother's soul. All the pain and fear that this little guy is carrying would become a part of you. It would hurt you. Your spirit would probably reject it, but if it didn't... that much pain and fear could drive you insane. Honestly, I don't even know if I could do it. I've never heard of it being done." Jerico said distantly.

The boy by the door finally said, "So what are the options?"

"Kevin has to accept this part of his soul back into himself..." Jerico began to say.

"Which he won't do." The boy by the door said simply.

Jerico nodded, and said, "Or we let it die."

\* \* \* \* \*

After his pressing business had been taken care of, Dylan noticed some stuff laying in the floor of the bathroom.

He walked over and looked in one of the pouches to find it filled with a brownish-gray powder.

The next pouch seemed to have a mixture of herbs.

"I've heard of safe places, but to leave your stash laying out like this is just crazy." Dylan muttered to himself as he went to wash his hands.

As he approached he saw his reflection in one of the mirrors over one of the sinks.

Dylan forced himself to look down as he washed his hands.

"Jake said this place is okay. I've got to give it a try." Dylan said to himself as he felt panic welling up within him.

After drying his hands, Dylan walked out of the bathroom and was surprised to find that Jake wasn't waiting for him.

"Jake said to tell you that he was going into that room."  
Lieutenant Masterson said quietly.

"Oh, thank you." Dylan said in an overwhelmed voice.

"Hi!" A boy said happily to Dylan.

"Hi." Dylan said cautiously and could feel them staring at his face.

"I'm Obie and this is Trent and Jose. Are you going to live here with us?" The boy asked hopefully.

"I guess so." Dylan said hesitantly.

"That's SOOOOOO AWESOME!!!" Obie crowed, then covered his mouth and looked around to see if anyone was going to yell at him.

"I think Obie is happy because that means you're going to be his roommate." Jose said with a big smile.

"That's right. I just moved in here tonight too so we can both have our first night in our new home at the same time." Obie said with excitement.

"Dddd do you wwww want tttt to ssss see your room?" Trent forced out.

"Yeah, it's the one right next to the bathroom which is the best one to have because when you need to go you're right there." Obie said in a ramble.

Dylan held up his hands to try and get the excited boys to give him a second to answer.

After a blessed moment of silence, Dylan calmly said, "Yes, I'd like to see the room. But if you guys get too hyper, I might have to ask Lieutenant Masterson to stun you."

The boys gathered around Dylan and Lieutenant Masterson and guided them into the first room past the bathroom.

\* \* \* \* \*

Simon watched with amusement as the boys dragged Dylan and his security escort away.

"I bet after this job, that security guy will start carrying a phaser rifle." Simon said into the bowl of water.

"Don't worry Arlo. We've got the Shaman, that Kevin guy is here, Cory is here... and you know that Cory can do almost anything. Whatever is going to happen is probably happening right now."

"It won't be long now. As soon as you get back into your body I want to hear all about what it was like... or whatever else you want to talk about. I just miss the sound of your voice." Simon said quietly.

The front door of the cabin flew open and the two guys that Simon actually got to meet that morning ran into the room.

Deacon and Lawrence. Both of them looked scared half to death and before Simon could say a word, they ran off down the hall and into his room.

Aaron walked in next and carefully closed the door.

"Hey Simon. Sorry about that, the guys were in a hurry." Aaron said shyly.

"I could tell. What's going on Aaron?" Simon asked cautiously.

"Honestly, I don't have a clue. But I probably need to be in there." Aaron said and walked casually to Simon's bedroom.

\* \* \* \* \*

"No! You're wrong. You're worried about this piece of Kevin's spirit hurting me, but you don't care that it already hurt Kevin. You want him to take it back even though he already said that he doesn't want it. Well, I love my brother and I don't want him to hurt. But I love this part of my brother too and I want him to live. I want you to give him to me." Kenny said firmly.

Paul felt tears well up in his eyes as he thought about how much love this boy must feel for his brother to be willing to suffer or even go insane to keep a part of him alive.

"I don't think the spirit fragment will be able to survive in you." Jerico said quietly.

"We're twins. IDENTICAL TWINS! We're the same!" Kenny said firmly.

Paul wiped his eyes, then looked at his Uncle Hawkeye when he said, "Jake, this course of action is very dangerous. Try and make your brother understand the gravity of the situation."

The boy by the door said, "I'm with Ken. If he believes that this is the right thing to do, I'll trust him."

"Really?" Kenny said with surprise from the bed.

"Yeah Ken. If you say it'll work, then I'm with you." the boy by the door, Jake, answered.

In a voice that was almost too quiet for Paul to hear, Kenny told his brother, "I'm sorry I thought you weren't my brother for a while. I understand now. I know that since I'm going to take the part of yourself that you hate into me that... well, that you might hate me too."

"I won't hate you, I promise! I'll always love you." Kevin said with teary eyes.

Paul smiled as he heard Kenny say, "I'll always love you too Kev."

Jerico seemed to be frozen in thought so Paul finally asked, "So are you going to do it?"

Jerico reluctantly nodded and turned to face Kenny as he said, "Okay... It looks like I don't have any other choice. I'll give it a try. Are you really sure?"

Kenny looked at Kevin, then at Arlo/Kevin in his arms then peacefully said, "Yeah. Do it."

"I left some things in the bathroom that I'll need." Jerico said as he started walking toward the door.

"STOP!" A boy screamed as he entered the room at a run.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Okay, this is our room, I just moved in here today, but if you want the bed by the door, it's okay with me. I won't mind moving." Obie said quickly.

"No, I think I'd rather have this one anyway." Dylan said as he walked to his bed and took a seat.

"Nnnnnneed Cccclothes?" Trent struggled to say.

Dylan thought about the question, then said, "Yeah, I guess I do. Dr. McCoy gave me this jumpsuit thing on the Enterprise. I don't really have anything else."

Trent nudged Jose and gave him an aggravated look.

"I think Trent wants to know if you know your sizes." Jose said, then looked at Trent with question.

Trent nodded.

"Yeah. Why?" Dylan asked cautiously.

"Because they keep all kinds of clothes in the admin building in case someone shows up without any. We can go over there and you can pick out whatever you want." Jose said happily.

"Yeah, and then this weekend they'll take all of us to the mall and I bet they'll let you pick out a whole bunch of stuff since you didn't bring anything with you." Obie said with excitement.

"Do you want me to stun them?" Lieutenant Masterson asked with a smile.

Dylan smiled at the question and said, "Not yet. But you might want to keep that phaser handy."

"I'm sorry if I was bugging you. I want you to be happy here so if you want me to be quiet, I will be... I'll try to be." Obie amended.

"It's okay. You don't have to be quiet, but I wouldn't mind if you calmed down a little. I'm feeling a little weird right now and all you guys talking fast and bouncing around isn't making it better."

The room went silent as Trent walked to stand before Dylan and look him in the eye.

In his most determined voice, Trent forced himself to say, "I nnnnever ttttalk ffffast."

Obie and Jose were the first to break into laughter at the statement.

Trent and Dylan finally joined him.

Dylan was surprised when he noticed that Lieutenant Masterson was fighting down chuckles.

\* \* \* \* \*

Paul's eyes went wide when a guy with wings appeared out of nowhere and started talking to them.

Everyone else seemed okay with it, like it happened everyday.

Paul finally came out of his shock enough to understand that the angel was asking Cory, Jake and Aaron to get someone named Dylan settled into his new home.

"Do you think we should go too?" Mouse whispered to Luke and Paul.

Luke shook his head, then pointed at the angel.

Mouse thought for a second, then said, "Mikey didn't ask us to leave, so that probably means that we're needed here for something."

Luke nodded his agreement, then turned his attention back to what was happening.

Paul cautiously looked over at the angel again, not at all certain about what was about to happen.

\* \* \* \* \*

Dylan looked up as Cory, Jake and another boy walked into the room.

"Sorry about leaving you Dylan. I just wanted to make sure my brothers were okay." Jake said quietly.

"No problem. I've just been getting to know my roommate and his friends." Dylan said with a smile at the boys.

"I thought you'd like Obie. He's a good guy." Cory said with a grin at Obie.

"Do I know you?" Dylan asked the blond boy who had walked in with Jake and Cory.

"You might. I'm Aaron Carter." Aaron said cautiously, not knowing what type of reaction to expect.

Dylan looked at Aaron in wonder, then asked, "Are you sure?"

Aaron chuckled at the question, then answered, "Yeah, pretty sure."

Dylan ducked his head at the stupidity of the question.

"Jake thought you might enjoy a celebrity welcome to your new home." Aaron said, wanting to divert attention from Dylan's embarrassment.

"Yeah, I wasn't sure if you listened to Aaron's music, but I thought you'd like to meet him either way." Jake said casually.

Dylan looked up shyly and said, "Yeah, thanks Jake. It makes me feel like I'm important or something."

"Well you'd better get used to it." Cory said frankly.

Dylan looked at Cory with question.

Cory looked Dylan in the eye and firmly said, "You are important so you'd better get used to feeling that way."

Dylan didn't answer, but his expression clearly spoke his disbelief.

"There's no way you'll believe it now, but he's right. Everything that's happened to me the past week has made me feel so important and special that I can't even imagine living like we did in Chicago." Jake said seriously.

Dylan glanced at Jake, then broke into a smile.

Seeing Jake happy and accepted gave Dylan more hope for the future than anything anyone could have said to him.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Devon, I'm going to need to hold on to Arlo for a while to keep him safe. Thanks for doing such a good job taking care of him." The angel, Mikey, said and drew Paul's attention.

Paul watched as Mikey scooted into the bed to hold Arlo/Kevin.

"Shhh. Don't worry little one, you're almost home." The angel whispered.

One of the guys who just ran in walked up to Kenny and asked, "Will you trust me?"

"Sure Deacon." Kenny said and seemed to be confused or concerned about something.

"Hold still." The boy, Deacon, said, then held his cupped hands in front of Kenny's stomach.

Paul watched in amazement as a sphere of sparkling light slowly emerged from Kenny's chest.

The light floated out and stopped all movement a few inches above Deacon's hands.

Mikey held Arlo/Kevin's body tightly as a blond boy cupped his hands in front of Arlo/Kevin and did the same thing. Except that Arlo/Kevin's light was dim and hazy.

As the sphere of light floated over the blond boy's cupped hands, he whispered, "It's okay. You don't have to be afraid now."

"Tell me what you see." The angel called out as he held Arlo's unmoving body in his arms.

"I have fear." The blond boy said quietly.

"I have safety." Deacon said with assurance.

"I have loneliness." The blond said as if he were feeling it himself.

"I have companionship." Deacon said in a voice filled with love.

"I have strength." The blond said, sounding surprised.

"I have weakness." Deacon said in exactly the same tone.

"I have wisdom." The blond said and started to smile.

"I have innocence." Deacon said and didn't look sure how he felt about that.

"I have stubbornness." The blond said with a chuckle.

"Uh oh." Deacon said as he looked carefully into the sparkling orb.

He glanced up and looked around the room before saying in a hesitant voice, "I have stubbornness too. A lot of it."

An amused chuckle spread through the room.

Deacon looked over at the blond and gave him a loving smile.

Paul suddenly realized that these two boys were in love. The look that they exchanged couldn't be anything else.

The two boys walked toward each other holding their glowing spheres before them.

Deacon held his sphere forward, as if offering it to his lover.

In response, the blond lifted his fainter glowing sphere to float beside the brighter one.

Paul watched as the two orbs began to pulsate.

In a movement that seemed to be slow motion, the larger sphere absorbed the smaller one into itself.

Deacon and his boyfriend looked into the new, brilliantly shining sphere with matching expressions of peace and joy.

Quietly, the angel said, "The spirit is now complete, brought full circle. That which started as one has become whole again, as it should have always been."

With their hands nearly touching, the two boys carefully guided the glittery sphere of light to Kenny.

"Is that thing going to hurt him?" Kevin asked in a voice that held an underlying tone of warning.

"No. The frightened child is safe. The lonely child is forever held in his brother's arms. This won't hurt Kenny, it will complete him." The blond boy said with a happy smile.

"If you wanted, you could share this complete spirit with your brother. The two of you would become what you should have always been." Deacon said quietly.

"Kevin, it's your choice. Kenny will be fine either way. All you have to decide right now is if you want to share a soul with your brother. You will literally become soul-mates, friends for life." The angel said from the bed, still holding Arlo in his arms.

Paul watched as Kevin and Kenny exchanged a look.

"I'd really like to share it with you if you'd let me." Kenny said seriously.

"What about Uncle Chip?" Kevin asked in deep thought.

"What about him?" Kenny asked in confusion at the question.

"Kevin. You'll still be you and you'll still love who you love. The only difference is that now you won't feel the same desperate need for acceptance and hunger for his love and attention that you felt before." The angel said peacefully.

Paul's head whirled at the fact that Kevin was in love with his uncle, then decided to put that one out of his mind for a while so he could focus on what was happening in front of him.

"Good." Kevin said with relief.

"So, are we gonna do this or what?" Kenny asked with a smile at Kevin.

Kevin nodded and returned the smile.

"Hold your brother." The angel said from the bed.

Kevin walked to Kenny and gave his brother a gentle hug.

Paul smiled at the scene before him.

This expression of love before him touched him down to his soul.

Deacon and his boyfriend carried the sphere of light and raised it up between them.

Carefully they walked together to stand on either side of the brothers, then slowly let the sphere of golden light come to rest on Kenny and Kevin.

Paul watched in amazement at the beautiful sight of the pure spiritual energy being absorbed into the two brothers.

"That wasn't so hard. It's done." The angel said happily.

"I don't feel any different." Kenny said as he reluctantly released his grip on Kevin.

"Not yet. But you are different in a fundamental way. Every day of your life until now you've had this little feeling inside you that something is missing. Even if you didn't know what that feeling was, it was always there in the background." The angel said in concentration.

As Kenny nodded at the statement, Paul considered the angel's words and realized that he had an emptiness like that within him.

"Nothing is missing now. You can rest. You can truly know peace. The two of you have each other now... and forever." The angel said happily.

"Wow. That sounds really cool but... I still don't feel any different." Kenny said in an apologetic voice.

The angel chuckled and said, "You will. It's a fundamental change to the core of your being. When you finally notice what's different, it's going to blow you away."

"What do we do now?" Kevin asked in confusion as he looked around.

"I think you guys need to help get Dylan settled in, then get Aaron to take you back to Uncle Chip's house. The rest of us have another situation to sort out here." The angel said as he held Arlo's unmoving body close to his chest.

Kevin ran to the angel's side and gave him a quick hug, then said, "Thanks for helping me Mikey. I still think you're the best angel ever."

"Not a problem little guy. I was just fixing something your parents screwed up by separating you two when you were so young. Now go on and have fun showing Dylan around. I've got more work to do." The angel, Mikey, said gently.

"Okay." Kevin said happily and ran to Kenny who was waiting for him at the foot of the bed.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Hey Dylan, how are you doing?" Kevin asked happily as he finally found the room that Dylan was in.

"Me? I'm great! Jake fixed it so I could meet Aaron Carter." Dylan said happily.

Aaron chuckled and said, "I live right across the street. By this time next week you'll probably think it's no big deal."

"Yeah, and the week after that you'll probably be trying to throw him into a swimming pool." Cory said with a laugh.

Dylan looked at Cory with a wide eye.

"The guys throw me in the pool a lot. It's just something we do." Aaron said shyly.

"Yeah, he'd think we didn't love him anymore if we didn't do something to tease him every now and then." Cory said with a warm smile at Aaron.

After a moment of thought, Aaron said, "I still think my way is better. I just say it... I love you Cor."

Cory was taken aback by the serious note in Aaron's voice and stared at him in wonder.

Jake looked from Cory to Aaron and finally said, "Nah, it's less painful to just throw him in the pool."

Cory began to chuckle and nodded his agreement.

"So it looks like all the serious stuff is done in the other room. Is everything okay?" Jake asked curiously.

"Yeah. Mikey fixed everything." Kevin said happily.

"How's everything with you Ken?" Jake asked with concern.

Kenny looked at Jake and gave him a gentle smile as he said, "Really good. Thanks for what you said back there Jake. You know, that thing about trusting me... I'll never forget it."

Jake smiled and said, "I meant it Ken. You've been honest and nice to me since we first met. Even if you weren't Kevin's brother, I'd like you and trust you."

Kenny blushed and said, "If there was a swimming pool here, I'd throw you into it right now."

Jake chuckled and said, "I love you too Ken."

\* \* \* \* \*

"Mouse and Luke, would you help Simon bring Arlo's soul in here?" Mikey asked hopefully.

"Sure." Mouse said quickly, then glanced to see that Luke was following.

Mikey turned to face at Jerico and said, "With everything going on, we didn't get formally introduce. I'm Saint Mikey."

"Nice to meet you." Jerico said hesitantly.

Mikey chuckled and said, "Don't worry, you're doing fine. I'm just here to keep Arlo's body going until you can get him put back together."

"Are you sure that you want me to do it?" Jerico asked cautiously.

Mikey gave a gentle smile as he said, "Of course. You had everything under control here and you would have done just fine

without me. You just didn't have any way of knowing what to do about the twins."

"Oh. Um, well thanks." Jerico said uncertainly.

"Once you get Arlo put back, I need to talk to you." Mikey said, then looked around the room and continued, "All of you."

Jerico slowly nodded, then noticed Simon, Luke and Mouse carefully carrying the copper bowl of water into the room.

"It's your show." Mikey said with a smile as he held Arlo firmly.

"Bring it over here." Jerico said as he walked to the side of the bed.

Devon and Uri took a few steps back to allow the three boys to get by.

As the bowl was placed on the bed beside Arlo, Jerico cautiously took hold of Arlo's hand.

"Hold on to the bowl. He might jerk or something and I don't want to spill it before we're finished." Jerico said carefully.

Mouse, Luke and Simon all took firm grips on the bowl.

"Okay Arlo, it's time." Jerico said and carefully placed his hand into the water.

"That's not going to make him pee the bed is it?" Mouse asked seriously.

"I hadn't thought of that." Jerico said as he waited to see Arlo's reaction.

"Don't worry about it. If that happens, we'll deal with it." Mr. T said assuringly.

Chief Tecumseh nodded and said, "Such things happen occasionally."

"Go on Arlo. It's safe. It's where you belong." Jerico said into the bowl as he watched Arlo carefully.

Silence fell over the room as everyone watched, waiting for something to happen.

Suddenly, Arlo's body took in a deep gasp of breath, then his eyes snapped open.

"It worked. He's back." Jerico said with a smile and released Arlo's hand.

"What? What happened?" Arlo asked in confusion.

"A lot. I'll tell you all about it later." Simon said with relief.

Arlo looked at Simon with question, then his eyes went wide as he appeared to remember something.

"What's wrong?" Simon asked slowly with concern.

Arlo looked around the room quickly, then his gaze fixed on Uri.

"What..." Simon began to ask, but was stopped by the look of complete terror in Arlo's eyes.

"NO!" Arlo screamed, then bolted out of bed and ran for the door.

"What's wrong?" Simon asked in confusion.

"Simon, follow him. Everyone else, stay here." Mikey said firmly as he stood.

It took a moment for Simon to comprehend the words, but he quickly followed Arlo out of the room.

"Shouldn't we go to see that he's okay?" Mr. T asked with concern.

"Simon is the only one who can do what needs to be done." Mikey said seriously.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Uri, wait." Mikey said firmly as Uri walked toward the door.

"I... I must go." Uri said past his churning emotions.

"No. What you're planning won't do anyone any good." Mikey said seriously.

"How do you know what I am planning?" Uri asked cautiously.

Mikey flexed his wings to their full span and glanced over his shoulder at one of them for an instant, then said, "Maybe I'm just a really good guesser."

Uri looked around the room and noticed that everyone was frozen in place, like statues.

"I pulled us out of time so we could have a talk." Mikey said casually.

"You know?" Uri asked in a trembling voice.

Mikey nodded solemnly.

Uri looked at the floor and asked, "Is there any way I can be forgiven?"

Mikey looked at Uri with sympathy and said, "Yes. That's why we're having this talk."

"What must I do?" Uri asked cautiously as he dared to look up at Mikey.

"I think you already know. You've known since you got here." Mikey said seriously.

"But I cannot ask him." Uri said desperately.

"Maybe not. But that doesn't change the fact that it needs to be done." Mikey said frankly.

"I do not deserve his forgiveness." Uri said in a voice that held no hope.

Mikey shook his head and said, "Uri, you don't get to decide that. You have to let it be Simon's decision. You need to give him that authority over you so you can restore the balance."

Uri stood quietly for a moment, then asked, "Is there no other way?"

"None." Mikey said firmly.

After a moment of thought, Uri quietly said, "Then I am damned."

"Only if you choose to be." Mikey said with sympathy.

Uri looked at Mikey with question, then noticed that everyone in the room was moving again.

\* \* \* \* \*

Simon stepped out the bedroom door in time to see Arlo rush into the bathroom.

He quickly followed and found Arlo curled into a ball, crying in the floor of one of the bathroom stalls.

"What's wrong?" Simon asked in a whisper.

"I... I... I saw what he did to you... I felt it. All of it." Arlo whimpered.

"Who? What did you see?" Simon asked as he crouched by Arlo's side.

"Uri. I saw what he did to you. Oh my God! How can you live here with him? How can you stand to be in the same room with him?" Arlo asked in a shaky voice as he hugged his knees to his chest.

Simon let out a sigh as he realized what Arlo was talking about.

"He raped you! Oh God! I can still feel him touching me." Arlo said as a shudder ran through his body.

"Listen to me Arlo. You're only seeing half the story." Simon said quietly as tears filled his eyes.

"No I'm not! I saw everything. I FELT it! He hurt you!" Arlo screamed.

"If you'll calm down, I'll explain." Simon said gently.

"What's to explain? You need to tell someone... You should call the police! He should be in jail!" Arlo said desperately.

Simon shook his head and waited, not knowing any way to make Arlo calm down.

"He's the reason you can't let anyone touch you. What he did to you... you still feel it don't you? That's why you have the nightmares..." Arlo said as he searched Simon's eyes.

"You need to listen to me." Simon whispered.

Arlo finally noticed the serious expression on Simon's face and tried to calm himself.

"Are you ready to listen?" Simon asked cautiously.

Arlo hesitantly nodded.

"What happened wasn't Uri's fault." Simon began.

"But I saw him. I felt him." Arlo said with a shudder as he hugged his knees even more tightly.

"Yes. But he wasn't doing it because he wanted to." Simon explained quietly.

"I don't understand." Arlo said slowly.

"You know I used to do porn before I came here, right?" Simon asked carefully.

"Um, yeah. I saw some pictures of you on the net once." Arlo said shyly.

Simon nodded and said, "The guys who made me do that stuff wanted to make a porno for the really sick freaks out there. They thought they could make lots of money from it."

Arlo looked at Simon cautiously, not sure he wanted to hear what was next.

"They put me in a room and locked me in there for about six hours." Simon said as his eyes became distant.

"I didn't know what was going to happen, but I had a feeling that it was going to be something really bad." Simon said in a pained voice.

"Then Uri came in and... well, you know that part. He beat me and... um, raped me." Simon said quietly.

Arlo began a slight rocking as he continued to hug his knees.

"But it wasn't his fault. He was doing what he was told to do." Simon said in a whisper.

"What?" Arlo asked in confusion as he stopped his rocking.

"You've got to understand, the people who brought Uri in there told him to rape me. And if he didn't do it the way they wanted him to, they probably would have beat him or maybe even killed him. That's the way they did things." Simon said quietly.

"But... he hurt you..." Arlo said in a small voice.

Simon looked Arlo in the eyes and said, "Uri has never talked to me about what happened that day. I don't know if you've noticed, but he doesn't talk to me... ever."

Arlo thought about it for a second, then said, "I never really noticed. Uri kind of keeps away from everyone."

Simon nodded, then said, "The day that Uri arrived here and he saw me... I could see it in his eyes. Arlo, as much as that memory hurts me, I think it's twice as bad for him. Think about it. What kind of monster would you feel like if you were forced to hurt someone the way he hurt me? I don't know about you, but I can't even imagine what kind of pain he's feeling."

"So you really don't blame him?" Arlo asked cautiously.

Simon shook his head, then said, "No, I don't blame him. But there's something inside me that's still afraid of him. I don't know if I'll ever be able to get past it."

Arlo nodded his understanding.

"But I can't let that stop me. As much as those memories hurt me, I can't let Uri see it. He needs to see that I'm okay so he can forgive himself." Simon said carefully.

Arlo stopped all movement as he thought about the statement.

"Everyone at Camp Little Eagle was rescued from something, but I think that there's a part of Uri that still needs rescuing. And I'm the only one who can do it." Simon said quietly.

"No. You're not the only one." Arlo said in a whisper.

Simon looked at Arlo with question.

"I'm part of this now. If Uri needs to be rescued, we'll work together to help him." Arlo said, trying to sound self-assured.

Simon gave a brief smile and said, "Thanks Arlo. It'll be good to have help."

Arlo gave a weak smile in return.

"Let's get back to our room. I bet the other guys are worried about you." Simon said as he stood.

"Yeah... I was meaning to ask, what happened?" Arlo asked cautiously.

"You were just possessed for a while. I'll tell you all about it later." Simon said with a peaceful smile.

Arlo was startled by the statement, but finally nodded his acceptance.

"So are you going to take Dylan to the mall this weekend?" Obie asked with excitement.

"Sure, that sounds like a good idea. You guys think about what stores you'd like to go to and we'll get Dylan completely set up." Cory said happily.

"Um, I don't understand where you're going to get the money to pay for that stuff... or what I'll have to do to pay you back." Dylan said cautiously.

"The Clan established this camp so that children in trouble can have a safe place where they can grow and learn so they can have a chance at a decent future." Cory said carefully.

"Clan Short is a Vulcan clan. A share of the money to support this camp comes from Vulcan. Each planet that accepts the Safe Haven Act also contributes to supporting the camp. Beyond that, we also receive donations from certain companies and individuals who appreciate the work that we do." Cory finished as he looked Dylan in the eye.

"So what do I have to do to pay you back?" Dylan asked seriously.

"For now, just accept what you're being given. If you feel honor bound to pay back what's being spent on you then after you leave Camp Little Eagle continue our work and help kids in need. That's the only payment that we'll ever ask of you." Cory said firmly.

"Okay. I think you believe what you're saying, but I should probably talk to that Chief guy to make sure he believes the same thing." Dylan said cautiously.

Cory chuckled and said, "You can talk to him if you want to, but I have to warn you..."

Dylan watched Cory's expression carefully.

With an impish grin, Cory said, "...Chief Tecumseh works for me."

\* \* \* \* \*

"You said you needed to talk to us." Mr. T said as he noticed a strange pained expression on Uri's face.

"In just a minute. We need to wait on Simon and Arlo." Mikey said, then glanced at Uri with concern.

"While we're waiting, can I ask you some questions?" Jerico asked cautiously.

"You can ask, but I probably won't answer. You have to find the answers to the big philosophical questions for yourself." Mikey said with a note of regret.

"Oh. Well that knocks out the majority of what I was going to ask you." Jerico said in thought.

Mikey chuckled and said, "You won't have time to worry about that stuff anyway, you're about to get very busy."

"I am?" Jerico asked cautiously.

Mikey nodded seriously.

"What am I going to be busy doing?" Jerico asked hesitantly.

"Being the camp's resident Shaman." Mikey said frankly.

"I am?" Jerico asked slowly.

"He is?" Mr. T asked in exactly the same tone.

Mikey nodded.

"Look at the people in this cabin. You've got one with such power that he can't speak without hurting people, another who's a spirit medium with incredible potential, and a few more with other gifts that will need to be nurtured. For years you've been searching for a place where you're needed, where you can make a difference, now you're here." Mikey said seriously.

"When you put it that way, I guess you're right." Jerico said as he considered the words.

"Excuse me, I know you were talking about Luke and Arlo, but who has the other gifts and what are they?" Mr. T asked slowly.

"I've told you all I can. I just wanted you to be on the lookout for them." Mikey said seriously.

Conversation stopped as the door opened.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Kenny? Why are you smiling?" Jake asked curiously.

"Because he is." Kenny said as he pointed at Kevin.

Jake glanced at Kevin and couldn't help but chuckle at the glowing smile on his face.

"So why are you smiling Kevin?" Jake asked with a grin.

"Cause he is." Kevin said as he pointed at Kenny, then started to giggle.

Jake turned to Dylan and said, "You see what I have to put up with?"

"I can think of worse things." Dylan said, then let a small smile escape.

"Me too." Jake said frankly, then looked at Kevin curiously.

"I just feel like smiling. It's like there's just something in me that feels happy." Kevin said, not letting his smile fade for an instant.

"I think it's your 'little guy'." Kenny said happily.

Obie broke into laughter at the statement.

A moment later, Trent and Jose were laughing right along side Obie.

Jake rolled his eyes and said, "You'd better watch out for these guys Dylan, I think they might have dirty minds."

"I was talking about this part of Kevin's spirit..." Kenny tried to explain to the boys who were laughing hysterically.

Jake glanced at Obie nearly convulsed in laughter, then said, "Give it up Ken. They think you're talking about boners."

By now Dylan and Cory had been drawn into the infectious laughter.

"Maybe he was." Kevin said quietly, then started to chuckle.

"Not you too." Jake said as he shook his head.

"Jake, you'd better just go with it. You're outnumbered." Cory fought to say past his laughter.

Jake glanced at Lieutenant Masterson who had his hand over his mouth trying to hide his smile.

"Jake." Kenny said with a curious look on his face.

"What is it Ken?" Jake asked cautiously.

"I can feel him. The little guy." Kenny said with wonder.

"What does it feel like?" Jake asked with a smile.

"It feels like he's laughing his teeny tiny little ass off." Kenny said, then crumpled to the floor in laughter.

Jake looked to the ceiling and asked, "Where's Xain when I need him?"

"Why... why do you need... Xain? Do you have a happy little guy for him?" Kevin asked through his laughter from the floor by Dylan's bed.

Cory and Dylan broke into fresh gales of laughter at the question.

Jake shook his head in exasperation, then started to chuckle.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Sorry about that." Arlo said shyly as he walked in at Simon's side.

"No problem. I'm glad to see you feeling better. Now let me fill you in on what's going to happen." Mikey said seriously.

"Do you want me to get the other guys?" Simon asked cautiously.

"No. Just the people in this room. The others will be brought into it later, when they're ready to take on the responsibility." Mikey said firmly.

Deacon and Lawrence shared a look with each other, feeling distinctly out of place.

"A storm is coming and you guys need to be prepared." Mikey said firmly.

Chief Tecumseh looked at Mikey curiously and said, "I take it that you don't mean a literal storm."

Mikey nodded and said, "It's too early to know how it will manifest, but it's coming; A force that will stand in opposition to Clan Short."

"Then shouldn't Cory be in here for this?" Mr. T asked seriously.

"No. He needs to focus on what's right in front of him at the moment. We need to look ahead and prepare. When the danger manifests, Cory will recognize it and do what needs to be done. If

you guys are prepared when he needs you, the Clan might have a chance of surviving this." Mikey said firmly.

"Then what do we need to do?" Devon asked carefully.

"What you need to do Devon, is to do what you do best. Study. Knowledge is your source of power. Jerico can provide you the books and other resources that you'll need. Everyone else will need to find their own source of power and develop it." Mikey said as he looked around the room.

"It's likely that our enemies will manipulate circumstances to get me out of the way before they act against you. In fact, there's a chance that I might not see you again in the coming weeks. Deacon and Lawrence will be able to provide you valuable information and offer some assistance if that happens."

"Chief Tecumseh can make arrangements for the resources you'll need for your training." Mikey said as he looked to Chief Tecumseh and received a nod.

"Mr. T can teach you to become a team. All of you need to learn how to be leaders... and followers. This will be a critical lesson no matter what form our enemies choose when they face us." Mikey said firmly.

"The first and most important thing the rest of you need to do is to resolve the issues in your past. Anything that is unresolved can be used as a weapon against you." Mikey said as he looked from Simon and Arlo to Uri.

"Jerico, your first job is to train Paul. I know you'll be tempted to show him the basics so you can devote your full attention to Luke and Arlo, but I can guarantee that any deficiency in Paul's training will be exploited and used to attack you. You are his sword. He is your shield. Neither of you can be effective alone." Mikey said as he looked deeply into Jerico's eyes.

Jerico nodded his understanding.

Mikey looked around the room and said, "All of you need to discover your gifts and learn to use them as effectively as possible. The security red that happened tonight was the first shot being fired. I'm afraid it won't be very long before our enemy is revealed so we can't waste any time."

"Does that mean we should learn to use phasers or something like that?" Devon asked carefully.

Mikey shook his head and said, "That's not the kind of threat I'm talking about. When the time comes, Cory will deal with the physical threat. You are going to be facing our enemy on a different level."

"What can we do?" Mouse asked cautiously.

"In the dark days ahead, the members of Cabin One are going to become the spirit of the Clan. It's going to become your responsibility to keep the Clan and the other members of the camp morally strong. You are going to have to reveal the misdirection and lies that our enemies will use to try and discourage us. It will be up to you to keep your brothers from falling into despair. The members of Cabin One will be responsible for keeping everyone focused on our true goals. And you will also need to be there to comfort those who fall victim to the attacks of our enemies. Our enemies have many weapons, but they usually use hate, deceit, misdirection and lies flavored with enough truth to make what they say sound reasonable." Mikey said firmly.

"How can we fight that?" Paul asked in shock.

"With faith, hope, truth and love. Those are your most important tools and all of you need to learn how to use them." Mikey said seriously.

"I... don't even know where to begin." Jerico said in a daze.

"With truth. Once the residents of this cabin are alone, you need to have a meeting and each reveal your own truths. If you face them as a group, you can overcome them. If you hold them back, our enemies will exploit them later." Mikey said firmly.

"You said the residents of this cabin... where does that leave us?" Jerico asked cautiously.

Mikey smiled at Jerico, then turned to Mr. T and asked, "Do you have any spare quarters for teachers?"

"They just finished the house parent's room of the new cabin today." Mr. T said cautiously.

"I think it would be appropriate for the camp's new Shaman to be given the responsibility of being a house parent..." Mikey said in a leading tone.

"So Jerico could move in here and Derek could move into the new cabin." Chief Tecumseh said speculatively.

"Paul needs to move in here too. He's essential to this plan." Mikey said firmly.

"So what do we do now?" Devon asked quietly.

"Right now, we need to get everyone who doesn't live here back where they belong. Once we're gone, the rest of you need to have your talk." Mikey said firmly.

"It feels like we're becoming an army or something." Mouse said quietly.

Mikey looked him in the eyes and said, "You're becoming the Clan's spiritual warriors."

## Chapter 6

"I'm sorry Mikey, but I still don't understand what we're supposed to do." Devon said shyly.

Mikey smiled at Devon with sympathy and said, "I know. It's your nature to want everything spelled out in no uncertain terms. Here's as much as I can tell you at the moment. Deacon and Lawrence can let Aaron know that they're ready to go, that should get the others thinking about getting back over to Southcrest. Chief Tecumseh and Mr. T need to attend to some camp business and get things settled down after that security alert. Everyone else needs to go into the common room to have a house meeting."

"Does that include that Starfleet security guy?" Simon asked carefully.

"That's up to Dylan. Lieutenant Masterson's presence won't change anything for us either way so it should be Dylan's choice." Mikey said with a distant look.

"I still don't get what difference it's going to make." Devon said hesitantly.

Mikey looked around the room, then smiled and said, "Guys, if everything else has any hope of working out, you're going to need to become a team. The way you do that is with honesty. This is the first step on a new path and one of the most important. It's the foundation of what you will eventually become."

"Are you going to stay and help us?" Mouse asked curiously.

"No Mouse, I can't be here for this. My presence would interfere with the bonds that you'll be forming, and besides, Dylan couldn't handle dealing with an angel on top of everything else he's faced today." Mikey said honestly.

Mouse looked at Mikey with concern.

"I've told you what needs to be done. Now all that's left is to do it." Mikey said seriously, then vanished in a shower of sparkles.

"Guys, call us if you need anything. Day or night. We'll always be there for you." Deacon said as he looked around the group.

"Thank you. We'll do that." Devon said quietly.

"Come on, let's get Aaron." Deacon said and walked to the door.

"If you'll send Cory and the other guys out to the common room, I'll drive them over to Southcrest." Mr. T said as he also walked toward the door.

"Yeah. I'll do that." Deacon said with a smile as Lawrence walked to his side.

Lawrence looked around one last time, then followed Deacon out of the room.

"I need to get to my office and get the details from security about the alert earlier." Chief Tecumseh said as he slowly stood from his chair.

"I guess the rest of us need to head into the common room." Devon said uncertainly.

"Wait. Before we go, I'd like to say something." Jerico said seriously.

Everyone turned their attention to the young Shaman.

"I guess I'm going to be your house parent or something like that, but... I feel like when we do this house meeting that I shouldn't be in charge. Even though I'm the oldest one here, I'm not going to try to act like your leader, I'm just going to offer advice and help out wherever I can." Jerico said slowly.

"We'll work it out in the meeting. When everyone is together and talking, we'll just know who our leader is." Paul said seriously.

Jerico looked at his cousin curiously.

Paul shrugged and said, "At least that's how it works on Digimon."

A chuckle spread through the group as people started filing out of the room.

Jerico noticed Paul's downcast expression and asked, "What's wrong?"

"I'm sorry. I'll try not to say stupid stuff like that anymore." Paul said in a mumble.

Jerico turned Paul to face him and said in a firm voice, "What you said was exactly right. You learned your life lessons a different way than I did, but that doesn't mean that they are any less

valid. If you want to quote something from Digimon or Gilligan's Island to prove a point, you go right ahead. It's not the source that matters, it's the fundamental truth that you derived from it."

Paul thought about the words, then reluctantly nodded.

"Come on cousin. Let's get this started." Jerico said as he put an arm loosely around Paul and guided him out of the room.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Sorry about that. I never thought anyone could have to pee so much." Dylan said as he walked back into the bedroom, followed by Lieutenant Masterson.

"No problem Buddy." Jake said with a happy smile at Dylan's improved condition.

As Dylan was about to say something, the door opened again.

"Hey Aaron, do you think you could take us back to Southcrest? We've done everything we needed to." Lawrence asked quietly into the room.

Aaron smiled at Lawrence and said, "Sure. But before we go, I'd like you to meet Dylan. He just moved in here today."

"Hi Dylan. My name is Lawrence. It's nice to meet you." Lawrence said with an honest smile and offered his hand to shake.

Dylan cautiously shook the offered hand as he looked at Lawrence's pale blue eyes.

"This is my boyfriend Deacon." Lawrence said shyly and guided Deacon to stand beside him.

"Hey there. What happened to your face?" Deacon asked curiously.

"I got shot." Dylan said, stunned by the blunt question.

"Ouch. That sucks. Well, I'm glad you're here now where you'll be safe." Deacon said, finishing in a smile.

Dylan hesitantly nodded, then reluctantly broke into a grin.

Deacon looked at him curiously, wondering what was funny.

"You're the first person who didn't stare at my face, then try to ignore it." Dylan said with a full smile.

"Really? I wonder how they managed that. Half your face is bandaged, it's kind of hard to ignore." Deacon said frankly.

Dylan offered his hand and said, "Deacon, it's really nice to meet you. I think that if I ever need someone to be honest with me, I'll know who to talk to."

Deacon shook the offered hand while he tried to decide if he was being complimented or insulted. Finally he concluded that it didn't matter and said, "You can call me any time, day or night. Plus Lawrence and I will be going to school here so you'll be seeing us all the time."

"Good." Dylan said with a sincere smile.

"I need to be going too. I need to get these guys back to Southcrest before Dad goes ballistic." Jake said as he looked at his brothers.

"Mr. T said something about going out to the common room. I bet if you asked him he'd give you a ride." Lawrence said quickly.

Jake turned to look at Dylan and asked, "Do you think you're going to be okay here?"

Dylan looked around the room and noticed that Obie was looking at him hopefully.

"Yeah. I think so." Dylan said with a gentle smile.

"Ken, can you give Dylan your cell phone number in case he needs to call us for anything?" Jake asked seriously.

"Sure, I'll just need something to write on." Kenny said as he looked around.

"Here." Obie said and picked up a spiral bound notebook and a pencil from beside his bed.

"Thanks." Kenny said as he quickly wrote down the number.

"If you need anything at all, I want you to call me." Jake said firmly.

"Yeah. I will." Dylan said quietly.

"I want you to promise. Even if you just feel like talking or something like that; I want you to promise that you'll call me." Jake said seriously.

"Yeah Jake, I promise. If I need anything at all, even if it's just to talk, I'll call you." Dylan said as he looked into Jake's eyes.

"Good. Come here." Jake said and opened his arms.

Dylan looked at Jake with caution.

Jake stepped forward and pulled Dylan into a hug as he said, "We lived the same lives and did the same things. Both of us got through it and survived. I'll do anything I can to help you. Remember that."

"I will. Thanks Jake." Dylan whispered as he felt a tear starting to form in his eye.

"I'll probably be back in a day or two to see how you're doing unless you call me first." Jake said seriously.

"Okay. Sounds good." Dylan said with a peaceful smile.

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As Obie followed the group out of his new bedroom, Mouse silently motioned for him to come to the sofa area of the common room.

"We're about to have a house meeting. Would you invite Dylan?" Mouse asked hopefully.

"Why me?" Obie asked cautiously.

"Because he's your roommate. He doesn't really know the rest of us yet." Mouse said quietly.

"Yeah. It's scary to be new, I'll get Trent and Jose to help me." Obie said, then looked to see where Dylan had gone.

Dylan was standing at the front door waving, watching Jake and the others walk away.

The preteen posse of Obie, Trent and Jose approached Dylan and waited until he closed the door and noticed them.

"Do you want to come over here and meet everyone else?" Obie asked hopefully.

Dylan glanced at the sitting area where most of the rest of the occupants of the cabin were taking seats.

"Sure. I guess." Dylan said uncertainly, then glanced to see that Lieutenant Masterson was only an arms reach away from him.

"Come on." Obie said with a grand smile and fell into step at Dylan's side.

Trent and Jose took up flanking positions behind the pair as they made the short walk across the room.

Lieutenant Masterson smiled to himself at the actions of the boys and quietly followed.

Dylan slowed his pace as he looked over the group that was assembled before him.

It was an odd collection of guys of all different ages and nationalities.

His gaze finally stopped on a blond haired, blue eyed boy, about fourteen years old that he recognized immediately.

"Oh my God! You're Steven!" Dylan said as he stopped in his tracks.

Simon's expression was pained as he said, "That was the name they used for me in the movies. I don't know what my real name is, but Cory and Sean helped me pick out a name. Now I'm Simon... Simon Smith."

"But... But you're really him! I've seen all your movies! You're the greatest!" Dylan said in amazement.

Simon closed his eyes and drew in a deep breath, trying to calm the shaking sensation that seemed to have overtaken his entire body.

"Dylan, if you'll sit down, maybe Simon will tell you about it." Jerico said with concern at Simon's nervous state.

Dylan looked around, as if just realizing that he was still standing, then took a seat on one of the chairs that had been pulled over from the table by the window.

Obie, Trent and Jose took that as their cue to find their seats and filled in wherever there was a place to sit.

"Lieutenant Masterson, you can have a seat too if you like. This might take a while." Paul said with a friendly smile at him.

Lieutenant Masterson hesitantly took the only seat that was left which was, coincidentally or not, beside Dylan.

"Simon, do you want to start?" Jerico asked quietly.

"Not really, but... I guess I should really explain some things..." Simon said in a diminishing voice.

"No." Uri said as he stood.

Simon flinched back at the sight of Uri towering over him.

Uri noticed Simon's reaction, and slowly sat down again.

"I know you too. You're Yusef." Dylan said in wonder.

"That was their name for me. My true name is Uriah Siyamak. In this cabin I am known as Uri."

Dylan hesitantly nodded.

"A little less than a year ago, I did something that... was wrong." Uri said in a quieter voice.

A moment of silence fell over the room as Uri tried to find the words to say what he needed to say.

"As I am sure you know, I was featured in some... movies." Uri said as he looked at Dylan, trying to keep his composure.

"Yeah, I saw them. All of them I think. Both of you were really great!" Dylan said quickly.

Uri cast his eyes down and said, "I have told myself that I had no choice. The men who forced me to do those things made me believe that it was the only way for me to survive."

"I don't understand." Paul said in confusion, as he looked from Simon to Uri.

"Uri and Simon were in some hardcore kiddie porn." Arlo said quietly.

Paul looked at Uri, then Simon with surprise.

"I saw them kill a child who was near Jose's age. All he did was refuse to follow their instructions and they slit his throat... From

that day on, I did as I was told, believing I had no other choice." Uri said distantly.

"You didn't." Arlo said seriously.

Uri shook his head and said, "I did have a choice. I could have refused. I could have let them kill me. So much suffering would have been prevented if I had."

"You're wrong." Simon said, trying to keep the tremors out of his voice.

Uri reluctantly forced himself to face Simon and felt the shame wash over him again at what he had done.

"If you had died, they would have just got someone else to do it. You saved someone else from going through what you're suffering." Simon said in a voice that sounded more assured than he felt.

"Perhaps." Uri said quietly.

"I don't get it. Do what?" Devon asked from Uri's side.

"Uri..." Arlo began to say, but stopped at the feeling of a hand on his arm.

"Uri needs to tell it." Simon said quietly, as he withdrew his hand.

Arlo nodded and turned his attention to Uri again.

"I... beat and... raped Simon." Uri choked out as tears started falling down his cheeks.

Silence fell over the room at the statement.

Trent scooted a little closer to Jose and discretely put an arm around him.

Finally Uri continued, "There are some actions in this life that are beyond forgiveness. I did not understand this at the time, but I do now."

"Do you want to be forgiven?" Arlo asked curiously.

Uri looked at Arlo through teary eyes and barely nodded.

"Then ask." Arlo said firmly.

"I cannot." Uri said, as his gaze fell to the floor.

"Uri. Ask." Arlo said again, firmly.

Uri reluctantly brought his eyes up to meet Arlo's and saw the determination housed within.

Paul glanced at his cousin to find Jerico watching the proceedings intently, like a referee looking for a foul.

Uri slid out of his chair and onto his knees.

All the others in the room were transfixed as Uri fought to find the words he wanted to say.

Uri turned his body so he was facing Simon and clasped his hands together as he said, "Simon, I am so sorry for all the pain I caused you. If there were any way I could go back in time and take your place to take away your hurt, I would do so willingly. I know I don't deserve it, but I will ask none the less... no, I will beg. I am on my knees so I can beg for your forgiveness."

Everyone watched in silence and waited to see what Simon would do.

Finally Simon seemed to come to a decision and said, "Uri. I've known since it happened that you didn't have a choice. I was held captive by the same kind of men that you were. I think you know that the physical pain doesn't last that long, it's the emotional pain that never seems to go away."

Uri slowly looked up at Simon, devoting his full attention.

"If you will do one thing for me, I will forgive you." Simon said quietly.

"Anything. You have but to ask, and I will find a way to give it to you." Uri said quickly.

"Are you sure?" Simon asked cautiously.

"Yes. Ask me whatever you want, and I will devote my life to providing it." Uri said desperately.

"The thing that I want is something that you can give me today, that is, if you really mean it." Simon said seriously.

"Yes. Name it and whatever it is, it will be yours." Uri said as his mind raced over what he had that Simon could possibly want.

"I want you to forgive yourself." Simon said, firmly.

Uri froze at the words.

"That's it. As soon as you can look me in the eyes and honestly say that you've forgiven yourself, then I'll forgive you too." Simon said seriously.

"But... I cannot." Uri said in a helpless voice.

"You promised me." Simon said, as he looked deeply into Uri's eyes.

Uri could see the determination in Simon's expression, then hesitantly nodded.

"You're going to do it?" Simon asked, to be sure.

"Yes Simon. I will find a way. I do not know when I will be ready to stand before you and say that it is done, but I will do it." Uri said with certainty.

"I'll be waiting." Simon said seriously.

"So... do you mean you weren't acting?" Dylan said in a small voice as he finally grasped what they were talking about.

Simon turned to look at Dylan, then softly said, "No. The whip marks, the blood... all of it was only too real."

"I... I'm sorry. When you see stuff like that in a movie, you know it's just special effects and stuff. It's not real... It's never real... I didn't know." Dylan said in a diminishing voice.

"I understand. It's okay." Simon said quietly.

An uncomfortable moment of silence fell over the room as everyone waited to see what was going to happen.

"I guess I'll go next. I'm Devon Garr." Devon said, as he watched Uri go back to his chair.

"What happened to you?" Simon asked softly, glad to have the attention off him and Uri.

"My parents went to Africa to do Christian missionary work." Devon said quietly.

"They left me with my grandparents, my father's parents." Devon said as his gaze became more distant.

"I had this friend named Leon and we... well, we were just messing around, you know, like guys do..." Devon said hesitantly.

"Um, do you mean messing around like, playing baseball or messing around like having sex?" Mouse asked seriously.

"Um... Okay. We're being honest here, right?" Devon said nervously as sweat started beading on his forehead.

"Yeah. It's okay Devon. We're all your friends." Mouse said assuringly.

Devon nodded, then quietly said, "I was sucking his dick."

"You're nasty!" Mouse said quickly.

Devon looked at Mouse with shock.

"Just kidding." Mouse said with a giggle.

Chuckles spread around the room and relieved some of the tension that had been building.

Devon smiled and said, "Well anyway, when my grandfather caught us, he started hitting me and... well, he beat me up pretty bad."

"How bad?" Paul asked with concern.

"Bad enough. Then grandpa threw me out of his house and left me laying there, bleeding on the sidewalk." Devon said quietly.

"Did you have to go to the hospital?"

"Yeah. Someone called the police and when they showed up they called an ambulance." Devon said quietly.

"So how did you end up here?" Jose asked curiously.

Devon smiled at the young boy and said, "Well, that's the part that I'm really not sure about. My grandfather was put in jail for beating me up and I was taken before a judge so he could figure out what to do with me. There was some CPS lady there who wanted me to go with her but the judge sent me here instead. He didn't really explain why."

"How did you end up in Cabin One? I mean, isn't it for, um..." Dylan trailed off, not knowing how to ask his question.

"Cabin one is for people not interested in any kind of a sexual relationship. After what happened, I kind of figured that I'd be better off dealing with other stuff first and saving the sex stuff till later. Doing that stuff with Leon was... would have been... my first time." Devon trailed off weakly.

Dylan nodded that he understood.

"There's one other thing..." Devon said uncertainly.

Everyone remained silent as they waited.

Devon thought for a moment, then said, "I'll just have to show you. Someone else can talk and I'll be back in a minute."

"I need to go too." Dylan said shyly, and hurried to the bathroom.

Jerico watched as Lieutenant Masterson stood and walked to wait by the bathroom door.

\* \* \* \* \*

Trent slowly moved his arm from around Jose, but the movement drew Jerico's attention.

Jerico looked at the pair of seven year old boys with concern and said, "I'm sorry you heard that, I didn't know it was going to get so graphic."

Jose looked Jerico in the eyes and said, "Me and Trent never got beat up like Simon, but we done all that sex and stuff since we was both little. We both had people do stuff to us and take pictures of us and movies and all that."

Paul stared in shock as Jerico quietly said, "I'm sorry to hear that, but I'm glad hearing what Simon and Uri went through didn't upset you too much."

"Knowing that Simon was hurt bothered me a little, I think it did Trent too. But we know about what all the rest is like and we're okay." Jose said seriously.

Simon gave a little chuckle and said, "I think you guys are handling it better than I am."

"When we got here they was gonna put us in cabin two with the little kids. But Cory and Sean stopped them. They said that we was old enough to be in cabin one." Jose said proudly.

Trent smiled and nodded his agreement.

"Well, as far as I'm concerned, they were right. If either of you ever need to talk about the stuff you went through, I'll always have time for you." Simon said with admiration for the pair.

"I too will help however I am able." Uri said quietly.

Simon glanced at Uri with surprise.

When Uri noticed, Simon gave him a small smile and an assuring nod.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Sorry about that." Dylan said shyly as he returned to his chair.

"It's not a problem." Paul said with a genuine smile that put Dylan at ease.

Everyone looked around at each other until Mouse finally broke the silence by saying, "My real name is Harold Eugene Mauser, but everyone calls me Mouse. And what happened to Devon is kinda what happened to me."

"You were caught having sex?" Paul asked uncertainly as he looked at the ten year old boy.

"Yeah. With my neighbor. He was fourteen. Anyway, when my dad caught me he kind of... beat me... into a coma." Mouse said uncomfortably.

Both Jerico and Paul stared in horror at the statement because from Mouse's earnest expression, neither had any doubt that it was true.

"Anyway, It's okay, because when I woke up a couple weeks later there was a really cool guy in the next bed with a couple broken bones. He was really quiet, but he was really good at listening. So when I went to court and Judge Robison said that I was going to go here, I asked him if Luke could go too since he didn't have no one and no one ever came to the hospital to see him." Mouse said quickly.

Luke looked at Jerico with question and received a nod to assure him that he could talk without hurting anyone.

"My real name is Lucifer Balthazar Graves, but I go by Luke. My parents were Satan worshippers, like, to the extreme. They were

trying to make me into a Satanic priest because I can... do things. It's hard to explain." Luke finished with frustration.

"Luke, if you want, you can show them your gift. I'll make sure it doesn't get out of control." Jerico said quietly.

"Okay, but I guess I'd better wait for Devon. It might freak him out if he walked in while I'm doing it." Luke said honestly.

"Good thinking." Jerico said with a smile.

Some of the others in the room looked at each other curiously, wondering what they were talking about.

\* \* \* \* \*

"This is what I looked like when I got here." Devon said as he walked down the hallway wearing incredibly thick horned rimmed glasses, a horrible striped button up shirt and black and white checkered polyester slacks that didn't fit him correctly or quite reach his ankles. The pocket protector full of pens and pencils was the finishing touch.

"Oh my God. You're the nerdiest nerd I've ever seen!" Arlo said with wide eyes.

"Yeah. Let your grandparents shop for your clothes at the Goodwill and garage sales for you and see how you do." Devon said in a wounded tone.

"I'm sorry Devon. I didn't mean to hurt your feelings. You just always look really normal, kind of cool actually, so I was surprised to see you like this." Arlo said quickly.

Devon wilted with relief and said, "Thanks Arlo. When I got here, Cory and Sean took me to the optometrist for contact lenses. Then they made sure I got a decent haircut and helped me pick out some nice clothes. I've had a better life in the last month than the rest of my life put together."

"I love a happy ending." Paul said with a smile at Devon.

"That's the best part, this is only the beginning." Devon said with a contented smile.

"Do you need those coke bottles to see?" Arlo asked hesitantly.

"No. I've got my contacts in. I just put them on so you could see what I looked like before." Devon said as he put the glasses in their case then slid them into his front pants pocket.

"Okay guys. I'm going to do something that may seem a little bit freaky, but don't worry. I'm just doing it so you can understand." Luke said in concentration as he stood.

"Go ahead Luke... It's funny to hear you talk." Devon said with a smile.

Luke looked around the group until he came to Uri who seemed to be lost in his own thoughts.

In a firm voice, Luke said, "Truth is the path to *understanding*. Once we *understand*, *forgiveness* is possible."

Looks of surprise went around the room as everyone suddenly felt memories surface that were coupled to guilt.

"To *know* that you are *forgiven* brings *peace*." Luke said in concentration.

Uri's eyes went wide as all the conflicting emotions swirling inside him suddenly fell into place and everything became clear.

"I'm not a monster." Uri said in wonder.

Luke smiled and said, "You're a survivor. But you have to *accept forgiveness* so you can leave the past behind and face the future."

Even though the words were directed at Uri, everyone in the room felt their power and applied the meaning to their own lives.

Tears filled Uri's eyes as he whispered, "Thank you."

Luke nodded, then looked around the group to see how everyone was doing.

They were all frozen with distant looks ranging between wonder and profound joy.

As Luke was about to say the words to undo the suggestion, he felt a hand on his shoulder.

"Leave them like this for a few minutes." Jerico said quietly.

"Why?" Luke whispered cautiously.

"I get the feeling that all these guys can use some forgiveness and closure in their lives. Just leave them and let them come out of it naturally when they've worked out their thoughts." Jerico said seriously.

"Okay. Thanks." Luke said as he looked around the group again.

"No problem. You did that very well. You've got better control than I did at your age." Jerico said with a smile.

"Really?" Luke asked happily.

Jerico nodded, then turned at a movement.

\* \* \* \* \*

Jose snapped out of his trance-like state and turned quickly to look at Trent.

Before he could think of what to say, Trent blinked his eyes and looked at Jose with concern.

"The other day I took a pair of your socks without asking. I'm sorry I stole from you. I really didn't mean to. I just kinda forgot." Jose said shyly.

Trent giggled, then struggled to say, "You rrrran out b-b-because I b-b-b-borrowed yours."

Jose chuckled, then said, "I guess that means we gotta forgive each other, huh?"

Trent happily nodded his agreement.

"I hope the rest of them can settle things as easily." Jerico whispered to Luke.

\* \* \* \* \*

"What was that?" Lieutenant Masterson asked in a daze.

"Forgiveness." Jerico said quietly.

"No, I mean, was that mind control or telepathy? I've never felt anything like that." Lieutenant Masterson said in confusion.

"I suppose that if you have to put a label on it, you could call it empathic manipulation. The ability is telepathic, but it doesn't work in the normal telepathic range of activity. It works on a subconscious level. That's why we use spoken words to convey a

message to the conscious mind. Otherwise, the emergence of strong subconscious emotions without warning could damage the conscious mind." Jerico said in thought.

Lieutenant Masterson thought for a moment, then asked, "Could you show me?"

Jerico nodded, then concentrated as he looked into Lieutenant Masterson's eyes.

Lieutenant Masterson went pale and began to shake.

"No! You can't!" Lieutenant Masterson said as he covered his eyes quickly.

"It's okay. Whatever you just saw was only for you. I don't have the ability to read your thoughts." Jerico said softly.

Lieutenant Masterson nodded shakily.

"I just brought up a feeling of humiliation. I don't know what memories are associated with that emotion for you, but I wanted to bring up something strong enough to recognize that wouldn't cause you any serious harm." Jerico said with concern.

"Just... Don't do that again." Lieutenant Masterson said in a shaky whisper.

"I won't. I promise." Jerico said quietly.

"Um, what were you saying?" Arlo asked in confusion as he looked around.

"Nothing important. Did you see what Luke's ability was?" Jerico asked with a smile.

"Um... I'm not sure. Did he make me go off into lala land like that?" Arlo asked as he looked around at everyone else's distant expressions.

"I suppose he did. He was giving Uri some encouragement and advice on forgiveness, and everyone else in the room was pulled into the suggestion." Jerico said with a contented smile.

"Oh. Um, yeah. So that's why I was thinking about back when I was living with my parents. I was feeling bad about..."

"You don't need to tell us if you don't want to." Jerico said quickly, before Arlo revealed anything he might regret.

"It's okay. I just felt bad about not missing my parents. I feel like I'm... I don't know... like there's something wrong with me." Arlo finished with a shrug.

"So you feel like you need to be forgiven for not loving your family?" Mouse asked in a whisper.

Luke smiled at Mouse and took a step away from Jerico to sit by his friend again.

"Well, yeah. I mean, as far as I can tell, they don't care about me either so... I guess I just feel bad because I *should* feel something for them." Arlo said with difficulty.

"Is there someone that you do feel close to? You know, the way you think that you should feel about your family." Jerico asked cautiously.

Arlo thought for a moment, then looked at Simon with concern.

"Yeah. Simon is closer to me than anyone ever has been." Arlo said with a nod.

"What about the others?" Jerico asked curiously.

Arlo looked around, then broke into a smile as he said, "I get it. *This* is my family. And I *do* love them."

Jerico chuckled at Arlo's look of wonder and relief.

"What did you do to me?" Dylan asked as he snapped out of his trance state.

"I'm sorry Dylan. I should have explained what was going to happen a little better. That didn't bother you did it?" Jerico asked with concern.

"Um... No. I'm fine. Whatever you just did made me realize something that I didn't understand before." Dylan said in a considering voice.

"I hope it helped you let go of something that was bothering you." Luke said quietly.

"Maybe it did. I don't know." Dylan said slowly.

"You don't have to talk about it if you don't want to." Jerico said seriously.

Dylan thought for a moment, then said, "No. I um... Maybe you could help me understand it."

"I'll do whatever I can." Jerico said softly.

"There was this guy named Johnny. He was kind of in love with me." Dylan said cautiously.

Jerico nodded and waited for Dylan to continue.

"Well, I didn't feel that way about him. I tried to get him to understand, but I don't think he ever really did." Dylan said with difficulty.

"That sounds tough." Paul said quietly.

"He kind of followed me around and was always trying to get me to notice him." Dylan said distantly.

"What did you do?" Paul asked with interest.

"Nothing. I mean, I let him hang around with me and tried to be his friend." Dylan said as he seemed to come out of his distant thoughts.

"That sounds like the right thing to do." Jerico said gently.

"I guess so. But I guess I've been feeling kinda guilty for not loving him the way he loved me." Dylan said as he looked down.

"You can't force yourself to love someone. The most you could do is lie to him and pretend to feel something that you don't." Jerico said with concern.

"Yeah. I see that now. And if I could go back and do it over, there's nothing that I would have done differently." Dylan said in thought.

"It's good to know that you don't have any regrets." Jerico said with a small smile.

"Well, I do have one. I wish I could have been there when he died so that in his last minutes he would have known that he had a friend." Dylan said sadly.

"I'm sure he knew." Jerico said softly.

Dylan nodded slightly.

"What was that?" Simon asked abruptly as he broke out of his trance.

"Luke used his ability to help all of you with forgiveness." Jerico said carefully.

Simon stood quickly and walked to Uri who was sitting with a vacant look on his face.

"Uri, wake up." Simon said firmly.

"He needs to finish this." Jerico said gently.

"I need him to hear this first." Simon said firmly, then turned his full attention back to Uri.

"Wake up Uri! I need you to hear me." Simon said more loudly.

Uri blinked and looked at Simon with confusion.

"Uri. I was wrong. I was trying to use your guilty feelings to make you do something that you may not be ready for. I forgive you for everything." Simon said seriously.

"No Simon. You had the right to ask of me whatever you wanted." Uri said quietly.

"Forgiveness with conditions isn't true forgiveness, it's just a deal that we made. I forgive you Uri. You don't have to do anything for me." Simon said firmly.

"You..." Uri trailed off in wonder.

"I forgive you. I'm not mad at you. I don't hate you. And if you'll let me, I'd like to try being your friend." Simon said sincerely.

"Thank you Simon." Uri said as he looked into Simon's eyes.

"Way to go Simon." Paul said with a smile.

Jerico glanced at his cousin, then back at Simon and said, "Yes. Good job."

Simon whispered, "Thanks." as he walked back to his chair.

Devon looked around the room in confusion but didn't say anything.

Paul noticed and asked, "Is everything alright?"

Devon blinked a few times, then hesitantly said, "I don't know."

"Luke just brought out your feelings about guilt and forgiveness." Jerico said as he watched Devon's expression carefully.

Devon shook his head and said, "It wasn't like that for me. I was thinking about my parents."

"What about them?" Luke asked quietly.

"I was thinking about how much I hate them for leaving me here. I was thinking about how I'll never forgive them because they couldn't love me enough to stay here with me or take me with them." Devon said angrily.

"Hating them only hurts you. You need to let it go." Luke said quietly.

"No." Paul said immediately.

Everyone looked at Paul with question.

"Devon has the right to feel whatever he feels. We don't get to decide that for him." Paul said firmly.

Luke and Jerico looked at each other as they considered Paul's words.

"That's it." Devon said with surprise.

"What's that?" Luke asked quietly.

"That's what I felt like I needed to be forgiven for. It's not that I feel like I should forgive my parents. It's that I feel like I need to be forgiven for holding onto the hate." Devon said in realization.

"I understand Devon. I hope that someday you're ready to let go of those feelings. But I won't think that you're a bad person because you feel that way now. You're just a person who's been hurt." Paul said as he looked into Devon's eyes.

Jerico was stunned by Paul's insights into Devon's revelation, but quickly recovered and said, "I agree with Paul. It's better to acknowledge your feelings than to try and feel something that you don't."

Devon smiled with relief.

"It's kind of the same thing that happened to me." Dylan said shyly.

Devon looked at Dylan with question.

"I felt guilty for not feeling something that I thought I was supposed to." Dylan said in a considering voice.

"I'm glad that I'm here with people who can understand." Devon said with a smile at Dylan.

"I think we're all happy about that Devon. So is everyone back now?" Jerico asked as he looked around.

"Mouse is still gone." Luke said with concern.

Mouse looked up at the sound of his name, then said, "I'm your anchor. It didn't work on me."

"Then why are you so quiet?" Luke asked, still sounding concerned.

"I've been thinking about what we're doing." Mouse said seriously.

"What are we doing?" Paul asked slowly.

"We're becoming a family."

## Chapter 7

"Wait, Obie's still gone." Paul said as he noticed Obie's distant expression.

"No I'm not. I snapped out of it a few minutes ago." Obie said quietly.

"Are you alright?" Paul asked with concern.

"Yeah. I don't have any big bad things like what happened to all of you. I'm fine." Obie said as he looked around the room.

"You have something. You can tell us if you want." Paul said cautiously.

Obie considered for a moment, then quietly said, "Nobody ever did any of the sex stuff to me or hit me or anything like that."

"Then why are you here?" Arlo asked slowly, more as a prompt for Obie to continue than out of curiosity.

"My mom was a drug addict. By the time it got really bad, Mike and I were old enough that we could take care of ourselves so it wasn't that bad. We didn't have nice stuff like some other kids, but... we got by." Obie said quietly.

Silence fell over the room as everyone waited, knowing that there was more to come.

"Then one night mom told me we were going to go somewhere. Just me and her. I thought that was weird because we never went anywhere." Obie said distantly.

Devon carefully placed one of his hands on Obie's shoulder to give it a gentle squeeze.

Obie took in a deep breath, then said, "This car was waiting on us when we left the apartment building. We got in the car and this really scummy looking fat old guy drove us to this warehouse."

More than one of the boys in the room felt a chill run up their spines as they easily envisioned what was about to happen.

"We went into the warehouse and mom started talking to this really creepy looking guy with long stringy hair and a tattoo on his face. I didn't hear what they were saying, but when they were done, he handed her a paper bag and it got real quiet." Obie said as tears started to well up in his eyes.

"She started to walk away, but then the fat guy grabbed her and before I knew what was going on, he held out a badge and told her that she was under arrest." Obie said distantly.

"So do you know what was going on?" Paul asked in a soft voice.

"Not then, but when we went to court I found out that she was trying to sell me for drugs." Obie said as his tears finally began to fall.

There was another long minute of silence before Simon quietly asked, "But the people she tried to sell you to were undercover police officers?"

Obie nodded without looking at Simon.

"And when she was sent to jail, you and your brother were sent to Camp Little Eagle where you would be safe." Uri said in confirmation.

Obie silently nodded and said, "They were going to put Mike and me into cabin two so we could have, you know, something like parents. But we didn't want that. Our mom wasn't much of a mom and we never had a dad. We told Sean and Cory that we were done with having parents and that we've always taken care of each other. So they let us move into cabin three."

"I'm glad you didn't have to go through the things that Uri and I did." Simon said honestly.

Obie looked up with tearful eyes and said, "But... I never done any of that stuff... even Trent and Jose have done it and I haven't... Maybe I don't belong here..."

"I haven't done it either." Paul said quietly.

Obie looked at Paul with surprise.

"You're not alone Obie. I'm going to be living here and I've never done any of those things either." Paul said gently.

"Me either. I've never done anything." Arlo said quietly.

Obie looked at Arlo with question.

"Most of you know about my... um..." Arlo trailed off.

"Gift?" Jerico offered quietly.

Arlo gave Jerico an uncertain look, but finally nodded and continued, "My parents are kind of... well, really rich."

He seemed to be searching for the words, and finally continued, "They thought I was nuts. I overheard them talking in the kitchen one night... they were going to send me away. They were going to put me in this place where no one would ever see me or hear from me again. That way their rich friends would never know that they had a kid who wasn't 'perfect'."

"So you ran away?" Simon asked in a whisper.

"Yeah. I was so stupid. There I was, living in a mansion with art and stuff worth millions of dollars and... I didn't even realize that when I left I would need money." Arlo finished with a defeated chuckle.

"What did you do?" Dylan asked quietly.

"I did what I saw some other kids doing. I found a place to sit and begged for change." Arlo said with an expression that said he couldn't believe he had ever done that.

"And?" Paul asked with concern.

"And on the second day that I was 'spare changing' outside this Denny's, two guys stopped and talked to me. Their names were Alec and Andrew." Arlo said as he looked around to see if anyone recognized the names.

"Alec McCarthy and Andrew Evans?" Devon asked curiously.

Arlo nodded.

"Who's that?" Dylan asked carefully.

"They're members of Clan Short. They go to school here." Devon said seriously.

"Whatever happened with your parents? Do you know?" Obie asked Arlo cautiously.

Arlo chuckled and said, "Yeah. Cory and Sean were going to tell them that I was safe, but they did some checking first. It turns out that they never even called the cops to tell them that I was missing. They just went on with their lives like I never existed."

"You're b-b-b-better off without th-th-them." Trent said firmly.

Everyone turned with surprise at the intensity in Trent's voice.

Jose looked at Trent cautiously.

Trent's response was an urging look.

"You want me to tell them?" Jose asked to be sure.

Trent nodded firmly.

Jose looked around and noticed that everyone was watching.

"Since we're all telling our stuff, Trent wants you to know that his dad used to screw him in the butt and videotape it. Trent told his speech therapist at school about it and he got sent here." Jose said seriously.

Trent poked Jose's arm, then pointed at him.

"Oh. Yeah. I, um... guess I got stolen or sold or something when I was a baby. I don't know, but the guy who I thought was my dad was white. He always did sex with me and took pictures and movies and stuff. I don't remember most of it but Dr. Dan says that it'll probably come back when I'm older. Anyway, the Clan guys saw some of the pictures of me on the Internet and figured out where I was and brought me here." Jose said frankly.

"Guys." Dylan said with distraction, gaining everyone's attention.

"I know I'm the new guy here, and you might want to make me move to a different cabin for saying this..." Dylan trailed off darkly.

"Go ahead Dylan. Say whatever you want." Paul said with concern at his dark tone.

"I went through some stuff like you guys did and I know what you're talking about. But... the stuff I went through wasn't all bad." Dylan said distantly, then lifted his head and looked around the group.

"You all seem to agree that the sex and stuff was horrible and kind of ruined your lives. But I don't feel that way." Dylan said, then ducked his head again.

"It's okay Dylan, you don't have to agree with us. But would you explain what you mean?" Paul asked gently.

"I don't know... I went through some pretty messed up stuff and there were things that I hated, but there was stuff that I liked too. Some people were really nice to me and I think they actually cared about me. Hearing you talk about what you've gone through makes me feel like I'm supposed to... I don't know, feel like a victim... or maybe I should act like I lost something that I can never get back." Dylan said carefully as he considered his words.

"So how do you feel about things?" Simon asked in a whisper.

Dylan expected Simon to be upset with him for feeling differently and was surprised to see that Simon really wanted to know.

After a moment of consideration, Dylan looked Simon in the eyes and said, "I guess I feel kind of like I'm a fighter. When a fighter fights, whether he wins or loses, he learns things. If he doesn't learn from his battles, he ends up having the same fight over and over."

Everyone was silent as glances were exchanged around the room.

Dylan thought for a moment, then decided that since he'd come this far, he might as well continue.

"I had sex with a lot of people in the past few years. Some of them were nasty, some of them were mean, but there were some of them who were really good to me and I enjoyed it. I think I need to take some time to get everything sorted out in my head, but after that, I'm going to get on with my life. I'm sorry if that sounds cold blooded of me and like I don't care about the things you guys went through. But it's best if I tell you this now so I won't piss everyone off because I don't feel the same way about things that you do."

Paul wanted to give Dylan some assurance, but didn't feel that it was his place.

He looked around the room and noticed that everyone seemed to be lost in their own thoughts.

"What do you guys think about what he said? He needs to know." Jerico said in a careful and controlled voice.

Paul turned to face his cousin and could clearly see the strain in his features.

"You need to rest don't you?" Paul asked with concern.

Jerico turned his attention to Paul as he strained to say, "After this."

Paul nodded, then glanced around the room again.

Obie stood and walked to the center of the gathering.

"If you want Dylan to leave, then I'm going to leave too. I've never really been a fighter, but I think that's what I want to be." Obie said seriously.

Trent nudged Jose and gave him an urgent look.

Jose nodded and said, "Trent and I want to be fighters too."

Paul sat forward in his chair and was about to say something when he felt Jerico's hand on his arm.

He turned to see Jerico shaking his head.

Paul sat back to watch and listen.

"Is there anyone here who *doesn't* want to be a fighter?" Arlo asked seriously.

After a long silent moment, Simon reluctantly said, "I don't."

Arlo looked at Simon with surprise.

Simon raised his eyes to meet Arlo's shocked gaze and said, "That doesn't mean that I won't. It just means that I've kind of gotten used to sitting here, thinking and rethinking everything in my past, I guess I didn't realize that by doing that, I'm not really creating a future. I never really thought about it before but, not everything was horrible. There was good stuff..."

After a moment of looking around the room, Arlo said, "Dylan, I don't think you'll have to leave because if you did, you'd be taking everyone with you."

Dylan looked at Arlo with surprise.

"All that personal stuff that we shared tonight needed to be brought out into the open so we could help each other deal with it, but what you said is right. We need to learn from our battles and get on with our lives." Arlo said with conviction.

"Yeah. Sean and Cory gave me a chance to be normal, but all I've been doing is obsessing about how nerdy I used to be." Devon said with irritation.

"We will help each other to move on." Uri said with assurance.

Devon looked at Uri and his irritated expression transformed into an amused smile.

"Yeah. Let's do that." Devon said warmly.

"Does that mean that everything is settled?" Paul asked as he looked around the room.

Several people looked at Paul with question.

"Well, it looks to me like everyone shared their histories and you've all decided to follow Dylan's example and work toward the future. Right?" Paul asked frankly.

"Not *everyone* shared their history." Devon said as he looked Paul in the eyes.

"Oh." Paul said shyly and looked at Jerico with question.

Jerico gave a single, firm nod.

"Okay. I guess that means it's up to me." Paul said nervously.

"You don't have to tell us anything Paul." Mouse said quickly.

"That's right. We said our stuff because we wanted to. No one made us do it." Arlo added seriously.

Paul shook his head and said, "It's okay guys, I thought about telling you while everyone else was telling, I just couldn't get up the nerve."

"Well, if you feel like you need to tell us something, just go ahead and say it." Simon said gently.

Paul reluctantly nodded and quietly said, "I, um, I don't..."

"Come on. You can do it." Arlo said assuringly.

"I don't, um, have any, like, um, sex drive or... anything like that." Paul murmured as his gaze fell to the floor.

After a long moment of silence, Obie turned to Dylan and quietly asked, "What does that mean?"

"I'm not sure." Dylan responded, then turned to Paul and asked, "Could you maybe explain that?"

Paul forced himself to look up and was surprised to see everyone looking at him with concern. He had expected amusement or at least disinterest.

"To tell you the truth, I'm not really sure either. I just know that most people, feel something, you know, like a sex urge or something when they see someone attractive. I don't have that." Paul said disjointedly.

"Sex urge?" Simon asked slowly.

"I don't know what it is that you feel because I've never felt it. I just know that the things that turn most people on don't do anything to me. I can look at porn and it's the same to me as looking at the pictures in a newspaper. I don't feel anything." Paul said quietly.

"Wow. That must be nice." Devon said with wide eyes.

Paul looked at Devon with shock.

"I'm popping a boner about every five minutes all day long. Almost everything I see or hear reminds me of sex and I have trouble thinking about anything else." Devon said frankly.

Everyone watched the crimson blush rise up Devon's face as he realized what he'd just blurted out.

"So does that mean you don't get boners?" Obie asked Paul with confusion.

Paul blushed a little at the question and hesitantly answered, "Well, I wake up with one most mornings, but I don't usually get them any other time."

"I can tell that you're really shy about it, but I don't think it's something so bad." Arlo said quietly.

"Yeah. And you can still be a fighter with the rest of us if you want to be." Jose said happily.

"Okay. Thanks guys." Paul said with a relieved smile, then noticed Jerico touching his arm again.

"Oh yeah. Jerico wants you to know that he's kind of a sex addict. He doesn't have sex with anyone anymore because if he did, he couldn't think about anything else. It would take over his whole

life... is that right?" Paul asked as he turned to look at Jerico with question.

Jerico hesitantly nodded.

"What's wrong? Why can't he talk now?" Dylan asked curiously.

"He's tired and can't control his gift right now. If he said anything, he might accidentally hurt someone." Paul said quietly.

"So that thing that him and Luke can do... he can't control it?" Simon asked carefully.

"He can, just not constantly. It makes him tired to try. Once he trains me how to be his anchor, he won't have to control it all the time." Paul said seriously.

"I don't understand." Simon said slowly.

"Mouse and Luke can explain it. I need to get Jerico home so he can get some rest." Paul said as he stood.

Dylan looked at Lieutenant Masterson who had been sitting silently at his side and said, "I think I'll be okay here if you want to go."

"I think so too. But I wouldn't mind staying if you want to be sure." Lieutenant Masterson said quietly.

"I'll take care of Dylan, I promise." Obie said firmly.

"Then I won't worry about him." Lieutenant Masterson said with a smile at the young boy, then turned to Dylan to say, "If you ever need me for anything, I'm just a phone call away. Call Starfleet and they can get a message to me no matter where I am."

Dylan was surprised by the statement, but hid it quickly and said, "I'll remember that. And maybe I can call you just to let you know how things are going."

"I'd like that. The Enterprise isn't scheduled to depart until Sunday night, maybe I could stop by and we could go do something this weekend?" Lieutenant Masterson asked hesitantly.

Dylan smiled and said, "Yeah. I'd like that."

"I'll see you then." Lieutenant Masterson said as he stood and began walking toward the door.

"Paul, do you know when you'll be moving in here?" Simon asked as he also stood.

"No, but I'm sure it will be soon. Maybe we'll get you guys to help us move when it's time?" Paul asked hopefully as he walked with Jerico toward the door.

"Yeah. We'll all help." Simon said, then looked around to see that everyone was in agreement.

Paul stopped at the door and looked back at the collection of boys of all different ages.

"I have this feeling like today we all ended some things that have been holding us back and now we're ready to start something new." Paul said peacefully.

"I think we all feel that." Simon said honestly.

"And I don't think any of it would have happened without you Dylan. Remember that." Paul said as he looked Dylan in the eye.

"What did I do?" Dylan asked hesitantly.

"You gave us a reality check. Thanks." Paul said with a smile, then turned to open the door.

"Um, sure. Anytime." Dylan said uncertainly as he watched Lieutenant Masterson, Paul and Jerico leave.

"It's getting late and we have school tomorrow. Are we ready to call it a night?" Simon asked as he looked around.

"There is one thing I would like to do first, if I may." Uri said as he turned to face Simon.

"What's that?" Simon asked hesitantly as he looked up into Uri's eyes.

Uri held out his hand to Simon and waited.

"You know I don't like to..." Simon said, then realized that Uri knew very well what he was doing.

"I believe it is time." Uri said quietly.

Simon reluctantly forced himself to take Uri's hand.

Uri responded by placing his other hand over Simon's.

"Good night Simon. I hope you have good rest." Uri said quietly, then gave Simon's hand a gentle squeeze before releasing it..

"Thanks Uri." Simon said in a slightly shaky voice and managed to give him a faint smile.

Uri responded with a single nod, then turned to walk to his room.

"Goodnight guys." Devon said quickly and hurried to follow Uri.

"Are you ready for our first night in our new room?" Obie asked with excitement.

Dylan smiled at the younger boy and slowly nodded.

"Then come on." Obie said, then happily hurried away.

"Good night everyone. Thanks for accepting me here." Dylan said quietly, then turned to follow Obie.

"Thanks for being a fighter." Arlo said frankly as he watched Dylan leave.

\* \* \* \* \*

As soon as the bedroom door had closed, Arlo turned to Simon and asked, "Are you okay?"

Simon sat down on the edge of his bed and stared at his hand for a moment before quietly saying, "Yeah. I really think I am."

"I'm here if you feel like talking. So if something's bothering you, you can tell me." Arlo said seriously as he walked to his dresser.

Simon watched Arlo pull his pajamas out of the dresser drawer and said, "I think I'm okay for right now, but there is something I'd like to try if you wouldn't mind."

Arlo sat his pajamas on the bed and looked at Simon with question.

"You've been really good about doing things to keep me from feeling uncomfortable and I really appreciate it. But I think maybe it's time for me to try to start doing normal things again." Simon said slowly.

"Like what?" Arlo asked curiously.

"Well, like getting ready for bed. I wouldn't mind it if you changed in here... I mean, if you wanted to." Simon said quietly.

Arlo was surprised by the statement. Ever since his first day at Camp Little Eagle, he had always gone to the bathroom to change clothes so Simon could change in private.

"Okay. If that's what you want. And if it'll help, I promise that I won't look until you say so." Arlo said quietly.

Simon smiled and said, "You don't have to do that. Having you look at me wouldn't bother me at all. The only thing that might cause me to panic is if you walked toward me while you were undressed." Simon said with a pained expression.

"Then I'll stay right over here." Arlo said as a vow.

Simon nodded that he heard.

"So, do you want to do it now?" Arlo asked cautiously.

Simon walked to his dresser and pulled out his pajamas, then said, "Okay. I think I'm ready."

Arlo sat on his bed and began to remove his shoes and socks.

He resisted the urge to look at Simon, not wanting him to feel that he was being stared at.

After placing his shoes under the bed, Arlo pulled his t-shirt off over his head.

He decided that he needed to know how Simon was doing so he quickly glanced across the room.

Simon was in the process of removing his t-shirt and didn't notice.

Slowly, Arlo reached down to untie the drawstring on his sweatpants.

As he began to pull the string to undo the knot, he glanced up to see how Simon was doing.

Arlo froze when he saw Simon staring at him, at his hands.

"I can still go into the bathroom to finish this if it's going to bother you. I really don't mind." Arlo said quietly.

Simon blinked twice, then slowly moved his gaze up to look Arlo in the eyes.

"No. It's really fine. Please keep going. I need to do this." Simon said in a shaky voice.

Arlo nodded, then began to pull on the drawstring again.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Do you like to take your shower at night or in the morning?" Obie asked as soon as Dylan walked into their room.

"I usually just take a shower when I've got the chance. I've never really thought about it." Dylan said quietly.

"Well, I like to take my shower at night because I think it makes me sleep better. But Mike always said that it was better to take a shower in the morning because it wakes him up and besides it makes your hair stick up funny if you sleep on it when it's wet." Obie said as he started going through the drawers of his dresser.

"I suppose I'll take a shower now. I do feel kind of grubby." Dylan said as he watched Obie searching through his things.

"Here it is." Obie said as he pulled a duffle bag out from under his bed.

Dylan remained silent, but leaned forward to see what Obie had found.

"Do you need a towel or a toothbrush or anything like that?" Obie asked as he looked at Dylan with question.

"I really don't have anything. All I have is what I'm wearing." Dylan said shyly.

"Oh. Okay. Well we can get you all that stuff in the morning. Tonight you can share mine... except for the toothbrush. They probably have extra toothbrushes in the cabinet in the bathroom." Obie said as he stood and put the duffel bag on his bed.

"Sounds good." Dylan said as he looked around, not sure if he should be doing something.

"In cabin three, we'd usually get undressed in the bedroom, then wear a towel to the bathroom... well, except for Nathan. But he has a really big dick and likes to walk around naked to show it off." Obie said as he held out a towel to Dylan.

"Thanks." Dylan said with a smile.

"Uh huh." Obie said then began to undress.

Dylan toed off the slipper shoes that he had been given on the Enterprise and pushed them under his bed.

"What do you like to sleep in? I mean, do you like pajamas or boxers or what?" Obie asked casually as he skinned the t-shirt off over his head.

"I usually either sleep in my clothes or I don't wear anything. It just kind of depends on where I am and what I'm doing." Dylan answered honestly as he opened the top half of his coveralls.

"Okay. I was just asking because if you wanted, we could borrow boxers or something from one of the other guys... probably Devon. He's about your size." Obie finished in a considering voice.

"We won't need to do that unless it's going to bother you if I sleep naked." Dylan said hesitantly as he pushed the coveralls down his legs.

"I don't care about that. The only person who ever bothered me was Nathan and that's only because he kept showing his dick off like it made him really special or something." Obie said frankly.

"You don't have to worry about me doing anything like that." Dylan said as he stepped out of the coveralls.

Obie looked over at Dylan and smiled.

"What?" Dylan asked as he looked down at his naked body.

"That's how I want my body to look when I grow up." Obie said happily as he pulled down his pants.

Dylan broke into a full smile at the statement as he said, "Thanks Obie. I think that's the nicest thing anyone has ever said to me."

"Really?" Obie asked in surprise while removing his white cotton briefs.

Dylan casually draped the towel around his waist as he said, "Yeah. I've had creepy old guys tell me I'm beautiful and things like that. But I don't remember anyone ever telling me I looked good without wanting something in return."

"Come on. It's already late. We don't want to take too long." Obie said as he draped his towel around his waist and held it with one hand.

Dylan continued to smile as he said, "Let's go."

"Uri, can I ask you something?" Devon asked shyly.

"Certainly." Uri said formally.

"Is it because of all that stuff between you and Simon that you won't open up and talk about... much of anything?" Devon asked cautiously.

"Perhaps to some degree. But I am a very private person by nature and do not share personal facts easily." Uri said in thought.

Devon nodded, then began to change out of his 'nerd' clothes.

"If you have a question, you may ask." Uri said uncertainly.

"Okay. But just because I ask you something doesn't mean you have to tell me. Okay?" Devon asked seriously.

"Agreed." Uri said as he sat in one of the two desk chairs and gave Devon his full attention.

"Let's see... I guess the one that's been bugging me the most is about the food. I know from working in the kitchen that you're on some kind of special diet. But I still don't know why. Everyone says to not talk about it." Devon said as he sat on the edge of his bed, wearing only his boxer shorts.

"The food I eat is kosher." Uri said simply.

"Kosher... like the pickles?" Devon asked hesitantly.

Uri chuckled and said, "Yes. Like the pickles. Kosher food meets certain requirements in its selection and preparation and is considered to be 'clean' by those of the Jewish faith. When I came to Camp Little Eagle, I had a long discussion with Doctor Dan about many things and he encouraged me to embrace this aspect of my faith."

"Oh. Okay. I guess that answers a few of my questions." Devon said slowly.

"In the past few hours you have learned some disturbing truths about me, and yet you are still willing to be my roommate. I would like to think that I would be as loyal a friend to you if the situations were reversed. So please feel free to ask whatever you like." Uri said seriously.

"Okay. I've heard a couple people ask you this one before and you always dodged it. Are you Russian or Serbian or what?" Devon asked as he looked into Uri's eyes.

Uri smiled at the question and said, "I am Israeli."

"Oh. Um... then how did you get here?" Devon asked hesitantly.

"I have little memory of living in Israel, I remember my parents being afraid and the explosions that killed them. I held to them and cried, not understanding at the time that they were dead. I remember a man, a soldier I think, took me away from the ruins that had been my home and put me on a truck with many other people. I don't remember clearly what happened after that. I was constantly moving, never staying in one place for very long. Eventually, I ended up in the custody of the people who used me for pornography." Uri said distantly.

"So you don't have a home to go back to." Devon said in a whisper.

"No. But I have a country. Israel holds my past, my ancestry. Someday I will return there and learn all that I can about my origin." Uri said with conviction.

"Want some company?" Devon asked with a small smile.

Uri looked at Devon with confusion at the strange question.

"When you go to Israel, would you like some company?" Devon asked more quietly.

Uri broke into a full smile and said, "Yes. I believe that company would be good."

"Good. Let's plan on doing that." Devon said firmly.

"Are you going to take your shower tonight?" Uri asked as he noticed that Devon was still sitting in his boxer shorts.

"No. It's too late and besides, I think I got enough of a shower while we were trying to keep Arlo warm." Devon said seriously.

Uri considered the statement, then said, "I agree. If you have no other questions, I will prepare for bed now."

"Nope. I just wanted to know about the food and where that kewl accent of yours comes from." Devon said with a grin as he started walking toward their bedroom door.

"You like my accent?" Uri asked with a smile as he followed.

"Absolutely." Devon said firmly over his shoulder.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Okay. We're alone so you can talk." Mouse said as he closed their bedroom door.

"I don't think I really have anything to say." Luke said helplessly as he sat on his bed.

Mouse giggled and said, "I guess I'll have to talk enough for both of us."

Luke smiled and made a show of nodding his agreement.

"What do you think about everything that's happened today?" Mouse asked as he plopped down on the bed next to Luke.

"Well, I'm glad I can talk." Luke said quietly.

Mouse looked at Luke strangely for a moment, then said, "Funny, it doesn't show."

Luke smiled at the statement and said, "It's just a lot for me to take in. My whole life I was told all these lies about who I am and the abilities that I have. I figured out for myself that the stuff they were telling me was lies and finally escaped from them. Now I've got someone else telling me a whole different story... do you see where I'm going with this?"

"So whether you're angel food or devils food, you're still the dessert that someone else gets to eat?" Mouse asked curiously.

Luke stared at Mouse for a moment as he thought about the statement, and finally said, "I guess that's right, but in a million years I never would have thought of saying it like that."

Mouse shrugged and said, "Maybe it's an anchor thing."

"Maybe it is." Luke said quietly as he smiled.

"Come on 'Chosen'. Don't make me have to call Paul and Jerico back here. You can talk to me now, so talk." Mouse prodded.

"You've just got to understand that I got out of the habit of talking and sometimes I don't know what to say." Luke said seriously.

"Okay. I get that. I can just tell that you've got something serious on your mind and I want to help you if I can." Mouse said frankly.

"All of us talking about our pasts got me to thinking. I'm worried about my parents." Luke said simply.

"Oh. Like what happened to them?" Mouse asked quietly.

"No. More like, are they waiting outside the camp gates to grab me the next time we go into town?" Luke said seriously.

"You know, the TV sitcoms totally lied to us. Families suck." Mouse said as he stared at the wall in front of them.

"Well, we're kind of like a family, and we're okay." Luke said quietly.

"Yeah. We are." Mouse said with a smile.

"You know, it's past our bedtime. Let's go check on Trent and Jose, then call it a night." Luke said quietly.

"Why do we need to check on them?" Mouse asked curiously.

"Because they're part of our family." Luke said as he stood and started walking toward the door.

Mouse smiled as he also stood.

\* \* \* \* \*

"We're alone now. You can talk." Paul said as he walked with Jerico toward the parking lot.

"Thanks for taking care of me Paul. I wouldn't have been able to help them if it wasn't for you." Jerico said quietly.

"We take care of each other. We've already decided that. Now I just need to know what we're going to do next." Paul said seriously.

"In the morning I'll make a few calls and find out how soon we can move over here. From everything that happened tonight, I think it had better be as soon as possible. I need to start training you, Luke and Arlo right away." Jerico said as he stopped at the side of his truck.

"I think you're right. The stuff that angel guy was saying about something big coming... it's got me spooked pretty bad. If we get

bogged down with the little things, it could be here before we're ready." Paul said seriously.

"Will you help me with that? I'm going to have to do the majority of the training and hands-on stuff. Will you help to keep me from getting too bogged down in the details and remind me about the big picture from time to time?" Jerico asked in a voice of concentration.

"I'll add that to my job description... do you want to drive through McDonald's for a snack on the way back to the house?" Paul asked curiously.

Jerico smiled and said, "Sure. Then we can watch the Gilligan's Island episode that you recorded before we call it a night."

"That would be perfect." Paul said with a happy smile, then climbed into the Fiero.

Jerico got into his truck and waited for Paul to finish backing out before starting his engine.

\* \* \* \* \*

Simon's eyes tracked to the movement and he stood, transfixed by the sight.

As soon as the knot released, Arlo hooked his thumbs in the waistband of the sweat pants and pulled them down.

He reached down to pull first one, then the other leg off over his feet, then looked at Simon and asked, "How are you doing?"

"I... I'm okay." Simon said in a daze.

Arlo could clearly see the nervousness in Simon's eyes, but he couldn't even guess how emotionally fragile Simon was at this point.

"Almost done." Arlo said with assurance and began to pull on his sleep pants.

Simon blinked, then seemed to notice that he was standing shirtless, watching Arlo change.

"I'm... I'm sorry." Simon muttered in a flustered voice.

"It's okay Simon. Really." Arlo said as he pulled on his pajama top.

"Thanks. I mean, thanks for trusting me when I said I was ready." Simon said shyly as he hurried to finish changing.

"All you need to do is let me know when you're ready to take another step and I'll be right there with you." Arlo said with assurance.

"Okay. And if you ever need me, I'm here for you too." Simon said shyly.

"I've known that since the beginning." Arlo said as he pulled back his covers.

Simon smiled at the words, then did the same.

\* \* \* \* \*

"What's all this stuff?" Dylan asked cautiously as he noticed that there were still pouches of herbs and various other things scattered around the bathroom floor.

"I don't know. I'll move it out of the way so no one will step on it." Obie said and began to gather the scattered items with one hand as he held his towel with the other.

"I'll help." Dylan said as he knelt down.

"Hey guys." Devon said as he walked into the bathroom.

"Hey Devon. You look a lot better without your nerd things." Obie said as he sat some pouches in a pile in the corner.

"Thanks." Devon said with a smile as he went to the first sink to start brushing his teeth.

"I am unaccustomed to staying up so late." Uri said as he walked into the bathroom and went directly to the next sink.

"Yeah. Me too." Obie said as he walked around the partition into the shower room.

After dropping off the miscellaneous items he had collected around the bathroom floor, Dylan walked casually into the shower room where Obie was turning on his shower.

Dylan followed Obie's example and hung his towel on the hook next to Obie's.

"You'll probably want to tilt the shower down a little so you don't get your bandage wet." Obie said as he glanced at Dylan.

Dylan smiled and said, "Thanks. I almost forgot."

"Whoa. Full house tonight." A voice said from the main part of the bathroom.

Dylan considered the voice for a moment, then decided that it was Mouse.

"Trent and Jose are already asleep. They didn't even change out of their clothes." Mouse said casually.

"Did you wake them so they could dress for bed?" Uri asked curiously.

"Nah. Luke and I took off their shoes, then covered them up. They'll be fine." Mouse said cheerfully.

"That was very considerate of you." Uri said in his usual formal tone.

"Well, it was Luke's idea to check on them." Mouse said, sounding a little bit shy.

"You almost done?" Obie asked from Dylan's side.

Dylan had been listening to the conversation outside the shower and lost track of what he was doing.

"No. I'll need another minute or two." Dylan said as he snapped back to the task at hand.

"How are you going to wash your legs and stuff if you can't get your head wet?" Obie asked curiously.

"I guess I'll step away from the water to do that." Dylan said carefully.

"I can help you if you want. I don't mind." Obie said seriously.

Dylan was about to refuse, but then saw the hopeful expression in Obie's eyes.

"If you'll get the legs, I think I can get the rest." Dylan said with a grateful smile.

As a response, Obie started lathering up a washcloth.

"Don't stay up too late guys. School tomorrow." Mouse called out and sounded like he was becoming more distant.

"Okay." Obie said quickly.

Dylan hurried to wash himself, taking care not to get the bandage on his face wet.

"I'm done down here." Obie announced.

"I'm done up here too." Dylan said as he turned under the shower's spray to rinse off the last of the soap.

As soon as he had finished turning off the shower, Obie was standing at his side holding out his towel.

"Thanks Obie." Dylan said gently.

"No problem." Obie said quickly as he began to dry himself.

As Dylan began to dry his chest, he watched the energetic, happy young boy who was his roommate.

By the time Dylan had reached his waist, Obie had finished drying himself. Dylan watched as Obie draped his towel around his midsection, then held it in place with one hand.

"Do you want me to tie that for you?" Dylan asked gently, not wanting to offend Obie.

"Would you? It always falls off when I try to do it." Obie asked hopefully.

Dylan smiled and slung his own towel over his shoulder, then squatted down and tied Obie's towel firmly around his waist.

"Thanks. Mike used to do that for me too. I'm going to see if they have any extra toothbrushes anywhere."

Dylan watched with a smile as Obie scampered out of the shower room.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Arlo?" Simon whispered from his bed.

Arlo opened his eyes and looked at Simon curiously.

"What do you think about that stuff that Dylan was talking about?" Simon asked quietly.

"You mean about not all of it being bad?" Arlo asked, having sensed that Simon was having difficulty with that one point.

"Yeah." Simon whispered.

"If you would have asked me yesterday, I wouldn't have had an answer. But since all that stuff happened today I have some of your memories... do you remember Shane?" Arlo asked quietly.

Simon closed his eyes and distantly said, "I haven't thought about him since I've been here."

"But you know how you felt about him, right?" Arlo asked seriously as he turned on his side and propped himself up on an elbow.

"Yeah. But he was... like, nearly thirty years old." Simon said slowly.

"He was nice. He obviously cared about you and you know as well as I do that if there was any way he could have gotten you out of there, that he would have." Arlo said frankly.

"Yeah. I do know that." Simon said in distant thought.

"So that's one. I bet if you thought about it, you could find some more memories from back then that weren't so bad." Arlo said more gently.

After a moment to consider, Simon said, "You're probably right."

"This is just the beginning Simon. Think about it, you're getting better." Arlo said with encouragement.

"You really think so?" Simon asked cautiously.

"I know so. What would you have done if I tried to change clothes in the same room with you two weeks ago?" Arlo asked frankly.

"I probably would have had a panic attack and I'd be curled up on the floor crying right now." Simon said with resignation.

"I think so too. Be proud of it Simon, and when you're ready we'll take another step." Arlo said with a smile.

"Okay Arlo. As long as you're there with me, I'll be able to do it." Simon said quietly.

Arlo smiled at the statement and whispered, "Go to sleep now. It's late."

## Chapter 8

"What is the meaning of this?" A stern female voice asked into the pre-dawn light.

Jerico blinked his eyes and looked around, then realized that he and Paul were snuggled together in the living room floor.

"I'm sorry Aunt Joce. We must have fallen asleep while we were watching 'Gilligan's Island'." Jerico said as he blinked his eyes, trying to get them to focus.

"Are you sure that's all?" She asked firmly.

"Yes. I got called out to Camp Little Eagle last night and when I got there I needed one of my notebooks so Paul brought it to me. It took a while to get everything taken care of so we drove through McDonald's on the way home. When we got here we ate while we watched an episode of 'Gilligan's Island' that Paul had recorded and... I guess we fell asleep." Jerico said unsteadily.

"Alright then. It just looked a little strange to see you two cuddled together in the living room floor like that." Aunt Joce said seriously.

Jerico finally came awake enough to realize what she was insinuating.

"I thought you trusted me." Jerico said in a small voice.

"I want to trust you. But I've talked to your parents and I have some idea of just what you can be like." Aunt Joce said seriously.

Jerico was about to try to defend himself when he realized that she was right.

Given his history, she would have every right to be suspicious of him.

"Okay. I can understand that. If I were to go off the deep end again, I might end up doing something like that... even to Paul." Jerico said quietly.

"Good enough. Wake up Paul so he can help me with breakfast." Aunt Joce said seriously.

"He was up late helping me. Would it be okay if we let him sleep a little while longer? I can help you." Jerico offered quietly.

"That's very nice of you Jerico. Wash up, then get to slicing potatoes." Aunt Joce said as she left the room.

Jerico looked at Paul who was still sound asleep and gently brushed a stray strand of hair off his forehead.

"Enjoy your morning of sleeping in." Jerico whispered, then got up to start his day.

\* \* \* \* \*

"I was just kind of curious about something." Devon said carefully.

"What is that?" Uri asked casually as he straightened the spread on his bed.

"Well, I'm not sure if I understood what you were saying last night about eating the Kosher food. But now that Simon said that he forgives you, does that mean that you don't have to eat the special food anymore?" Devon asked cautiously.

Uri stopped all motion as he considered his answer.

Devon quickly continued, "I was just thinking that if you were eating that, um... pure food because you were feeling, um, well... dirty, I guess. I just thought that if that's why you were eating it to begin with and now that Simon said he forgives you, then you don't have anything else to prove or make up for or anything like that."

"To answer your question, I will continue to eat the Kosher food. Not because I feel that I need to be purified or due to some imaginary 'bargain' I made with God. But simply because I feel that it is the proper thing for me to do at this point in my life. In my mind, following these requirements of my faith is a way of honoring my God. It is not so much a sacrifice as a symbol of my obedience of the laws that were set down for my people to follow. It is difficult to explain. I just feel that it is the proper way." Uri finished introspectively.

Devon considered the words for a moment, then said, "I think I get what you're saying. And I can really understand and respect that. Are you ready?"

Uri looked around to see that everything was in its proper place, then said, "Yes. And thank you for understanding."

"Sure. Anytime."

As Simon walked into the bathroom, he noticed Dylan standing at the mirror, cautiously pulling the gauze pad away from his face.

"Good morning Dylan." Simon said shyly before retreating into a bathroom stall.

"Good morning Simon." Dylan said absently, still focused on his image in the mirror.

Dylan finally eased the gauze pad back into place, then proceeded to wash the portion of his face that was exposed.

After relieving his bladder, Simon moved to the sink beside Dylan's and started the water.

"How are you feeling this morning?" Simon asked casually.

"A little tired. I feel like I was up every few minutes all night to go to the bathroom." Dylan said honestly.

Simon glanced at Dylan in the mirror, then said, "You look like you lost about ten pounds since you arrived last night.

Dylan chuckled and said, "Yeah. You should have seen me when they rescued me from the hospital. I was all bloated and looked like something that had been dead for a week."

Simon looked at Dylan with concern at the statement, not knowing what had been done to him.

"Simon, I want to say something to you but I don't want you to get mad at me." Dylan said seriously as he met Simon's gaze in the mirror.

"Okay." Simon said hesitantly as he felt a spark of anxiety ignite within him.

"When I saw you in those movies, I always liked you. It wasn't about how you looked or about how good you... um, performed. It was you that I liked." Dylan said with difficulty.

"Thank you Dylan. I think I know what you're saying and I appreciate it. I've just spent the past month or so trying to forget about all of that and start a new life. When you called me Stephen, it kind of brought it all back to me."

"I'm sorry if I'm bringing back bad memories. But maybe instead of trying to forget Stephen, you could try to accept him. He's part of you and I think once you get to know him, you might like him. I always thought he'd be the kind of person that I'd like to get to know."

"You mean the kind of person you'd like to screw." Simon said bitterly.

"Actually, no." Dylan said without offense, then turned and continued, "I don't know what it is, so I can't really explain it. But when I would watch you, there was something about you that was... I don't know, gentle. I just got the feeling that you were the kind of person who would never hurt me."

Simon looked into Dylan's eye, unable to think of any way to respond to the statement.

Dylan smiled at Simon's flabbergasted state and said, "Don't worry about it Simon. I'm not asking for you to like me or trust me or anything like that. I just wanted to tell you so you'd know where I'm coming from."

"Okay." Simon whispered uncertainly.

"Please just don't give up on Stephen. He wasn't a bad person, he was just someone in a bad situation." Dylan said gently.

"Okay. I'll think about it." Simon said with difficulty.

"Hey guys! How are you doing this morning?" Arlo asked cheerfully as he walked into the bathroom.

"I'm good." Simon said as he quickly dried his hands.

"I didn't sleep well and my face is starting to hurt." Dylan said frankly.

"If you're not in too much pain, you can tell Mr. T during homeroom and he'll make sure you get to see Doc Austin." Arlo said casually as he walked to the urinals.

"I think Doctor McCoy mentioned something about me seeing him today." Dylan said as he finished drying his face and hands.

"Well, then he probably already knows that you're coming." Arlo said while emptying his bladder.

"I'd better get dressed, it's just about time for breakfast." Simon said quietly.

Dylan looked down at the jumpsuit he had been wearing the day before and said, "Obie mentioned that they have some other clothes around here. Maybe I could get something else to wear."

Arlo walked to the sinks and began to wash his hands as he said, "Yeah. I think that if you go to homeroom with us, Mr. T will arrange all that. Homeroom is kind of when we make all our plans for the day so everyone knows what's going on."

Dylan nodded that he had heard.

"But first we need to get some breakfast. I'm starved." Arlo said as he dried his hands.

"Sounds good. I can't even remember the last time I had a decent meal." Dylan said earnestly.

"Then we'll meet you in the common room in just a minute." Arlo said happily as he started walking toward the door.

Dylan nodded and noticed that Simon was walking to join Arlo.

"And you may need to wake up Obie. I don't know if he's used to getting up by himself or if he's used to his brother waking him up in the mornings." Arlo said before walking out of the room.

Simon followed Arlo out, leaving Dylan by himself in the bathroom.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Can you still talk?" Mouse asked timidly.

Luke cracked open one eye and looked at him with question.

"That stuff with the 'Chosen One' and the 'Anchor'... that really happened didn't it. Cause if it didn't I had the weirdest dream ever last night." Mouse said as he sat up in his bed.

"It was real." Luke said quietly, feeling funny being able to talk so freely.

"Oh wow. That is so kewl." Mouse said with a grand smile.

"I'm glad you think so." Luke said, drawn in by Mouse's happiness.

"What do you think we're going to do? I mean, about all that spiritual warrior stuff?" Mouse asked as he quickly returned to his normal energetic state.

"I really don't know. I guess we'll just do things like normal for now until someone tells us what we need to do next." Luke said as he slowly got out of bed.

Mouse got a distant look as he thought about Luke's words.

Luke was surprised by Mouse's unusually serious expression.

Finally, Mouse said, "I don't think it works that way."

"I don't get what you're saying." Luke said cautiously.

Mouse thought for a moment longer, then slowly said, "I think that if we wait for someone to tell us what to do, this isn't going to work."

Luke looked at Mouse with question, falling back into the familiar habit of being silent.

Mouse noticed his expression and continued, "This isn't like being in class. This isn't something we're being told to do. This is something that we're doing. That means that it's up to us to decide what needs to be done next, and then to do it. If we wait around for someone else to take charge and figure everything out... we'll fail. We won't be ready when the Clan needs us."

Luke thought about the words, then slowly nodded.

"So what do you think we should do next?" Mouse asked as he seemed to snap out of his trance-like state.

"I think we should talk to the others at breakfast to get them thinking about it. With all of us working together, we'll probably be able to come up with some kind of plan." Luke said slowly.

Mouse nodded, then suddenly seemed to remember something that he had forgotten.

"I've got to pee." Mouse said quickly as he dashed out of the room.

Luke smiled to himself, then walked at a reasonable pace to follow Mouse to the bathroom.

\* \* \* \* \*

"You said that you talked to my parents... did they say how Jeremiah is doing?" Jerico asked hesitantly.

Joce placed a small corn meal cake into the hot skillet before saying, "He's not any better. And he's not going to get any better."

Jerico nodded as he turned his full attention back to slicing the potatoes for breakfast.

After a long, uncomfortable silence, Joce asked, "Why did you do it?"

Jerico thought about all the ways he could answer the question, and finally said, "Because I could."

Joce turned away from the skillet and looked at Jerico with concern.

"I had all these powers. I could command people. I could tell them what to think, what to remember... anything I could imagine. And they would do it." Jerico said distantly.

"And you took your brother past the point where he could deal with what you were making him do." Joce said speculatively as she turned back to her cooking.

"Yeah." Jerico said as he felt tears beginning to well in his eyes.

"That's why I don't trust you around Pauley." Joce said as she took a griddle cake out of the skillet and put the next one in.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Five more minutes." Obie grumbled into his pillow.

Dylan smiled down at the sleeping boy who was usually so energetic.

"If you sleep much longer, you'll miss breakfast." Dylan said quietly.

Obie's eyes popped open.

"I thought that would do it." Dylan said with an amused smile.

"Dylan? Oh wow. For a minute I thought you were Mike." Obie said as he sat up in his bed and blinked.

"Sorry." Dylan said as he turned quickly away to hide his smile at Obie's hair sticking up in every direction.

"Ever since I can remember, me and Mike shared a room." Obie said as he turned and looked at the clock.

"That must be nice, always knowing that you have someone there." Dylan said while he worked.

After a moment to consider, Obie said, "Yeah. I guess I never really thought about that before."

Dylan stopped and looked at Obie with question.

When Obie noticed, he said, "I'll be okay. I just have to get used to it. I know Mike is just a few cabins away if I need him."

Dylan nodded with sympathy as he remembered Johnny.

Even though they never considered themselves brothers, more often than not, they would end up sleeping in the same place and would take care of each other when everything else in the world seemed to be going against them.

"Did you sleep okay last night? I thought I heard you get up a few times." Obie asked curiously, but before Dylan could answer, he continued, "Sometimes I have trouble sleeping for the first few nights when I'm in a new place. Back when me and Mike lived with my mom we used to move around a whole lot. I don't think we ever lived one place or a whole year... ever."

Dylan smiled at the younger boy's ability to ramble, then when he was fairly certain that Obie was either finished, or had run out of breath, he quietly said, "I'm pretty used to sleeping in new places. In fact, sleeping in the same place for more than a few weeks is probably going to take some getting used to. The reason I kept getting up last night was because I needed to use the bathroom a lot. Besides that, I slept fine."

"Be right back." Obie said quickly as he hopped out of the bed, then scurried out of the room.

Dylan felt an involuntary smile come onto his face at the sight of Obie's little butt clad only in white cotton briefs.

After a moment to finish smoothing out the blanket on his bed, Dylan looked around to see that nothing else needed to be done before he left to begin his day.

\* \* \* \* \*

The occupants of the cabin came by ones and twos into the common room and were in various stages of wakefulness when there was a knocking on the door.

A few curious looks went around the room since it was unusual for anyone to visit so early in the morning.

Uri went to the door and peeked out the peephole before opening the door and standing aside.

"How are you doing Obie?" Mike asked as he dashed into the room.

Rather than answer, Obie ran to his brother and hugged him tightly.

"Did you sleep okay?" Mike asked as he held his brother and seemed to be fighting down his tears.

"Yeah. I slept fine. How about you?" Obie asked into his brother's shoulder.

"I had that dream again. You know the one." Mike said quietly.

"I'm sorry I wasn't there for you. I know that always makes you feel rotten." Obie said quietly.

"It's okay. I just feel like I didn't get enough sleep." Mike said quietly.

"Is it something we can help with?" Dylan asked, not wanting to intrude, but feeling that Mike was really bothered by it.

"I just have this dream sometimes. It's stupid." Mike said dismissively.

"Why don't you tell us about it while we go to breakfast?" Simon asked cautiously, not feeling entirely comfortable with Mike.

"Sure. I guess so." Mike said, then shifted Obie around to his side and draped one arm around his shoulders.

The rest of the boys took that as a sign that they were ready to go and started walking toward the door.

"I had a twin brother named Amos, but he died. Sometimes I have dreams about him." Mike said, trying to sound like it didn't bother him.

"What kind of dreams?" Dylan asked curiously.

"I guess they're like, what he would be like if he had lived. The one last night wasn't as bad as some of them. He was just kind of depressed and feeling alone." Mike said distantly.

"When did he die?" Mouse asked in thought, then received a disapproving look from Luke for asking about something that obviously bothered Mike.

"Um, It was about six, maybe seven years ago. I don't remember it very well, I was still pretty young." Mike said distantly.

"How did it happen?" Mouse asked, then looked at Luke with a serious expression to convey the message that he had a good reason for asking.

"I don't know, I was just little and mom wouldn't talk about it. She'd get really mad if I asked." Mike said as he hugged Obie a little tighter to his side.

"You don't think..." Simon asked suddenly, then caught himself at Mouse's look of warning.

"Think what?" Mike asked curiously as he looked at Simon.

"Nothing." Simon said slowly, then continued, "Will you sit with us at breakfast this morning?"

"I can't. I'm working on a big report for class and I need to talk to Kole and Ryvan about what we've got to do today." Mike said with regret.

"We've got some stuff to talk about too." Mouse said seriously as he looked around the group.

"I guess we'd better get to it then. Remember that you're having dinner at my table tonight Obie." Mike said as he gave his brother a final squeeze of his one armed hug.

"Yeah." Obie said as the hug broke, then watched his brother go to the cabin three table.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Why didn't you wake me up?" Paul asked sleepily as he scuffed into the kitchen.

"Jerico said that you were up late and deserved some extra sleep." Joce said to her son with a gentle smile.

"Oh, um, thanks." Paul said semi-coherently.

"Go wash up. Breakfast will be ready in a few minutes." Joce said as she turned frying potatoes in a cast iron skillet.

"Did you tell mom about what happened last night?" Paul asked Jerico curiously.

"No. I was waiting for you." Jerico said reluctantly as he watched for his aunt's reaction.

"What happened last night?" Joce asked as she looked at Paul with eyes that seemed to bore into his soul.

"We just... I, um..." Paul stammered, then turned to Jerico and looked at him with helplessness.

Joce turned her gaze on Jerico and waited for an answer.

"The potatoes are going to burn." Paul whispered, afraid to upset his mom as she stared at Jerico.

"Fuck the potatoes. What happened last night?" Joce asked firmly as she stared Jerico in the eyes.

Paul was shocked to hear his mother swear, but rather than stop to stare at her, he ran behind her and started turning the fried potatoes.

"I'm waiting." Joce said to her nephew with a hard stare.

"Camp Little Eagle offered me a job as their Shaman..." Jerico said cautiously.

Joce didn't give any indication that she had heard as she continued to stare deeply into Jerico's eyes.

"...and they want Paul to come with me." Jerico added in a quieter voice.

"No." Joce said firmly.

"But they need me." Paul said as he moved the skillet off the burner.

"Need you for what? Pauley, you're just a child." Joce said as she turned to look at her son.

Paul took in a deep breath, then looked his mother in the eyes and said, "I'm not *just* a child. I'm a person. I have my own

thoughts and feelings and I have dreams that are all my own, whether you think they're important or not."

"What the hell are you talking about?" Joce asked in a voice that was increasing in volume as well as pitch.

"I'm talking about my future." Paul said simply, and seemed to be confident of his answer.

Joce shook her head and said, "I don't need to be hearing about your crazy adolescent daydreams. You're not going anywhere with *him*. That's final!"

Jerico knew that when his aunt made a declaration like that, nothing would change her mind.

"Great Spirit, please help me." He said in a sincere plea as he looked upward.

Joce looked at Jerico with aggravation, but before she could say any more, the phone started ringing.

Paul rushed to the phone and answered, "Foote residence."

"Hi Uncle Aubrey!"

"Yeah, she's right here... but there's some stuff I need to tell..."

"Oh, okay. Here she is." Paul said, then held out the phone to his mother.

"Yes?" Joce said cautiously.

Jerico looked at Paul with question and received a shrug as his only response.

"But Uncle Aubrey, I can't let Pauley..."

"...but..."

"...but..."

Finally Joce gave a sigh of resignation and said, "If you're sure."

"Yes. He's right here." Joce said, then held out the phone to Jerico.

"Uncle Aubrey?" Jerico asked cautiously.

*"Listen well. I have been receiving omens and portents since I left yesterday and they all pertain to you. The demon, the*

*monster you fear, has been contained but not controlled. That is a weakness that will be exploited. The time has come for you to face it. In the end you will either dominate it or submit to it.*" Aubrey said in a diminishing voice.

"But the last time I fought it with everything I had and still lost. How can I possibly win?" Jerico asked helplessly.

*"With faith, hope, truth and love."* Aubrey said frankly.

Jerico froze at the words, remembering having heard them the night before.

*"Think about what those words really mean to you and you'll know what needs to be done."* Aubrey said frankly.

Jerico nodded absently, then suddenly thought to say, "We found out last night that Paul is an anchor."

*"Of course he is."* Aubrey said with a chuckle.

Jerico was confused by the reaction and asked, "You knew?"

*"No. But I suppose I should have."* Aubrey said with humor obvious in his voice.

"Why?" Jerico asked curiously.

*"What other reason would the Great Spirit have for instilling such a burning desire into a boy to follow the path of the Shaman without giving him one speck of talent for doing the job?"* Aubrey asked in a fond voice.

"I guess that makes sense." Jerico said cautiously as he looked at Paul, who was listening intently to every word.

*"Talk to your aunt now. The signs are telling me that there are many things that need to be done, and you need to get started."* Aubrey said seriously.

"Okay. Thank you Uncle Aubrey." Jerico said as he considered the words.

*"Remember. Faith, hope, truth and love."*

\* \* \* \* \*

The boys walked to the serving line as a group and made their breakfast selections in silence.

As soon as everyone was seated, Jose said, "You think that their mom sold Amos like she tried to do with Obie."

Glances flashed around the table as Obie looked at Jose with shock.

"I think it's possible." Mouse said frankly.

"What?" Obie asked as he turned his puzzled gaze on Mouse.

"I wasn't going to say anything to you because I didn't want to get your hopes up, but... yeah. We should at least try to find out." Mouse said cautiously at Obie's disbelieving stare.

"When the Clan guys get here we should tell them so they can do their thing." Arlo said thoughtfully.

"No." Luke said firmly, then froze.

He knew that it was too dangerous for him to say more.

Everyone looked at Luke with question, wanting to know the reason for his objection.

Luke leaned over to Mouse and began to whisper.

All the boys around the table waited to see what Luke was worried about.

Finally, Mouse nodded then sat up in his chair as he seemed to be considering what Luke had told him.

"What did he say?" Jose asked seriously.

Mouse smiled at the younger boy, then slowly said, "Luke thinks that this is part of our reason for being here."

Glances of confusion went around the table, all of them wanting to know if anyone understood what that meant.

"Okay... The Clan rescued most of us, so we have a pretty good idea of what they can do." Mouse said cautiously.

"And..." Devon prompted in a voice filled with frustration.

"And we're rescued now. We've had a chance to rest and get comfortable. I think all of us know that we're safe here." Mouse said carefully.

"Um, do you think you could just spit it out? My face is hurting and I'm not really up to playing guessing games." Dylan said in a pained voice.

Mouse looked at Luke, then turned to the group and said, "The Clan rescued us and gave us this place to stay. But if something happens and the Clan needs us, we'll be no use to them the way we are now. We can't run to the Clan guys whenever we face a problem and expect them to do everything for us. We've got to start learning how to do things for ourselves."

Silence fell over the table as everyone considered what Mouse had said.

Finally Trent stuttered, "How c-can wwwe dddo that?"

"I think we need to do as much as we can on our own, then if there's something that we can't do by ourselves, we can talk to the Clan guys and get their help. But just think about it, the Clan may have really amazing people like telepaths and stuff, but we have special people too." Mouse said frankly.

"All we've got is Luke and Arlo, and they don't even know how to use their special abilities yet." Simon said slowly, not wanting to hurt anyone's feelings.

"Right. But even if they knew how to use their abilities, what kind of help would that be finding Obie's brother?" Mouse asked as he looked around.

"I guess you're right." Simon said reluctantly.

"I think we already have what we need to get started." Mouse said carefully.

"What's that?" Arlo asked cautiously.

"Right now we have a couple of really good computer nerds who can probably find out most of what we need just by looking for it." Mouse said frankly.

Devon and Arlo both smirked at Mouse, knowing that they were the computer nerds he was talking about.

As Mouse was about to continue, he noticed a dark look on Dylan's face... like he was feeling left out.

"And I think Dylan needs to be in charge." Mouse said before he could think his statement through.

"Me?" Dylan asked with surprise.

"Why Dylan?" Simon asked, not disagreeing, but simply out of curiosity.

Mouse thought for a moment, then smiled as he said, "Because Dylan doesn't know what we can't do."

"What?" Arlo asked in confusion.

"All of us who have been around for a while have an idea of what we can and can't do. We know the rules and the limits. But Dylan is new here so he doesn't think like that yet. I think that if Dylan is in charge, he'll probably come up with stuff that none of the rest of us would think of." Mouse said as he looked around the table.

"That actually does make some kind of sense." Simon said absently as he considered the words.

"Yeah. We've all got an idea of what it means to be Clan and what it means to be Camp. Dylan doesn't have that yet so he's free to consider all the alternatives." Devon said reasonably.

"Didn't I just say that?" Mouse asked Devon with a playful grin.

"You really want me to be in charge?" Dylan asked before Devon could answer.

"Yeah. But don't freak out about it. We'll tell you our ideas about what we should do, and you can kind of coordinate things so we're actually working together." Mouse said frankly.

"It's like we'll all be out looking for pieces of the puzzle. You'll be looking at the pieces we find and trying to fit them together to make one big picture." Devon said as he looked Dylan in the eye.

"I just said that too." Mouse said to Devon playfully.

"I said it better." Devon said, then on impulse, stuck out his tongue at Mouse.

Obie broke into giggles at the action, drawing everyone's attention.

The serious mood at the table was unable to stand up to Obie's laughter.

"Thanks for helping me and Mike. I really hope you're right and that Amos is still alive." Obie said as he looked around the table.

Mouse looked Obie in the eyes and said, "I hope so too Obie... We all do."

\* \* \* \* \*

"What did Uncle Aubrey say to you?" Paul asked his mother with concern.

Joce appeared not to have heard his question as she busied herself, gathering the completed breakfast items and taking them to the table.

Paul looked at Jerico with question but found him lost in thought.

"Call your sister down for breakfast." Joce said without turning her attention away from the food on the table.

"Mom, what did Uncle Aubrey say?" Paul asked in an urging tone.

Joce stopped all movement, then slowly turned to face her son and said, "He told me that today you will be taking your first step on the path to fulfill your purpose in this world and become the man that you were meant to be."

"Wow." Paul gulped.

"...or you won't. He said that if I choose to hold you back from your first, best destiny, you will never get another chance at it." Joce said with pain in her voice.

"Oh." Paul said in a whisper.

"I'll protect him." Jerico said quietly to his aunt.

"You had better, because if Pauley gets hurt, there is no force in heaven or on earth that will stop me from hunting you down!" Joce said as she looked Jerico in the eyes.

"Mom! Don't say stuff like that. Jerico would never let me get hurt." Paul said urgently.

"Go get your sister. The food's getting cold." Joce said as she continued to look Jerico in the eyes.

Jerico held his aunt's gaze, then gave a slight nod, silently sealing his vow to his aunt and accepting her terms.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Good morning everyone. I hope you all slept well." Mr. T said as he walked to the table.

"Dylan had to get up and go to the bathroom all night." Obie said, then realized that he probably shouldn't have shared that.

"Oh, I'm sorry to hear that. Would someone like to take Dylan to the admin building to pick out some clothes before homeroom?" Mr. T asked as he looked around the table.

"I'll do it." Obie offered quickly, hoping that Mr. T wouldn't think he was too young for the job.

"Actually, I think we're going to need your help Obie." Simon said as he looked at Mr. T with caution.

"I would be happy to take Dylan to the administration building." Uri offered quickly before Mr. T could ask about Simon's statement.

Mr. T glanced at Simon curiously, then said, "Thank you Uri. We're going to use the first part of the day as unstructured study time, so you won't need to rush."

Uri nodded that he understood.

"Oh Dylan, Doc Austin will be here sometime this morning to check on you." Mr. T said seriously as he looked Dylan in the eye.

"Thank you." Dylan said cautiously as he reached up and felt the bandage on his face.

"I'll be in the classroom as soon as I've had my breakfast if you have any questions or concerns that I can help with." Mr. T said with a kind smile.

"Okay. I'll remember that." Dylan said in an even quieter voice.

Mr. T nodded, then walked away from the table and to the serving line.

\* \* \* \* \*

"I thought we'd be having some study time soon. The Clan guys have been really busy lately and are probably behind on their stuff." Arlo said casually.

"I was thinking the same thing." Devon said thoughtfully as he began to gather his dishes.

Jose looked at Dylan and said, "Instead of helping the Clan someday, what if we helped them today? You know, to get caught up and stuff."

"It's not the same thing Jose, we were talking about helping them kind of in the same way that they helped us." Devon said carefully.

Dylan noticed Jose's expression wilt as his idea was rejected, then he turned to Devon and asked, "Why?"

"What?" Devon asked in confusion.

"Why can't we do like Jose said and help the Clan guys get caught up on their lessons?" Dylan asked seriously.

"Well, we *could*. But I was just saying that it wasn't the same thing we were talking about." Devon said carefully.

"As far as I can see, it's exactly what we were talking about. I don't know the Clan guys like you do, but if they're as amazing as you make them out to be, then they don't need us following behind them, trying to become just like they are. We need to work at really helping them when they need it and the way they need it. If Cory didn't get to do his homework last night because he was busy saving my life, then this is something I can do that might really help him." Dylan said frankly.

Devon nodded slowly as he thought about the words.

"So helping the Clan isn't something that we're going to do someday. It's something that we're doing, starting right now." Mouse said with a conspiratorial smile at Luke.

"Mouse was right Dylan." Simon said seriously to draw Dylan's attention, "I think you're the perfect choice to be our leader."

Nods of agreement went around the table.

"If you are finished with your meal, we can go to the administration building and get you some new clothing." Uri said as he stood.

"Yeah. The food was good." Dylan said as he picked up his glass and plate.

"We'll take care of that for you. Go ahead and get Dylan's clothes." Devon said seriously as he reached out to accept both Uri and Dylan's plates.

"Thank you Devon." Uri said with a gentle smile.

"Yeah, thanks." Dylan said shyly, then hurried to walk to Uri's side.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Jerico, did you move my car last night?" Lucy asked curiously as she took her seat at the breakfast table.

"Oh, that was me." Paul said quickly before Jerico could answer.

"You drove my car?" Lucy asked slowly in a low, menacing voice.

"Yeah. You know how Jerico got called out to Camp Little Eagle last night? Well, while he was there, he needed a notebook and since I was the only one here... I kind of borrowed your car... but I took really good care of it and I was really careful." Paul finished in a rush.

Lucy glanced at Jerico and received a nod to confirm that Paul was telling the truth.

Paul looked at his sister apprehensively, waiting for her reaction.

Finally Lucy said, "Well, as long as it was for something important, I guess that's okay."

"It was very important. Paul saved some people considerable pain and suffering by bringing my book when I needed it." Jerico said honestly.

"I did?" Paul asked with surprise.

Jerico looked around the table to see that his Aunt Joce and Cousin Lucy were waiting for an explanation of the statement.

"There's kind of a lot to it, but basically, I was called over to the camp to help a boy they thought was possessed." Jerico said slowly.

"Wait. You mean, like in 'The Exorcist'?" Lucy asked uncertainly.

"Yes. The same basic idea, though the spirit wasn't nearly as bad as the one the movie portrayed." Jerico said to Lucy seriously.

"So you're saying that last night you exorcised a demon?" Joce asked carefully.

"Well no. Not really. To have any hope of casting a spirit out, I would need to know the type of spirit I was dealing with. Some require special handling, and in the case of the one last night, he actually needed to be helped." Jerico said quietly.

"You *helped* a demon?" Joce asked darkly.

"No, he helped the spirit of a scared little boy." Paul answered quickly.

Joce looked at her son, then at Jerico with question.

"It's complicated. But thanks to Paul bringing my notebook, I was able to determine what kind of spirit I was dealing with and then had a better idea of how to deal with him when everything started to come together." Jerico said seriously.

"So is that why Pauley was asked to go to the camp? To fetch and carry for you?" Joce asked as she looked Jerico in the eyes.

"I'm his anchor." Paul answered before Jerico could think of what to say.

"His what?" Lucy asked cautiously.

"That could really take some explaining..." Jerico said reluctantly.

"We'll wait *right here* for as long as it takes." Joce said firmly.

Jerico flinched at the icy tone in his aunt's voice.

"Jerico has a gift... or maybe a curse." Paul said seriously.

Joce and Lucy both turned to look at Paul with surprise at the statement.

After a moment to consider what he wanted to say, Paul continued, "He has this really great ability and can help people who need it... but he can hurt people too."

"So you have some kind of mysterious power?" Lucy asked cautiously.

"It's not that mysterious. From a scientific standpoint, what I have is a sort of telepathy, except that I can speak directly to the subconscious... I guess you could describe it as telepathic hypnosis." Jerico said simply.

"That's it?" Lucy asked with surprise.

"Think about what it would be like if you could hypnotize anyone... everyone that you spoke to. They would believe every single thing that you told them and do anything that you asked... anything at all." Jerico said as he looked into his cousin's eyes.

Lucy thought for a moment, then began to get some idea of the power that Jerico was talking about.

"So is that why you're learning to be a Shaman?" Lucy asked slowly.

Jerico was surprised by the question and had to consider for a moment before he answered.

"No, not really. I suppose there will be times when my gift will be of use. But I think the real reason that I chose the path of the Shaman was because of Uncle Aubrey. I saw everything he went through to save me and protect me from my gift... I respect and admire him. I think he's the best person I know and I suppose I want to be just like him someday." Jerico finished shyly.

"What does any of this have to do with Pauley?" Joce asked while Lucy began to look at Jerico as if seeing him for the first time.

"That hypnosis stuff he was telling you about..." Paul said, drawing his mother's attention.

"...it doesn't work on me."

Jerico nodded his agreement to Paul's statement, then said, "Not only that, but once he's had a little training and practice, Paul will actually be able to negate my ability. As long as he's around, I wouldn't be able to use my ability against anyone, even if I wanted to, unless Paul allowed it."

Lucy looked at Jerico with surprise at the statement, confused that Jerico would want to give Paul that control over him.

"Lucy, think about the story of King Midas who dreamed that all he touched would become gold... it's the same basic thing with me. The hypnotic ability can be useful at times, but to have it every day, all the time, makes the dream become a nightmare." Jerico said honestly.

"So is that why you stay in your room all the time?" Lucy asked in realization.

Jerico gave a weary smile as he nodded.

"He was trying to protect us." Paul said in a sympathetic voice.

"But now you're going to help him so he doesn't have to do that anymore?" Lucy asked her brother curiously.

"That's right. And on top of that, we're going to be living at Camp Little Eagle so Jerico can be their Shaman." Paul said happily, then proudly added, "And I'm going to get to help him."

"You're moving out?" Lucy asked with surprise.

"Yeah." Paul said with a grand smile.

"I'm not sure when they'll be ready for us to make the move, but from the way they were talking last night, it could be as soon as today." Jerico said cautiously, watching for his aunt's reaction.

"Mom?" Lucy asked as she looked at her mother with an urging expression.

Joce took in a deep breath, then reluctantly nodded.

Lucy smiled, then said, "Pauley, do you know where Mom and I were last night?"

Paul thought about it for a moment, then slowly shook his head.

"I found this new car at the car lot that I really really love and I spent most of last night trying to convince mom that I need a new car." Lucy said, nearly bubbling over with excitement.

"I couldn't talk her into letting me have the car, but she said that when you were old enough to want to move out on your own, then I could give you the Fiero and I could get a new car for

myself... I thought it was going to be years!" Lucy said and seemed to be on the verge of bouncing right out of her chair.

Paul looked at his sister with surprise, then at his mother with hope.

"I'm sure that if Uncle Aubrey were here, he'd say that this was the Great Spirit's way of providing both of you what you'll need. I've lived with him long enough to know not to stand in the way of something like that. Lucy, when you get home from school, I'll take you to get your car." Joce said with a resigned smile at her daughter.

"Thanks Mom!" Lucy said as she bounded out of her chair and hugged her mom firmly.

When Lucy had finally settled down enough to move back to her own chair, Joce turned to Paul and said, "As soon as Lucy gets home from school and clears her things out of the Fiero, it's all yours."

"Thanks Mom!" Paul said, and hugged his mother with every bit as much enthusiasm as Lucy had.

Jerico waited for Joce to glance at him, then whispered, "Thank you Aunt Joce."

Joce gave Jerico a gentle smile and nodded, then suddenly said, "Look at the time! You two had better get a move on or you're going to be late!"

"Hurry up and get dressed Pauley and I'll drive you to school." Lucy said as she hopped up from her chair.

"Aunt Joce, would it be okay if Paul stayed home from school? As soon as we get moved, he'll be going to school at Camp Little Eagle and we really have a lot of things to do between now and then." Jerico asked quickly.

Everyone froze in place as they waited for Joce to make her decision.

"I suppose so. I'll call Pauley's school and let them know what's going on. But you two had better not make me regret it." Joce said with warning.

"Right. Let's get changed into some fresh clothes and get going. We need to get to the Camp." Jerico said seriously.

"I need to help Mom with the dishes first." Paul said as he looked Jerico in the eyes.

Jerico looked at Paul with surprise, but quickly hid it as he thought about what he had expected Paul's reaction to be.

"That's fine Pauley, I can take care of it." Joce said with a smile at her son.

"No Aunt Joce. Paul is right. In fact, if you would like, we could do the dishes for you." Jerico said as he looked at his aunt.

Joce smiled and said, "I'm not going to turn down an offer like that. I'll be in the living room if you need me for anything."

Jerico nodded, then began to help Paul gather the empty dishes from around the table.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Good morning Mrs. Crow. Dylan came to the camp last night and is in need of clothing." Uri said formally.

"Good morning Uriah. It's a pleasure to meet you Dylan. If you'll come with me, we can get you a few changes of clothes. You're in luck, we just restocked the shelves day before yesterday." Mrs. Crow said happily as she got up from her desk.

"Nice to meet you." Dylan said shyly as he self-consciously felt the bandage on his face.

"Right this way." Mrs. Crow said as she led the way out of the room.

\* \* \* \* \*

"They're new." Dylan said in surprise as he looked around at the racks and shelves of clothes.

"I too expected to be given second hand clothing when I arrived. But I have been told that some people equate being given second hand clothing with being second hand people. Although I do not believe that it would have occurred to me to feel that way, I agree with the sentiment that people arriving at the camp should be made to feel welcomed and worthy of new clothing." Uri explained as he casually looked through the shirts on one rack.

"I can't even remember the last time I had anything new." Dylan said as he stood, staring at a shelf of pants.

"Do you see anything you like?" Mrs. Crow asked tenderly.

Dylan blinked, then said, "Um, yeah."

"Just pick something, there is a privacy curtain over there if you want to try anything on to make sure it's the right size." Mrs. Crow said as she gestured toward a free standing partition at the side of the room.

"Uri, do you think this will look okay?" Dylan asked as he cautiously picked up a pair of pants.

"If you are as I was when I arrived, you should take two or three sizes of whatever interests you. I was unsure of my proper size and had become accustomed to wearing clothes that were too small." Uri said honestly.

"Oh, um. Yeah. I'll do that. Thanks." Dylan said as he picked up two other pairs of pants.

"While you are trying those on, I will choose some shirts that you may like." Uri said as he moved to another rack of clothing.

"I hear someone out in the office so I need to go. Remember to stop by the desk on your way out." Mrs. Crow said as she walked to the door.

\* \* \* \* \*

"What's wrong?" Paul asked curiously as he accepted a plate from Jerico and rinsed it in the sink.

"Nothing." Jerico mumbled distantly.

"Come on. Ever since we came in here you've been lost in your own little world. Did I do something wrong?" Paul asked as he placed the plate into the dish drainer.

Jerico stopped and turned to face Paul before saying, "I didn't realize it before, but my ability has been getting away from me."

"It has?" Paul asked cautiously.

Jerico nodded, then continued, "When I told you to get changed so we could leave, I expected you to just do it. When you said that you needed to help your mom do the dishes... it really surprised me."

"I don't get it." Paul said with concern at Jerico's mood.

"Paul, I thought that I was controlling my gift. I thought that I was 'safe' to be around people. But what just happened made me realize that I've been controlling people without meaning to." Jerico said in a softer voice.

Paul thought about the words for a moment, then nodded that he understood.

"I'm scared Paul." Jerico said honestly.

"Then it's time to start my training." Paul said gently.

Jerico looked at Paul with uncertainty.

"Camp Little Eagle needs you. The Great Spirit has given you everything you need to be able to help them and do what you're supposed to do. It's time to do it." Paul said frankly.

Jerico nodded, then gave Paul a reluctant smile.

"What do we need to do first?" Paul asked, then glanced down at the dishwater.

Jerico followed Paul's gaze, then started to wash the next dish.

"Well, there's no list of instructions on how to train an anchor, but I think the first thing we'll need to do is to get you to recognize when I'm using my abilities. Once you can detect that, we'll move on to teaching you control."

\* \* \* \* \*

"How does this look?" Dylan asked as he walked from behind the privacy curtain wearing the new black jeans.

He was barefoot and shirtless as he walked to stand before Uri.

After a moment to consider, Uri said, "I believe you should try the next larger size of pants. Although those do not look bad, a more relaxed fit might be more comfortable."

"Oh, um. Yeah, I'll give it a try." Dylan said shyly as he turned.

"Here, I have selected some shirts that you may like." Uri said as he held out three hangers with shirts on them.

"Oh, thank you Uri." Dylan said as he accepted the shirts.

"Do you know your shoe size?" Uri asked casually.

"9 1/2." Dylan said as he walked back to the partition.

"I will get you some socks and a pair of shoes. This weekend we will go into town to buy you more clothing." Uri said casually.

Dylan chuckled as he said, "No one ever took care of me like this before. I've always been told that being in a group home is worse than any nightmare you could ever have. But this place is alright."

"I have heard the stories of many people here. Some of the child care facilities are indeed worse than anything you or I could imagine. We are just fortunate that a place such as this exists and that the Clan found us and brought us here." Uri said, then asked, "Do you have need of undergarments?"

"Oh, um. Yeah. I guess I do. I've kind of gotten used to going commando." Dylan said shyly.

"If you will tell me the size of the pants that fit you correctly, I will get some for you." Uri said simply.

"24." Dylan said quickly.

"Do you have a preferred style of undergarment?" Uri asked casually.

"Huh?" Dylan asked as he walked out from behind the privacy screen wearing black jeans and a sky blue t-shirt with the word 'Dream' written across the front in white letters.

"That looks very good on you." Uri said seriously, then continued, "What I was asking is if you prefer boxers or briefs."

"Oh. Well, what I really like is boxer-briefs. But if they don't have any of those, briefs will do." Dylan said, then accepted a package of socks and a pair of cross trainers from Uri.

"If you will put on the shoes to see that they fit, I will return in a moment." Uri said as he walked away.

Dylan looked around and found a chair beside the shelf of shoes.

\* \* \* \* \*

"We do have boxer-brief undergarments, however we only have this 'olive' color." Uri said in an apologetic voice.

"That's okay. I like this color." Dylan said as he accepted the package of boxer-briefs from Uri.

"Would you like to look through the shirts for some different selections?" Uri asked curiously.

"No. I think the ones you picked out are great. What do we do now?" Dylan asked as he looked around.

"We will stop at Mrs. Crow's desk so she can make note of what we selected, then we will go to the cabin so you can put your new clothing away." Uri said as he held out his hands, silently offering to help carry some of the clothes.

"Why does she want to know what I got?" Dylan asked as he looked around to see that he hadn't forgotten anything.

"Mrs. Crow will make sure that the clothing you selected will be replaced, so the next person who arrives that is your same size will have as many selections to choose from as you did." Uri said as he led the way out of the room.

\* \* \* \* \*

The sound of crying caused both Dylan and Uri to be cautious as they entered the outer office.

"Oh baby, we're going to take good care of you. Please stop crying." Mrs. Crow said gently to a sandy haired six or seven year old boy that she was holding in her arms.

He didn't show any sign of hearing her words as he continued to cry.

"Is there anything we can do to help?" Uri asked as he cautiously approached the desk.

"I don't know." Mrs. Crow said with frustration, then continued, "The police just dropped this boy off with me and are in talking to Chief Tecumseh right now. All he's done is cry since he arrived, he won't even tell me his name."

The door by Mrs. Crow's desk opened and Chief Tecumseh looked around the room before saying, "Mrs. Crow, will you please get this young man settled in. It may take a while to gather all the official documents, but he *will* be staying."

"Yes, I'll take care of it." Mrs. Crow said quickly.

Chief Tecumseh nodded, then retreated into the office.

"Uri, Would you please go to Mrs. Sixto's classroom and see if she can come here? She's good with the younger kids and this young man obviously isn't taking to me." Mrs. Crow said in a sullen voice.

"Yes. Of course. I will return in a moment." Uri said as he sat down the clothing he had been holding, then dashed out of the room.

Dylan watched the boy crying and was at a loss as to what he should do.

He had never been around young children and had no experience in dealing with them.

Finally the boy noticed Dylan and stopped crying.

Dylan stared at the young boy.

The young boy stared right back.

"Who hurt you?" The boy finally whispered.

"Some bad people." Dylan said as he sat down the clothes he had been carrying, then quietly walked to Mrs. Crow and held out his arms.

Once the boy was transferred to Dylan's arms, he laid his head on Dylan's shoulder and whispered, "My mommy hurt me."

Dylan felt a lump form in his throat as his eye began to well with tears.

He was at a loss for what to say to comfort the boy in his arms, when an idea suddenly came to him.

"Do you know what?" Dylan asked gently.

"What?" The little boy asked curiously.

"Those bad people that hurt me, they can't get in here. This camp is a safe place where no one will hurt me... or you." Dylan said as he pulled back to look in the boy's eyes.

"Really?" The little boy asked cautiously.

"Really. I'm new here, just like you are. I got here last night. Everyone's been really nice to me." Dylan said honestly.

The boy searched Dylan's eye for a moment, then laid his head back on Dylan's shoulder.

"My name is Dylan, what's yours?" Dylan asked in a soothing voice.

"Teddy." The boy whispered in return.

The sound of the door opening made Teddy raise his head.

"This is Mrs. Sixto, she'll be in charge of your cabin." Mrs. Crow said quietly.

Teddy clutched onto Dylan with fear and looked as though he were about to cry again.

"Mrs. Sixto, I'm Dylan and this is Teddy. Would it be okay if we go to the cabin where Teddy is going to be staying and look around?" Dylan asked as he looked at her imploringly.

"Of course, that sounds like a wonderful idea." Mrs. Sixto said in a cheery voice.

"I will take your clothing selections to your room and await you in our cabin." Uri said quietly.

"Thanks Uri." Dylan said with a smile.

"Thanks Uri." Teddy parroted.

"Your welcomed." Uri said to Teddy with a gentle smile.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Teddy, do you see that cabin over there? That's cabin two. That's where we're going." Mrs. Sixto said as she slowly led the way.

"That one over there is mine." Dylan said as he pointed.

"You live there?" Teddy asked seriously.

"That's right. Mine is Cabin One. I moved in there last night." Dylan said with a smile.

"Is it nice there?" Teddy asked curiously.

"Yeah. I think it is. You're going to be staying in the cabin right next door to mine, so we'll be neighbors. We'll probably be able to visit each other all the time if you wanted to." Dylan said as he shifted Teddy a little to hold him more comfortably.

"Here we are... you'll need to watch your step when we go in. The boys are working on a project that seems to be taking up quite a bit of floor space." Mrs. Sixto said as she opened the door.

When Dylan stepped into the room he nearly broke into laughter.

There was a complicated track that was working its way around the majority of the floor.

Not only were there toy cars, trucks, and motorcycles at various points along the track, but there were even some buildings and a few bridges.

"The boys have been working on this all week. I think they're doing a pretty good job of it." Mrs. Sixto said with pride.

"They don't get in trouble for leaving toys in the living room?" Teddy asked quietly.

"No no. Toys are for playing and the living room is for living. Besides, this creation of theirs needs to be out here where everyone can enjoy it. Come on Teddy, would you like to see your room?" Mrs. Sixto asked gently.

Teddy reluctantly nodded, but at the same time, tightened his grip on Dylan.

"You'll be sharing this room with a boy about your age named Jason... Actually, we call him Jason K since we have two other Jason's here." Mrs. Sixto said as she led the way into the room.

"Hey Teddy, your room is the same as mine." Dylan said gently.

"It is?" Teddy asked curiously.

"Yeah. It's the one right next to the bathroom." Dylan said frankly.

"This will be your bed." Mrs. Sixto said gently.

Teddy looked at the bed, then up at Dylan with indecision.

"Now if you'll come with me, my room is right down the hall." Mrs. Sixto said as she walked past Dylan and Teddy out of the room.

Dylan followed her out of the room and down the hall.

"Whenever classes are out, either me or my husband will be here with you." Mrs. Sixto said, then stopped.

"That's good. Then you never have to worry about being left alone." Dylan said gently, hoping that he was helping to ease some of Teddy's fears.

"Okay Teddy, there is one rule that I'm going to ask you to remember. That is to respect a closed door. If someone has their door closed, then knock and wait to be invited in." Mrs. Sixto said seriously.

"What if I forget?" Teddy whispered in a frightened voice.

Mrs. Sixto leaned close and smiled as she whispered, "Then I'll tell you again."

Teddy nodded that he heard, but seemed uncertain.

Mrs. Sixto opened the door at the end of the hall and said, "This door leads into my apartment. If the door is opened, you're welcomed to come in any time. If the door is closed, just knock."

"That sounds pretty easy. What do you think Teddy?" Dylan asked gently.

"I'll try to remember." Teddy whispered in a worried voice as he clutched even tighter to Dylan.

"Now that you've seen the place, let's go to my classroom so I can introduce you to the other boys. I know Jason K will be anxious to meet you." Mrs. Sixto said warmly.

"Will you go with me Dylan?" Teddy asked hopefully.

"Sure thing." Dylan said, then started to follow Mrs. Sixto back down the hall to the living room.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Here we are. We're doing arts and crafts this morning." Mrs. Sixto said as she led the way into the classroom.

Most of the boys in the room stopped what they were doing to look at Dylan and Teddy.

"Boys, may I have your attention. We have a new student who will be staying in our cabin. This is Teddy." Mrs. Sixto said with a smile.

"Is he gonna be in my room?" A small boy with jet black hair asked as he ran up to Dylan.

"That's right. Teddy, this is Jason K." Mrs. Sixto said with a smile.

"Hi." Teddy said in a whisper.

"Hi. I'm Jason K, that's 'cause there's two other guys named Jason in our cabin." Jason K said happily.

Before Teddy could respond, Jason K continued, "There's no one else named Teddy in our cabin... I bet there's no one else named Teddy in the whole camp."

"Maybe you'd like to show Teddy what you're working on this morning?" Mrs. Sixto asked Jason K gently.

"Yeah. Come over here. I'm finger painting." Jason K said happily, then held up his paint covered hands as proof.

"Maybe you could help me if you wanted to." Jason K said, then took off running to the other side of the room without waiting to see if Teddy was going to join him.

Dylan sat Teddy down and said, "Why don't you go over and see if you can help him?"

Teddy looked over at Jason K, then back at Dylan with indecision.

"I'll be right here." Dylan said with assurance.

That was all the encouragement that Teddy needed. He took off running to follow Jason K to the other side of the room.

"Thank you for your help Dylan." Mrs. Sixto said quietly.

Dylan smiled and said, "I'm glad that there was something I could do."

"Would you mind if I bring Teddy by your cabin every now and then to visit for the next few days until he can get settled in? He seems to trust you." Mrs. Sixto asked hopefully.

"That would be fine. Like I said before, I'm staying in Cabin One. I don't think any of the other guys would have a problem with Teddy visiting... in fact, I'm pretty sure my roommate Obie will really like Teddy." Dylan said as he watched Teddy being drawn into finger painting with Jason K.

"I know Obie and I think you're right. He's such a sweet boy." Mrs. Sixto said with a warm smile.

"I guess I'd better get going. Uri is waiting on me in Cabin One." Dylan said with regret.

"I think that if you'll go over and let Teddy know that you'll be right next door if he needs you, he'll probably be alright." Mrs. Sixto said speculatively.

Dylan nodded, then began walking across the class room.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Hey Teddy, I've got to go to my own class now, but Mrs. Sixto said that she'll bring you over to Cabin One to visit me later today." Dylan said as he crouched down beside the table where Jason K and Teddy were working.

"Really? She said that?" Teddy asked hopefully.

"That's right. And if you wanted, I bet you could even bring Jason K with you so I could introduce you both around." Dylan said gently.

"Do you wanna?" Teddy asked Jason K hopefully.

"Yeah. That sounds like fun." Jason K said with a smile at his new friend.

"Just remember Teddy, I'm going to be living here at the camp, just the same as you. So if you ever need me, I'll be here."

## Chapter 9

"I placed your clothing on your bed." Uri said as Dylan walked into the common room.

"Thanks, Uri. Give me a minute to put them away, then I'll be ready to go." Dylan said as he walked to his room.

"How is Teddy?" Uri asked cautiously as he followed.

"Frightened, but I think he's going to be okay." Dylan said as he paused to look at Uri, then quickly started putting away his new clothes.

"I believe that fear is a common reaction when arriving in a new place." Uri said gently.

"Yeah. I invited Teddy to come over here to visit. You don't think anyone will mind, do you?" Dylan asked curiously as he put the last of his things away.

"No. I am certain that everyone will enjoy getting to know Teddy." Uri said with a smile.

"I thought that, too." Dylan said with an answering smile, then continued, "I need to make a pit stop, then I'll be ready to go."

"I will await you in the common room."

\* \* \* \* \*

"This is Mr. T's classroom. We begin each day here and find out about what has been planned for the day." Uri said, as they approached a small building.

"So you don't do the same thing every day?" Dylan asked curiously.

"There is a standard schedule, but we frequently have special projects that require us to make alterations." Uri said frankly, then opened the door.

"Perfect timing." Mr. T said from the front of the classroom.

"Dylan, Dr. Michaels just arrived. He's here to examine you."

Dylan looked at the indicated man with a bit of apprehension.

"Hello Dylan. You can call me Doc Austin, if you like."

"Okay." Dylan said carefully, noticing the man's casual demeanor.

"Please come with me, I promise that this won't take very long at all." Doc Austin said with an encouraging smile.

Dylan looked back at the classroom for a moment before reluctantly following Doc Austin out of the room.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Before we begin, I need to explain something to you." Doc Austin said seriously.

Dylan looked at the doctor with concern.

"Dr. McCoy sent me his scans of you and explained your condition. He also told me about the treatment you received while you were in the hospital in Chicago" Doc Austin said gravely.

Dylan stared at the doctor, not able to guess at what point, if any, he was trying to work toward.

"So before we start the examination, I need your promise that you'll tell me if anything I'm doing is bothering you." Doc Austin said as he stopped to look Dylan in the eye.

A look of confusion was the only response that Dylan was able to give.

"From what Doctor McCoy said about your condition, we may be seeing a lot of each other for the next few months. With your help, I'll make the experience as comfortable for you as possible." Doc Austin said seriously.

"Okay..." Dylan said hesitantly, still not understanding what the doctor was asking of him.

"Your doctors hurt you, Dylan." Dr. Michaels said quietly. "I realize that there are no words that I can say that will undo what they did and make it so you can trust me. I'll do my best to make you comfortable, but I'll need for you to tell me if I do anything that disturbs you."

Realization lit up in Dylan's eye as he finally understood Dr. Michaels' concern. "Listen, doc. I've learned to do a lot of things that I don't like and that I don't want to. But I go ahead and do them just because they have to be done. So you don't have to worry about me freaking out on you. You do what you need to do and I'll do my part."

"Good enough." Doc Austin said cautiously, then added, "Just as long as you know that you're free to ask questions and that you can ask me to stop at any time."

"Yeah. Okay." Dylan said dismissively, not even trying to conceal his distrust.

"Well, I suppose it's a start." Doc Austin said with a reluctant smile, then gestured toward the administration building, indicating for Dylan to precede him.

\* \* \* \* \*

As soon as Dylan and Dr. Michaels were out of the room, Cory raised his hand to gain Mr. T's attention.

"Yes, Cory?"

"A few of us weren't able to get all of our homework done last night... Is there any way we could have a little more time?"

Mr. T smiled at the respectful request, since he knew that Cory would be well within his rights to demand additional time since they were busy with Clan business the night before.

"Don't worry about it, Cory. I've already set aside the entire morning for unstructured study time." Mr. T said as he looked around the room.

"Oh, thanks." Cory said gratefully.

"If anyone runs out of work, you can ask one of the teachers and get a head start on tomorrow's lesson." Mr. T said professionally.

After a moment to see that no one had any questions, Mr. T said, "That's it, you can begin. Just call on me or one of the other teachers if you need any help with your studies."

Mr. T watched with satisfaction as everyone started pulling out their study materials.

"What are we doing?" Jose asked as he looked around the group of Camp guys.

"Obie, Arlo and Devon can work on looking for Obie's brother. The rest of us can see what we can do to help out the Clan guys with their work." Simon said seriously.

"Good plan." Mouse said, then glanced to his side to see that Luke was in agreement.

\* \* \* \* \*

Dylan felt uncomfortably exposed with all the bandages removed from his face.

"So what's the verdict? Can you help me?" Dylan asked cautiously.

Doc Austin considered for a moment before carefully answering, "Dylan. The God's honest truth is... I don't know."

Dylan was surprised by the answer, expecting Doc Austin to, at least, give him empty assurances.

"Now that I've had a chance to examine you for myself, I think that I have enough understanding of your condition to do some research and make some inquiries to find what options are available to you." Doc Austin said seriously as he began to dress Dylan's wounds with fresh bandages.

"Okay." Dylan whispered, trying to hold still, so as not to interfere with the doctor's work.

The sudden, downcast look in Dylan's eye told Doc Austin that Dylan's hopes were falling.

"I tell you what, I have a temporary office set up at the Short Compound where I keep more sophisticated equipment. I can make arrangements for you to go over in the morning so I can do a more detailed exam, then I should be able to give you at least 'some' answers about what can be done and what steps will need to be taken." Doc Austin said as he looked Dylan in the eye.

"Short Compound? Is that like a prison or something?" Dylan asked cautiously.

Doc Austin chuckled as he said, "No. Nothing like that. In fact, that's where many of the Clan members live... including Cory. It's right across the street."

"Oh. That sounds alright." Dylan said as he seemed to relax a little.

"Please just leave it to me for now and try not to worry about it." Doc Austin said gently.

"I'll try." Dylan said helplessly.

Doc Austin looked at Dylan with sympathy for a moment, then said, "How about I give you something for the pain so you can get back to your class?"

Dylan looked at the doctor with surprise for a moment, then said, "I forgot it was even hurting."

Doc Austin chuckled at the statement and said, "I'll do my best to keep it that way."

"Thank you for, you know, being nice and stuff." Dylan said shyly as Doc Austin retrieved the pain medication.

"It's my pleasure, Dylan..." Doc Austin said, then looked up at the sound of a knock on the door.

"Yes?" Doc Austin asked curiously.

Mrs. Crow opened the door and quietly said, "A new child arrived this morning and I was wondering if you'd have time to look at him before you leave?"

"Of course. In fact, Dylan and I were just finishing up. I can see him now if you'd like." Doc Austin said, then held out a hypospray and looked at Dylan with question.

Dylan looked at the doctor curiously, wondering what he was waiting for, then realized that Doc Austin was silently asking his permission before injecting him.

After a slight nod, Doc Austin injected Dylan's arm.

"It will probably take a few minutes for Mrs. Sixto to bring him." Mrs. Crow said seriously, then in a more reluctant tone she added, "He may not be altogether cooperative."

"Are you talking about Teddy?" Dylan asked curiously.

"Yes." Mrs. Crow said quietly. "Considering his emotional state when he arrived, I'm not sure how receptive he'll be to the idea of an examination."

"If you'd like, I can go get him and help him through it." Dylan said to Mrs. Crow, then looked at Doc Austin with question.

"I think that might be a very good idea." Mrs. Crow said thoughtfully, then looked at Doc Austin and said, "It might make your examination go a lot more smoothly if Dylan is here to console him."

"If it will make the child more comfortable, then I'm all for it." Doc Austin said frankly.

"Do you want me to go get him now?" Dylan asked, looking from one adult to the other.

"Yes, thank you, Dylan." Doc Austin said with a gentle smile.

"I'll call Mrs. Sixto to let her know that you're coming." Mrs. Crow said decisively before turning to leave.

\* \* \* \* \*

"How's it going?" Simon asked as he walked up behind Devon and Arlo.

"Well, we haven't found anything yet, but there are still quite a few places to look." Arlo said seriously.

Devon nodded absently, never looking away from the computer screen.

"How are you doing, Obie?" Simon asked gently.

"Okay. I guess." Obie said quietly. "I just wish there was something I could do. I feel so useless."

"Hey! You're the guy with the answers." Arlo said over his shoulder. "When we finally do find something, we're going to need you to look at what we found and tell us if it's what we're looking for."

"That's right. We can't do this without you." Devon said, and even glanced away from the computer for an instant.

"You see there?" Simon asked with a smile, "You're not useless, you're the most valuable member of the team."

Obie thought for a moment, then broke into a sunny smile.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Hey Doc, look who I've got." Dylan said as he carried Teddy into the room on his hip.

"Who do you have here?" Doc Austin asked with a genuine smile at the happy six year old boy.

"This is my new friend, Teddy." Dylan said happily.

"Well, Teddy. My name is Doc Austin, and it's very nice to meet you."

"Are you gonna give me shots?" Teddy asked, his sunny mood instantly changed to seriousness.

"I'm not planning on it." Doc Austin said honestly. "This isn't going to be a very long examination. I just want to have a look at you to be sure that you don't have any immediate medical needs. But if I find that you do need some type of medication, I have a device called a hypospray that would make it so that a shot wouldn't hurt at all."

"He gave me one of those shots a few minutes ago, and it just felt like it puffed some air on my arm." Dylan said frankly.

"It didn't hurt?" Teddy asked cautiously.

"Not even a little bit." Dylan said assuringly.

"Okay." Teddy said slowly, obviously not fully believing either of them.

"Hopefully, you won't need any shots, so you might not have to worry about it." Doc Austin said with a grin, then gestured for Dylan to bring Teddy over to the examination table.

"Teddy, when I examine you, I'm going to need for you to take your clothes off for a few minutes. Would you feel better if Dylan stayed in here or went outside?" Doc Austin asked gently.

After a moment of careful consideration, Teddy looked Dylan in the eye and quietly asked, "Would you stay?"

"Sure, Teddy. I'll be here whenever you need me." Dylan said with a tender smile.

"Will you take your shirt off for me?" Doc Austin asked as he walked across the room to get his stethoscope.

Teddy looked hesitant, but slowly began to pull the shirt off over his head.

"Do you need some help?" Dylan asked gently.

"No." Teddy whispered, then said, "Just don't be mad at me when you see."

"I'm not going to be mad at you." Dylan said in puzzlement, not being able to imagine what Teddy was worried about.

A moment later he found himself fighting for every bit of self control at his command to keep from screaming out in rage.

There were some cuts and bruises that seemed relatively minor, but it was the mass of burns that spoke of nothing short of torture. Some were fresh, probably done within the past ten hours, and others... it could have been going on for years.

"Dear God!" Doc Austin gasped when he saw Teddy's upper body. "Who did this to you, Teddy?"

Teddy looked from Doc Austin to Dylan with fear in his eyes.

"His mother." Dylan whispered regretfully, then hopped up on the edge of the bed and tried to make the move look casual. "Since the police brought Teddy here, I'm guessing that she's being dealt with."

"Well, if they don't deal with her, Cory will." Doc Austin said under his breath, then in a gentle voice he asked, "Are you in any pain, Teddy?"

"No. They smeared some smelly gunk on me at the hospital before I came here and it don't hurt at all now." Teddy said quietly.

"It's okay, buddy. No one's mad at you." Dylan said with a grin as he patted Teddy's knee.

Teddy looked at Dylan, obviously not believing him.

"Remember me, Mr. 'shot-in-the-face' guy?" Dylan asked with a grin.

Teddy couldn't keep from smiling at the comment.

"I'm sorry for asking this, but... what were you burned with?" Doc Austin asked quietly, fairly sure that he knew, but needing for Teddy to confirm it.

Teddy looked at the doctor, but didn't give any indication of wanting to answer.

"Cigarettes." Dylan said, knowing from too much personal experience.

"Is that right, Teddy?" Doc Austin asked gently.

Teddy reluctantly nodded.

"Will you take off your pants? This will just take me a minute, I want to be sure that you don't have any injuries that need immediate treatment." Doc Austin said gently.

Teddy looked at Dylan and received a smile of encouragement.

Since he was sitting on the examination table, getting out of the pants involved a lot of squirming and wiggling.

Dylan was relieved to see that the majority of the damage was above Teddy's waist. There were a few scars of old burns on his butt, but it wasn't nearly as bad as it could have been.

"Thank you, Teddy. You can go ahead and put your clothes back on." Doc Austin said quietly.

"Do you need some help?" Dylan offered casually.

"I got it." Teddy said as he wriggled into his pants.

"When I came here today, I thought I was only going to be seeing Dylan so I didn't bring in my scanner. If you guys will wait for just a minute or two, I'll be right back." Doc Austin said hopefully.

"We'll be fine." Dylan said with a smile, then turned and asked, "Right, buddy?"

Teddy smiled a broad smile and said, "Right!"

\* \* \* \* \*

"That wasn't too bad, was it?" Dylan asked as he walked out of the office, holding Teddy's hand.

"No, but he said that I'm going to have to see him again later." Teddy said seriously.

"That's just so he can put some more 'smelly gunk' on your burns so you won't be hurting. All the scary stuff is over and Doc Austin says that you're fine." Dylan said gently.

"Are you okay?" A small voice asked as they walked out of the office and into the lobby of the administration building.

"The doctor says that I am." Teddy said as his surprise changed into a smile.

"Mrs. Sixto said that it was okay if I came here and waited for you." Jason K said happily.

"Thanks." Teddy said gratefully.

"Uh huh." Jason K said as he looked up at Dylan cautiously.

"Would you mind taking Teddy back to Mrs. Sixto's class with you?" Dylan asked gently.

"Uh huh!" Jason K responded immediately, then turned to Teddy and said, "Come on!"

Dylan smiled wistfully as he watched the two boys hurry away.

"Every single day it amazes me how resilient children are. It's truly one of God's mercies." Mrs. Crow said as she moved to stand at Dylan's side to look out the door.

After a moment of consideration, Dylan finally said, "I never thought about it before, but it really is amazing."

\* \* \* \* \*

"Here, look at this. I think I've got something." Arlo said as he scooted to the side to allow Devon to see his computer screen.

"Yeah. But if I'm reading this right, they changed his name. And I don't know how to get into the county computers to find what they changed it to. They're really super careful with those records. I'm not even sure those records are computerized."

"Well, if we can't go by name, maybe we can track it by date. Look in the school system records for a boy about his age admitted to a new school." Arlo said thoughtfully.

"I'm not sure which one of these... Obie, can you remember when you lost your brother, I mean, like what time of year or anything like that?" Devon asked carefully.

"I think it was cold. I don't remember anything from that long ago, but Mike's mentioned how cold he was without Amos to help him keep warm." Obie said quietly.

"Thanks. That helps. Going by the date of the name change, I think we should try December and January new admissions. There shouldn't be too many of them." Devon said decisively.

"Yeah. That sounds right." Arlo said slowly.

"Hey, look at this." Devon said in concentration.

"The light..." Arlo said in a distant voice.

Devon heard the strange response and looked at Arlo curiously.

What he saw sent a shiver up his spine. Before he could even think about it, he called, "Simon! Arlo needs help."

The camp guys exchanged glances, all of them having a pretty good idea of what was happening.

"The light." Arlo mumbled and seemed to be concentrating.

"What about the light?" Simon asked gently as he moved to Arlo's side.

"He sees the light, he craves the light. But it doesn't want him... it won't take him." Arlo said as tears began to fill his eyes.

"Why not?" Simon asked with concern.

"He doesn't know." Arlo said, then seemed to come back to himself as he turned to look Simon in the eyes.

Simon chewed on his lower lip as he concentrated on what Arlo had said.

"It's horrible. He's trapped between life and death. His body is gone, but he can't move on." Arlo said as a single tear fell.

"When are you seeing?" Simon asked carefully.

"Right now. He's here... somewhere... everywhere." Arlo said as he looked around the room.

"Does that mean that there's a ghost, here in the room with us right now?" Obie asked in a whisper.

"I think so. He's sort of... vague. Spread out. It's like he's diluted or like he's dissolving." Arlo said in a weak voice.

Simon bit his lip again in concentration, trying to think about what they could do.

"I... Oh god! Not again." Arlo whimpered, then started breathing heavily.

"What's wrong, Arlo?" Obie asked immediately.

"I feel... Oh please no, I can't. Not again." Arlo said as he hugged himself tightly.

"Is it a vision?" Simon asked in a whisper.

"No. Oh God, Simon! I can't do this. I don't want this. Make it stop." Arlo said as tears started rolling down his cheeks and he seemed to be struggling.

"Guys, I'll take care of Arlo. Will you let the Clan guys know that everything is fine?" Simon asked quickly.

"Is it?" Devon asked seriously.

"It will be. He'll get through it. He always does." Simon said in a tone that sounded like he was trying to convince himself.

"Until he doesn't." Devon whispered.

Simon looked at Devon with surprise.

"I'm not trying to be cruel, Simon. I'm just saying that... maybe Arlo is right to be scared. Maybe we need to see if there's some way for him to get rid of this thing. It seems like every time it happens, it's getting worse." Devon said frankly.

"We'll talk about it after." Simon said reluctantly, then noticed a fresh look of panic in Arlo's eyes.

Without thinking, Simon pulled Arlo into his arms and whispered, "I'm here, Arlo. You're not alone. Follow my voice and come back to me."

"I can't. I'm slipping. I can't stop it." Arlo said weakly, then rested his head on Simon's shoulder and returned the hug.

As soon as Simon felt the arms close around him, a jolt of panic surged through his entire body.

"NO!" Simon screamed as he fought to break free of Arlo's hug.

As soon as Arlo realized what he had done, he immediately let go.

Simon scrambled away from Arlo and backed himself into a corner.

As the panic passed its peak, Simon slid down the wall and curled into a ball.

Everyone in the room was silent as they watched Simon crying, hugging his knees to his chest.

Mr. T discretely ducked into his office and hurried to the phone.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Can you feel it?" Jerico asked quietly.

"I think so." Paul said uncertainly.

"I don't know what you're feeling, so you'll need to tell me if it's working or not." Jerico said quietly. "I think you're supposed to be able to sense what I'm doing and stop it."

"Let me try again." Paul said in concentration.

Jerico focused his thoughts on Paul and in his mind he repeated, *'See the apple. The apple is red. See the red apple...'*

While he was concentrating, he felt something curious. The sensation was difficult to identify, but it was something like a soap bubble bursting. It felt like the suggestion he was making had suddenly vanished, it had simply ceased to be.

"I think I did it!" Paul said with excitement.

"I think you did too." Jerico said with a smile at his cousin.

Paul jumped up from his chair and pulled Jerico into a joyful hug.

"I really felt it! That was so awesome!" Paul said happily.

Jerico returned the hug and reveled in the sensation of being held. The warm body pressed against him awakened something deep inside him, something he had fought very hard to suppress.

Paul felt Jerico tense and quietly asked, "Are you okay?"

"Yes." Jerico whispered, but the single word had a ring of falsehood.

Paul pulled out of the hug, then quietly said, "I'm sorry."

"No. Please don't be sorry." Jerico said quickly. "It's not your fault."

"What isn't?" Paul asked quietly as he sat in his chair again.

"You remember that I told you that I was... addicted." Jerico said hesitantly.

"Yeah. To sex." Paul said casually.

"I just don't want to take the chance of losing control of it." Jerico said as he forced himself to meet Paul's concerned gaze. "I don't want to feel that way about you. I don't want to hurt you."

"You won't." Paul said seriously.

Jerico wanted to believe Paul's words, but knew himself too well to be able to.

"You can't control me." Paul said seriously. "You can't make me do anything I don't want to."

Jerico looked at Paul uncertainly, wanting to believe what he was saying.

"From what you told me, I think I understand why you're scared. But think about this." Paul said thoughtfully. "Because of your gift, you've learned how to deal with your feelings a certain way... a bad way. Since you can't control me, I could help you learn to deal with your feelings like a regular person."

Jerico's gaze became distant as he considered what Paul was saying.

"It's safe to hold me." Paul whispered. "It's safe to love me. You won't hurt me."

Jerico looked into Paul's eyes and quietly asked, "I could love you?"

Paul puzzled over Jerico's expression for a moment, then rolled his eyes and said, "I'm not talking about sex. I'm talking about love. Yes, you can love me."

Jerico slowly nodded, not knowing if he was acknowledging his understanding or giving his agreement.

"And just so you know..." Paul added quietly, "I won't hurt you either."

Jerico blinked with confusion at the statement. He had always seen himself as the aggressor. No one had ever hurt him, he had never given them the chance. And yet... hearing his cousin's promise soothed him more than he could account for. Knowing that Paul wouldn't hurt him seemed to chip away at a wall within him that he didn't know was there.

"Thank you..." Jerico began to say when the ringing of the phone drew his attention.

"I got it." Paul said as he raced into the kitchen.

Jerico sat for a moment, thinking about the possibility that he might learn how to love safely. That Paul might help him find a way that he could actually have a future of something more than isolation.

His uncle's words from earlier came back to him. *'The demon, the monster you fear, has been contained but not controlled. That is a weakness that will be exploited. The time has come for you to face it.'*

That's what Paul was offering him, the chance to learn to control his inner demon. With Paul's help, he might be able to learn how to love in a healthy way.

"We'll be right there." Paul said firmly, then hung up the phone and dashed into the dining room.

"What's wrong?" Jerico asked with concern.

"That was Chief Tecumseh." Paul said seriously. "Something is happening at the camp, with the cabin one guys, and he said that we need to get over there right away."

"Did he say what the problem was?" Jerico asked as he stood.

"No. He just said that Arlo and Simon need us." Paul said frankly.

"Do you need to get anything before we go?" Jerico asked as he thought about the things that they might need.

"Just this." Paul said as he pulled Jerico into a hug.

Jerico froze for a moment, then reluctantly put his arms around Paul and hugged him in return.

"Okay. I'm ready." Paul said decisively.

"Me too."

\* \* \* \* \*

"Stop." Kyle said as he grabbed Sean and Cory's arms to hold them back.

"They need help." Sean said as he turned to look at the younger boy.

"You don't have the help they need." Kyle said cryptically.

"Kyle, can't you do something?" Cory asked as he watched two of his classmates and friends 'melting down' right before his eyes.

"I can't." Kyle said with frustration. "Mikey says that if I do anything, I'll make things worse."

"If you can't do it, then he needs to get his butt down here and take care of it himself. I'm not going to just stand here and watch these guys self destruct." Cory said firmly.

Kyle seemed to be lost in concentration for a moment, then he looked at Cory and said, "Dylan."

"What?" Cory asked with confusion.

"That's all he told me." Kyle said helplessly.

"What's going on?"

Cory, Sean and Kyle turned as one to see Dylan walking into the classroom.

Before any of them could answer, Obie ran across the room and pulled Dylan into a desperate hug.

"Something's wrong with Arlo. A ghost or something like that is here and Arlo's scared that it's going to go into him and, I don't know, push him out or something." Obie said in a trembling voice.

"What's wrong with Simon?" Dylan asked as he stared at Simon curled into a ball in the corner.

"Arlo hugged him. Simon can't stand for anyone to touch him. It freaks him out. I mean, really bad. It's because..." Obie began to say when Dylan interrupted.

"I can guess why he feels that way." Dylan said sympathetically, then considered what he should do. "I don't know anything about ghosts, so let's help Simon first."

Obie looked at Dylan with surprise, then hurried to walk with him to the other side of the room.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Simon, can you hear me?" Dylan asked quietly.

"Yeah." Simon muttered, still hugging his knees desperately.

"Will you tell me what happened?" Dylan asked gently.

"It's not Arlo's fault." Simon said quickly, then quietly added, "I hugged him first. I didn't even think about it. He was scared and I just did it."

"Obie said that you can't stand for anyone to touch you. Does that mean that hugging is something that you wouldn't normally do?" Dylan asked carefully.

"No. Not for... I can't remember how long." Simon said distantly.

"But when you saw that Arlo was scared, you wanted to comfort him, so you hugged him?" Dylan confirmed.

Simon reluctantly nodded.

"If you're interested, I'll tell you what I think." Dylan said quietly.

"What?" Simon whispered nervously.

"I think that you've just taken a big step." Dylan said frankly.

"Backward, maybe." Simon said in a trembling voice.

"Think about it Simon. Arlo was hurting. Your instinct was to hold him and ease his fear. If I'm understanding things right, this is something totally new and probably something you thought you could never do." Dylan explained seriously.

"But when he hugged me back, I freaked out." Simon whimpered.

"So you're not ready for *that* step yet." Dylan said dismissively.

"The important thing to focus on is that you took *this* step."

Simon sat silently and thought about the words.

"Whether you're ready to believe it or not, you're getting better." Dylan said frankly.

Simon looked into Dylan's eye, then broke into a reluctant smile.

Dylan stood and held out his hand, offering to help Simon to stand.

After a moment of staring at the hand, Simon hesitantly took it.

"Let's go help Arlo." Dylan said with a smile.

Simon nodded, then stood with Dylan's help.

"I'm proud of you, Simon. You're doing great." Dylan said before releasing Simon's hand.

"Thanks."

\* \* \* \* \*

"Um, Cory. I think we need to go to the admin building." Kyle said urgently.

"We can't leave these guys like this." Cory said anxiously as he reluctantly turned his attention away from Simon and Dylan.

"Mikey says that since Dylan is here, they'll be fine. But what we've got is someone who is a real mess. I'll tell you on the way out, we need to get out there now." Kyle said urgently.

"All of us?" Cory asked as he looked around.

"Probably. I think he may need all of us before it's over." Kyle said frankly.

"You're sure they're going to be fine?" Cory asked as he looked at the camp guys across the room.

"You know that nothing is for sure until it happens. But they've got everything they need, they'll just have to figure out how to use it." Kyle said urgently.

"I'll get everyone." Sean said decisively.

Cory nodded, then called to Mr. T, "Clan Business."

He nodded that he understood and watched as Cory and the rest of the Clan members trooped out of the room.

\* \* \* \* \*

"I really don't know much about what's happening to Arlo. What can we do to help?" Dylan asked as he walked to join the rest of the camp guys who were loosely surrounding Arlo.

"Arlo is a spirit medium. He can communicate with ghosts." Simon said quietly.

Dylan nodded that he heard, then quietly said, "Arlo, it's Dylan."

"Dylan? I can barely hear you." Arlo said weakly.

"Arlo, tell me what I can do to help you. I don't know what to do." Dylan said seriously.

"It's... it's everywhere, it's filling me up. It's pushing me out." Arlo said desperately.

"Tell me what I can do. I can't help you if I don't know what to do." Dylan said forcefully.

"Take care of Simon for me." Arlo whispered, then his eyes went blank.

Dylan looked into the empty eyes, and knew that even though the body before him was alive, everything that had made it Arlo... was gone.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Isn't there something we can do?" Dylan asked as he looked around in panic.

"I saw Jerico do something yesterday, but I'm not sure it will help." Luke said timidly.

"Do it. Something is better than nothing." Dylan said quickly. "It looks like we're losing him."

Luke nodded, then took a deep cleansing breath before saying, "I call upon the spirit that's in this room. *Raise* your *voice* to be heard above the whispers. *Expose* your true *intent* that we may know your heart."

*"I command you to come forth now!"* Luke finished in a booming voice that echoed through the classroom.

Silence filled the room in the wake of the commanding words as everyone watched to see what was going to happen next.

A strange confusion seemed to fill Arlo's expression, then he quietly said, "Beg pardon?"

"Arlo?" Dylan asked cautiously.

"I am sorry, but I do not know to whom you are referring." Arlo said slowly.

"Who are you?" Obie asked from Dylan's side.

Arlo looked around the room curiously, then asked, "Pray tell, what place is this?"

"This is Camp Little Eagle, can you tell us who you are?" Dylan asked seriously.

"Oh, how rude of me, my name is Randolph. Randolph Pettigrew, at your service." Arlo said with a strange accent that seemed to be somewhere between British and New Englander.

"Randolph, you're hurting Arlo. You need to leave." Dylan said firmly.

"Would that I could." Randolph said thoughtfully, "I do not know where I am nor do I know from where I have just arrived."

"Let me try." Luke said from Dylan's side. "Randolph, you're a spirit. Right now you're in the body of a friend of ours, his name is Arlo. You being here is hurting him."

Randolph looked at Luke with surprise, then at Dylan with fear.

"I am a spirit?" Randolph asked as tears welled in his eyes, then reluctantly asked, "Am I dead?"

"Yes." Dylan said quietly, feeling sympathy at the frightened confusion in Randolph's expression.

After a long moment of silence, Randolph seemed to calm and quietly said, "I would never wish to harm anyone. What can I do to help your friend?"

"Leave." Luke said imploringly.

"I don't know how I came to be here, wherever this place is. I haven't a clue of how to leave." Randolph said honestly.

"Hey, I saw this thing in a movie once. Is it okay if I try it?" Obie asked hopefully.

Dylan considered for a moment, then said, "Since I can't think of anything to do, go ahead."

Obie walked directly in front of Randolph and said, "Randolph, I need to talk to Arlo."

"I'm sorry, but I don't know what it is that you're asking me to do." Randolph said with regret.

"I'm asking you to go to sleep or relax or something like that. Just be quiet and let Arlo talk." Obie said seriously.

"I will try." Randolph said quietly, then closed his eyes.

"Do you think it will work?" Mouse asked, from Luke's side.

"It's all we've got at the moment. Who are you supposed to call when something like this happens?" Dylan asked helplessly.

"Ghostbusters?" Obie asked with a giggle.

"A Shaman." Luke answered, with a reluctant grin at Obie.

"Yeah. Someone needs to call Jerico." Simon said immediately.

"I will do it." Uri said from Devon's side, then walked across the room to talk to Mr. T.

"Simon?" Arlo asked weakly.

"Arlo? Is that you?" Simon asked hopefully.

"Yeah. Are you alright?" Arlo asked as he fought to open his eyes.

"I'm fine. Don't worry about me. How are you?" Simon asked anxiously.

"I'm scared." Arlo whispered. "I think someone else is in here with me."

"Yeah. That's Randolph." Simon said gently.

"Please help me." Arlo begged. "I'm so tired."

"Uri is calling Jerico right now. He fixed you last time, so he should be able to fix you again." Simon said assuringly, then whispered, "Just hang on."

"Wait. Something is happening." Arlo said as he blinked his eyes.

"What's going on? What's wrong?" Simon asked in panic.

"Nothing." Arlo said in wonder. "Everything is fine now."

"What about Randolph?" Simon asked anxiously.

"I don't know." Arlo said slowly as he looked around the room.

"What do you see?" Simon asked desperately.

"Before, I felt like I was suffocating, like he was crowding me out. But now... I don't know what's different, but I don't feel that anymore." Arlo said slowly.

"Is the spirit gone?" Simon asked with concern.

"Yeah. When you asked to talk to me, I think he just... went away." Arlo said with surprise.

"I guess Luke did the right thing then." Simon said cautiously.

"Don't worry about it, Simon. I'm really fine now." Arlo said with a relieved smile.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Mr. T called Jerico as soon as Arlo began having difficulties. He should be here any moment." Uri said as he walked to Dylan's side.

"Hey, what happened to all the Clan guys?" Dylan asked as he looked around.

"They had to deal with an emergency elsewhere. Mr. T didn't know any more than that." Uri said seriously, then quietly asked, "How are you, Arlo?"

"Much better. When Obie asked to talk to me, I guess the spirit figured out how to leave so I could talk." Arlo said happily. "I'm really fine."

Obie smiled with accomplishment.

"We should still have Jerico look at you." Luke said with concern. "That was too easy."

"I guess it's easy to say that from your point of view." Arlo said with a chuckle.

Luke smiled at the response, but still looked uneasy.

"How are you, Simon?" Uri asked cautiously.

"I'm better, too." Simon said quietly, then smiled gratefully at Dylan.

"I am pleased." Uri said sincerely, then turned to Devon and asked, "Have you made any progress on your project?"

"Actually, yeah." Devon said distractedly.

"What have you got?" Dylan asked quickly. "We could really use some good news right now."

"I think I've narrowed it down to three guys. I'm not sure what we're going to do with the information, but at least it's something." Devon said with a shrug.

"Significant progress." Uri said in an impressed voice.

"Is there any way to narrow it down more?" Simon asked, reluctantly diverting his attention from Arlo.

"No. Not that I can think of." Devon said thoughtfully.

"Why don't we just go and check out these three guys? I mean, Amos is Mike's twin, we should be able to tell if it's him by just looking at him." Obie said frankly.

After a long moment of silence, Uri finally said, "I believe that Obie has once again provided a simple and effective solution to our problems."

Simon smiled at Obie and said, "Yeah. And just a little bit ago you were saying how you felt useless."

Obie smiled shyly at Simon's words.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Come on in and meet the guys." Cory said as he walked slowly into the classroom.

"Inmates, you mean." The older teenage boy said angrily.

"No, I mean classmates. This is a school." Cory said gently, then looked at Kyle imploringly, hoping he could see the root of the new boy's problem.

"Yeah! Classmates in a prison school!" The boy stormed.

"Guys, I'd like for all of you to meet Donny." Cory said into the room, hoping to divert the angry teen's attention.

Donny glanced around the room, then he froze in place.

Everyone watched as all the color seemed to drain out of the boy's face.

"Steven?" Donny whispered in disbelief. "They got you too?"

Simon's expression filled with panic at the sound of the name, but after a moment, he looked at the boy's face carefully. Donny seemed familiar to him, but Simon couldn't place where he knew him from.

"Yusef?" Donny gasped as he looked at Uri.

"Yes, Malchijah. Although, my true name is Uriah and Steven is now called Simon." Uri said quietly.

"Malchijah?" Simon gasped, then quickly said, "Oh my God! It's been years! I didn't recognize you. How are you?"

The boy glanced at Cory, then shook his head before saying, "Honestly, I don't know. But I have a feeling that things may have just gone from bad to worse."

"Guys, will you let Donny... or Malchijah, know that this isn't a prison and it's really okay here?" Cory asked hopefully.

"It's a nice place." Simon said simply.

"For a prison." The boy said firmly, letting it be known with his expression that he wasn't going to be convinced of anything.

"Come on."

Everyone was surprised to see Arlo walk across the room to look the new arrival in the eyes.

"Let's go for a walk." Arlo said simply, then turned away and started walking toward the door.

The boy looked around and saw that no one was going to try to stop him, or even try to talk him out of leaving.

"Um... Yeah." He said with surprise, then hurried to meet Arlo at the door.

As everyone watched Arlo and their new guest walk out, Cory quietly asked, "Do you think they're going to be okay?"

"Yeah. I think so." Simon said confidently. "Arlo's helped me so much that I'm sure he'll have a good idea of what Malchijah needs."

Cory looked at Kyle with question.

Kyle shrugged in response.

"Thanks for getting me out of there. I really appreciate it." Donny said gratefully, then took in a long deep breath as he looked around at the sparkling sunlight and lush green trees.

"I was happy to help." Arlo said casually, then added in a conspiratorial whisper, "I was kind of feeling cooped up in there anyway."

Donny looked at Arlo curiously.

Arlo started to walk away from the classroom and the older teenager followed along silently.

"Would you prefer that I call you Malchijah or Donny?" Arlo asked casually.

"My real name is Donny. I was just called Malchijah by the people who had me." He responded quietly. "I was with them for so long that I almost forgot my real name."

Arlo nodded as they reached the administration building, then turned to walk past it and into the parking lot.

When Donny finally realized that they were walking toward the main gate, he quickly asked, "What are you doing?"

"You were saying that this is a prison, I'm just showing you that it isn't." Arlo said simply.

"Do you mean that they're just going to let us walk out of here?" Donny asked incredulously.

"Yes." Arlo said simply, then added, "These gates and guards aren't here to keep us in, they're here to keep out people who would hurt us. You know, like the people who called you Malchijah."

Donny watched in wonder as Arlo waved at the guard at the gate as they passed.

"So we can just... leave?" Donny asked in wonder.

"That's right, Donny. You haven't been captured, you've been rescued." Arlo said seriously.

"Wow." Donny said in amazement as he looked back at the gate, then thought to ask, "By the way, what is your name?"

Arlo smiled a sunny smile at Donny and said, "Randolph."



## Chapter 10

Two teenage boys, one slightly older than the other, were slowly walking down the side of the road.

The older boy's longish straight brown hair seemed determined to fall across his eyes, causing him to have to brush it away every time the wind blew.

The younger of the two had auburn hair that was shorter and naturally wavy. And regardless of any wind, the hair would steadfastly hold its style.

There was no conversation between them, and yet, they wore matching expressions of serenity and it seemed that they might be thinking the same thoughts.

Those thoughts were not only an appreciation of the unspoiled, natural beauty that surrounded them, but also an appreciation of a more intangible thing... freedom.

A sound in the distance drew their attention and broke them out of their silent reverie.

As the sound grew louder, they saw a very old pickup truck approaching.

When it became obvious that the truck was slowing down, both boys tensed and watched apprehensively.

"Arlo? Are you okay?" Jerico called out as he pulled to the side of the road. "Chief Tecumseh called us and said that you were having trouble of some kind."

"It's okay, Donny. That's Jerico, he's alright." Arlo said assuringly, then ran across the road to the driver's side window.

Donny hesitated for a moment, then followed Arlo.

"Yeah. I'm sorry about that. I had some trouble for a little bit, but it turned out not to be a problem after all." Arlo said happily, then said, "Jerico and Paul, I'd like for you to meet Donny. He just arrived at the camp today."

"It's nice to meet you." Jerico said absently as he looked at Arlo curiously.

"Cool truck. It's a '56, right?" Donny asked with a smile.

"That's right. Most people only know that it's old." Jerico said as he turned his attention to Donny.

"Yeah. Hey, this thing is really sweet. I'd love to have a look under the hood sometime." Donny said with an ear to ear grin.

"Well, I don't see any problem with that. I need to go to the camp and find out why I was called, but after that you could take a good long look at her." Jerico said with a smile.

"That'd be great." Donny said happily.

"Do you guys want a ride back to the camp? If Simon is doing as well as Arlo, then this won't take very long." Jerico said honestly.

"Want to?" Donny asked Arlo hopefully.

"Sure. Why not?" Arlo said with a grin, then walked around to the back of the pickup and climbed in.

Donny smiled happily at Arlo as he eagerly followed.

"Hang on, guys. We'll be there in a minute." Jerico called out before pulling the truck back onto the road.

\* \* \* \* \*

"So why did that guy call you Arlo? I thought you said your name was Randolph." Donny asked curiously.

Arlo shrugged, then said, "I answer to either name."

"So is Arlo for you, like Malchijah is for me?" Donny asked cautiously as they pulled up to the guard shack at the front gate of the camp.

"Sure. I guess you could look at it that way." Arlo answered without concern.

Before they could continue their conversation, the truck started moving again, to travel the short distance to the visitor's parking lot.

\* \* \* \* \*

"There you are. I was beginning to worry." Mr. T said, as Arlo, Donny, Jerico and Paul walked into the classroom.

"I just needed to show Donny something." Arlo said with a grin.

"Yeah. He showed me that this really isn't a prison." Donny said a bit shyly.

Cory looked at Donny with surprise, then at Arlo with an appreciative smile.

"So is there some sort of emergency here that you need me for?" Jerico asked curiously.

"Well, yeah. At least it looked that way at the time." Mr. T said frankly.

"Arlo was having ghost problems." Obie said seriously.

"What kind of problems?" Jerico asked curiously as he turned his full attention on Arlo.

Arlo glanced at Donny, then asked, "Can I have a minute to introduce Donny to the guys before we talk about that?"

"Sure. Go ahead." Jerico said slowly, watching Arlo carefully, trying to pin down just what was different about him.

"Donny, come over here, let's see what the guys are up to." Arlo said cheerfully.

After a glance at Jerico, Donny followed Arlo across the room.

\* \* \* \* \*

"We've been working on the computers, trying to find Obie's brother. He's been missing for about six years." Arlo said as they approached a small group of boys.

"Really? What happened to him?" Donny asked curiously.

"We think that Obie's mother sold him so she could use the money for drugs." Arlo said frankly.

Donny nodded his understanding, obviously having heard of such things happening before.

"How's the search going?" Arlo asked the group cheerfully.

"We've narrowed it down to three guys, well, actually five. But two of them have moved out of the area. So we're trying to figure out a way to go and check out the three locals." Dylan said frankly.

"Why don't you just ask Jerico to drive you over there?" Arlo asked simply.

"Do you think he'd do that?" Simon asked in astonishment.

"He might, if you asked him." Arlo said frankly. "Come on, Obie. Let's ask him now."

Obie broke into a grin, then hurried to Arlo's side.

As they walked away, Donny automatically followed.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Jerico, since everything's fine here, do you think you'd have time to drive Obie into town to check out a couple guys? We think one of them might be his missing brother." Arlo asked as they approached.

"I think I really need to sit down with you and find out what happened today." Jerico said seriously.

"I could drive them." Paul offered quietly.

"Can you drive a standard?" Jerico asked curiously.

"Yeah. Uncle Aubrey showed me how." Paul said quickly.

"Then here you go." Jerico said as he tossed Paul his keys.

"Are you sure about this?" Mr. T asked with concern.

"Hang on just a second." Cory said to Paul, then drew Mr. T aside and motioned for Dylan to join them.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Paul is only sixteen. I really think we should get an adult to drive them." Mr. T said seriously.

"I know you want to protect him, just like you protect all of us. But if you don't give him the chance to do something like this when it comes up, how can he ever prove himself to you and earn your trust?" Cory asked as he looked Mr. T in the eyes.

"Yeah. And what happens when he's eighteen? Are you going to expect him to be able to just walk out into the world and know how things work?" Dylan asked quietly.

"I suppose you're right." Mr. T said reluctantly, then quietly added, "But he's so young."

Cory tilted his head slightly as he looked up at Mr. T with question.

When Mr. T noticed, he chuckled and said, "Sorry, Cory, I forgot who I was talking to."

Cory broke into a grin at the words.

\* \* \* \* \*

Paul knew that Mr. T, Cory and Dylan were talking about him and was poised for disappointment when they broke out of their huddle.

"So, have you decided who's going with you?" Mr. T asked with a smile at Paul.

After a moment of surprise, Paul looked around curiously.

"Well, Obie needs to go, for sure." Dylan said frankly.

"And probably Devon, he has the directions." Simon said thoughtfully.

"That might not be such a good idea. I printed out the addresses of the schools and all the other information that you might need, but someone else would probably be able to get you there a lot better." Devon said apologetically. "Seriously, I get lost really easy."

"I think Donny should go." Arlo said frankly.

"Why?" Dylan asked curiously.

"He really likes Jerico's truck, so I know he'd enjoy going for a ride. It also might be a nice way for him to ease into things here, instead of facing all of it at once. And besides, it'll just be another way to show him that he's not a prisoner here." Arlo said thoughtfully.

Mr. T considered for a moment, then nodded his agreement.

"How are you with directions?" Dylan asked Donny curiously.

"I can find my way around." Donny said hesitantly, having difficulty believing that they were going to trust him to go into town to run an errand for them.

Dylan accepted a handful of printouts from Devon, then handed them over to Donny as he said, "I'm counting on you to guide them where they need to go and bring them back safely."

Donny broke into a smile, then said, "I won't let you down."

\* \* \* \* \*

"How are you feeling, Arlo?" Jerico asked curiously.

After a moment of consideration, Arlo smiled and said, "Alive."

Jerico didn't seem to be at all assured by the answer and looked around at the others before saying, "I need to know *exactly* what happened here this morning."

"I felt something, a ghost, I guess. It seemed like it was going to be a problem, but then it got better. Now it's fine." Arlo said simply.

"I have a feeling that you may be glossing over a few of the facts." Jerico said slowly, then looked around to see if anyone else had anything to contribute.

"He started off feeling it here in the room with us. He said that it was... what were the words he used?" Simon finished with difficulty.

"Diluted. Dissipating." Devon said seriously.

"Yeah. He said it was in here. All around us." Mouse said firmly.

"Okay. A diffuse spirit. So what happened then?" Jerico asked slowly, not taking his eyes off of Arlo.

"Well, then he got really scared. He said that it was going into him and it felt like it was pushing him out." Mouse said seriously.

"In fact, it looked for a minute like it really did push him out. It scared me so bad that I asked Luke to do his talky thing." Dylan said with an apologetic look at Luke for not having a better way to describe his ability.

"Luke, what did you do?" Jerico asked slowly.

"I did what you did to the ghost yesterday. I told it to raise its voice and expose its intent and to come forth now." Luke said carefully.

Jerico closed his eyes as his head slumped down.

"Is something wrong?" Luke asked cautiously.

"So you called the spirit to come into full being while it was *inside* Arlo?" Jerico asked hesitantly.

"Oh... I guess when you put it that way, maybe that wasn't such a good idea." Luke said regretfully.

"I asked him to do it. We were losing Arlo and none of us knew anything else to do for him." Dylan said firmly. "If you're going to be mad at anyone, be mad at me."

"I'm not mad." Jerico said quietly. "I'm just trying to decide how bad things really are."

"I don't think things are bad at all." Arlo said honestly.

"Yeah. But you aren't exactly *yourself* at the moment." Jerico said frankly, then turned to Luke and asked, "You didn't happen to think to 'release' the spirit when you were done talking to him, did you?"

"Oh, um... no. I didn't think of that." Luke said shyly.

Jerico nodded, then said, "I didn't think so."

"How bad is it?" Dylan asked cautiously.

"I'm not sure yet." Jerico said slowly, then looked at Arlo speculatively.

"Would you feel better if Arlo told you that he was okay?" Arlo asked cautiously.

"Yes. Please let me speak to Arlo." Jerico said immediately.

Arlo blinked a few times, then looked around the room curiously.

"Arlo, is that really you?" Jerico asked carefully.

"Yeah. It's me." Arlo said hesitantly.

"How do you feel?" Simon asked quickly.

Arlo looked up at Simon and smiled before saying, "I feel good."

"Really?" Simon asked in a worried tone.

"Yeah. I can't really explain it, but I just feel... right." Arlo said slowly.

"Does that mean that you didn't feel right before?" Jerico asked cautiously.

Arlo considered for a moment before saying, "No. Not for a long time. I just didn't know anything was wrong because it's been that way for so long."

Jerico looked carefully at Arlo, almost like he was looking right through him.

"What's wrong?" Arlo asked cautiously.

"I'm worried about you." Jerico said frankly.

"I wish you could feel what I'm feeling. Then you wouldn't be worried at all." Arlo said seriously. "I can't explain except to say that this is a good thing."

"Arlo. The spirit that's inside you doesn't belong on this plane of existence. He needs to move on." Jerico said quietly.

"He's been trying but the light won't take him. Maybe *this* is why he's been earthbound. Maybe this is what he was meant to do." Arlo said seriously.

"Arlo. This spirit has rooted into you and begun to merge with your consciousness. What's happened to you has a name. It's called possession. You're possessed. I think we may need to do an exorcism to deal with this. We need to cast out the spirit so you can return to being yourself." Jerico said seriously.

"Why?" Arlo demanded, then in a quieter voice he said, "Jerico, you don't seem to understand. When I'm *myself*, I'm like a giant roach motel for ghosts. What happens if you get rid of Randolph, then something evil and nasty moves in to take his place?"

"I wish I could believe that it was really Arlo that I was talking to." Jerico said regretfully.

"You know what? Don't even worry about that right now. Just think this through." Arlo said firmly. "I used to get cold flashes from spirits. Then I could hear whispers. Eventually the whispers were clear enough for me to hear their words. Then, within the last year, I started having the visions, like some funky ghost telepath. And now I'm like some big freaking psychic Hoover sucking up any ghost that gets within twenty feet of me."

Jerico seemed to be considering his words.

"Have you thought that this might be the next step for me? The stronger I get, the more powerfully I draw spirits to me. Maybe *this* is what I've been growing into. Now that I have Randolph, the empty place in me is filled." Arlo said seriously.

"Arlo, you're not thinking clearly right now. You're *literally* not yourself. I know this may seem perfectly reasonable to you, but the spirit... Randolph, has melded with you. He's influencing your mind. Because of that, I'm not going to be able to take your wishes into account in making my decisions."

Arlo turned to face his friends and said, "Guys, can't you see? I'm happy. I'm whole now. I don't want to go back to the way I was."

"The person that you were before, was my best friend." Simon said frankly.

"I'm still your best friend, Simon. I'm everything that I was before but now I'm this too." Arlo said imploringly.

Simon forced himself to look away from Arlo, then he hesitantly asked Jerico, "What are you going to do?"

"I guess I'd better get started. There's an entire book of requirements I have to work through before I can even think about beginning an exorcism." Jerico said with resignation.

"I give up! You talk to him!" Arlo said with exasperation.

Jerico looked at Arlo curiously.

"Good sir, you seem to be firmly set upon this course of action. And by your own words, there is nothing that I can say or do to dissuade you. Am I correct?" Randolph asked cautiously.

"When someone is possessed, there's really only one thing to do about it." Jerico said frankly.

"That being the case, I will vow not to fight you. If you truly wish to be rid of me, I will offer no resistance." Randolph said quietly.

"Oh. Well, thank you." Jerico said with surprise.

"I guess he's right. If you're going to do it no matter what, there's no use fighting it." Arlo said regretfully, then looked Jerico in the eyes as he said, "But if you go through with it, you need to know that I will never trust you again and I will NEVER forgive you."

Before Jerico could respond, Dylan quietly said, "Jerico, I have a question."

"What would you like to know?" Jerico responded absently, not taking his concerned gaze off of Arlo.

"Well, I know that movie probably wasn't what it's really like to do an exorcism, but... it's really dangerous, isn't it? I mean, you can end up killing the person you're trying to save." Dylan said slowly.

"Yes. The ritual can be extremely dangerous." Jerico admitted reluctantly.

"Okay. Stay with me here." Dylan said thoughtfully. "Randolph hasn't really *done* anything to hurt anyone. No spinning head, no pea soup vomit. All he's really done so far is to help Donny and make him feel welcomed here. So maybe before we start doing something that could kill Arlo, we might think about leaving him like he is for now and just keep an eye on him."

"If Arlo starts having trouble later, you can still help him then, right?" Devon asked curiously.

"I don't recall reading of any accounts of someone being possessed by a benevolent spirit so it's true that this may be a special case. And since the ritual is so dangerous... I suppose we can wait and see what happens." Jerico said reluctantly, then turned to Arlo and said, "But if I determine that Arlo is in any kind of danger from you, I will perform an exorcism on you before you know what happened."

"Were I to become aware of such a danger to Arlo, I would come to you myself and ask that you expel me." Randolph said seriously.

"I'm glad we're in agreement about that." Jerico said firmly.

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"How long have you been driving?" Donny asked with a pained expression.

"Four months, but I still need a little practice at driving a standard." Paul admitted reluctantly.

As Donny was about to say something more, Paul shifted up to the next gear and made a horrible grinding sound before the gear finally *:thunked:* into place, rattling the entire truck.

Donny turned quickly to look out the back window.

"What? What are you looking for?" Paul asked quickly as he checked his rear view mirrors.

"The transmission. I thought you might have left it laying back there." Donny said as he slowly turned to face forward.

"Do you want to drive?" Paul asked with irritation.

"Yes." Donny responded immediately, then added more slowly, "But you won't learn anything that way."

"Fine. Well, if you have any suggestions, I'm all ears." Paul said seriously.

"You need to push in the clutch faster when you're going to change gears, and you should try to ease off it more slowly when you're finished. Just hold it a little longer until you get a feel for it." Donny said as he watched Paul's expression carefully.

"Okay. I'll try that." Paul said quietly.

"Where are we going first?" Obie asked curiously.

"I guess we should go for the closest one." Donny said as he looked through the pages.

"Just tell me where to go." Paul said as he tried to keep his nervousness from showing.

"Do you think you're up to a drive on the expressway?" Donny asked as he looked up from the papers.

"I guess there's only one way to find out." Paul said frankly.

"You'll be able to get on in a few miles, hang a right and stay on it all the way into town. We'll be able to get off about a block away from the first school." Donny said in concentration.

"I don't know what we're going to do when we get there." Paul said frankly.

"We'll go see if we can find Amos." Obie said, as if it were obvious.

Paul chuckled, then said, "But I don't know how we're going to do that."

"How do you find anyone? We'll just go in there and ask people until we find him." Obie said seriously.

"Well, I guess since I'm the driver and Donny's the navigator, we'll put you in charge of that." Paul said with a smile.

"There's the on ramp." Donny said as he pointed ahead of them.

"I see it." Paul said seriously.

"Slow down." Donny said carefully.

"Um... yeah." Paul said nervously.

Donny watched Paul cautiously for a moment, then looked at the on ramp approaching quickly.

"Paul... brake." Donny said in a tone of warning.

"I know. I know." Paul said as he accidentally hit the clutch.

"The other brake!" Donny said in panic.

"I got it now." Paul said as he finally depressed the brake.

"Gear down!" Donny barked.

"Yeah. Give me a sec." Paul said frantically.

"In a second we'll be up that Mack truck's ass!" Donny yelled.

"I got it." Paul said with accomplishment as the truck slowed to a more reasonable speed.

"Oh Fuck!" Donny wheezed as he fell back into his seat.

Obie giggled before saying, "Can we do that again?"

"Yeah. Probably." Paul said with a chuckle at Donny's expression.

"Well, we're almost on the expressway, so it should be smooth sailing for a while." Donny said with relief.

"Yeah. I've always wanted to try 'merging'." Paul said as he carefully followed the Mack truck.

He glanced over in time to see Donny's horrified expression.

\* \* \* \* \*

Jerico glanced at Arlo at the computers before walking up to Simon's table and asking, "How are you doing, Simon?"

"I'm fine, I guess." Simon answered hesitantly.

"When Chief Tecumseh called us, he said that you and Arlo were having problems. How are you now?" Jerico asked quietly.

"Oh! I'm fine." Simon said with realization. "It wasn't a really bad one, and Dylan helped me through it."

"A really bad what?" Jerico asked with concern.

"Panic attack." Simon answered simply, then added, "But you don't need to worry about it. Like I said, Dylan helped me through it and besides, I'm already scheduled to see Dr. Dan today."

"The child psychologist." Jerico said slowly, confirming that he remembered correctly.

"Yeah. He's been helping me get over my nightmares and panic attacks and stuff." Simon said casually.

"How's it working?" Jerico asked gently.

"Really good." Simon said with a smile. "In the last couple days I've done things that I thought I might never be able to do again."

"I'm glad to hear that." Jerico said with a gentle smile, then added, "If you can think of anything that I can do to help, please just let me know."

"Sure thing." Simon said with a smile. "If I get hung up on something, I may ask you to do your 'talky thing' to jar it loose."

Jerico looked at Simon with surprise before saying, "You know, that might actually work. I never thought of using it to just give someone a 'nudge' in the right direction."

"If I find myself needing a nudge, I'll give a yell." Simon said with a grin.

"I'll be waiting." Jerico said with a smile before walking away.

\* \* \* \* \*

After arriving at the first school, Obie led the way directly inside and to the office.

Paul and Donny didn't know what approach he was going to use to get the information he wanted, but since neither had a better idea, they were just as happy to go along and see what happened.

As they walked into the office, a rather 'abundant' lady with meticulously styled hair was talking on the phone.

When Obie approached the desk, the woman glanced at him, then held up one finger to indicate, 'just a minute'.

"Talk to the finger." Obie said with a giggle.

After a moment longer on the phone, the woman pointed at the trio, then over to the chairs lining one wall.

"Isn't it wonderful being unworthy of notice?" Donny asked as they walked to take their seats.

"Yeah. I bet if we were adults, she'd at least stop talking long enough to ask us what we wanted." Paul said with a dark look at the woman.

"What are you in for?" Obie asked a boy who had been sitting in the waiting area when they arrived.

"I was late. I overslept." The boy said timidly.

"So they make you go to the office and wait, instead of going to class... yeah. That makes sense." Donny said sarcastically.

"Adam." A man, probably just a little over thirty years old, called as he emerged from the hallway past the desk.

The boy stood and looked up at the man reluctantly.

The man seemed to be about to say something to Adam, then froze as he looked at Obie, Paul and Donny.

"Hold on. All of you." The man barked as he rushed away.

"Who was that?" Obie asked curiously.

"Mr. Hammond. He's the counselor." Adam said as he leaned a little bit to look down the hallway.

The boys exchanged curious glances.

Mr. Hammond reappeared a few seconds later with a magazine in his hands.

He flipped through it, then looked at Donny with wonder.

"I thought so! You're Malchijah!" He said in amazement.

"You never said you were famous." Obie said to Donny with a smile.

"I didn't think I was." Donny said absently, then asked the man, "What is that book?"

"This is a listing from the center for missing and exploited children. I've been seeing you in here for years. You're him, aren't you?" The counselor asked in wonder.

"If I say 'yes', are you going to call the cops or something?" Donny asked slowly.

"No. I won't do that. Please, just come back to my office and talk with me for a minute."

Donny looked at the others and received shrugs that let him know that the decision was his.

"Okay." Donny said slowly.

"Good. Come on, it's right this way." Mr. Hammond said happily.

Donny looked at the others again, to be sure that they wanted to do this, then began to walk down the hallway.

Obie, Paul and Adam followed in turn.

As they reached the office, Mr. Hammond looked at the fourth member of the group and said, "Adam, stop staying up so late and for God's sake, remember to set your alarm clock."

"Yes sir." Adam said shyly.

"Go on. Get to class." Mr. Hammond said with fond exasperation.

They all watched as Adam hurried away.

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"Please sit down." Mr. Hammond said as he gestured to the chairs across from his desk.

"Thank you." Paul said courteously as he took his seat.

"Are you in any trouble?" Mr. Hammond asked as he looked Donny straight in the eyes.

"I don't think so." Donny said hesitantly.

"I just wanted to be sure to ask that first in case there was something urgent going on that I needed to know about." Mr. Hammond said seriously.

"No. I'm actually just along for the ride. It's Obie that you should be talking to." Donny said frankly.

"Okay. But before I address that, Malchijah, I really need to know how you're doing and if you need some kind of help." Mr. Hammond said seriously.

Before Donny could answer, Obie asked, "Have you ever heard of Clan Short?"

"Yes. Of course!" Mr. Hammond answered immediately.

"What about Camp Little Eagle?" Obie asked seriously.

"I should say so." Mr. Hammond said emphatically.

"I live there now." Donny said firmly.

"Oh. That's fantastic. I'm so glad to hear that." Mr. Hammond said with a relieved smile.

"And just so you know, my name is really Donny. Malchijah is the name that the porn guys used for me to keep people from knowing who I really am." Donny said seriously.

"Oh, I'm so sorry, Donny. That was the only name I knew for you." Mr. Hammond said quietly.

"That's alright. I'm not upset, I just thought you'd like to know my real name." Donny said with a smile.

"Thank you, Donny. I appreciate that." Mr. Hammond said sincerely.

"It's good to know that there are people who are keeping a lookout for missing and exploited kids." Paul said frankly.

"It seems like a million to one odds that I'll actually spot any, but considering my job, I've got a better chance than most... I've got to try." Mr. Hammond said quietly.

"Well, what would you think about finding a kid who was sold by his mother so she could buy drugs?" Donny asked seriously.

Mr. Hammond looked at Donny with surprise.

"That's what we're doing here." Donny continued as he matched Mr. Hammond's gaze.

"Is there anything I can do to help?" Mr. Hammond asked hopefully.

"Maybe. We're looking for this kid." Donny said as he placed a printout on the desk, then scooted it toward Mr. Hammond.

"You think Antony is the person you're looking for?" Mr. Hammond asked cautiously.

"He could be. We know they changed Amos' name, but we don't know what they changed it to. We found three boys who still live here in town who are the right age and started school at the right time. This is the first one we're checking on." Obie said anxiously.

"But how will you know if Antony is the one you're looking for?" Mr. Hammond asked cautiously.

"My brother Mike is Amos' twin. If this is my brother, I'll be able to tell just by looking at him." Obie said frankly.

"What are you going to do if it is him?" Mr. Hammond asked slowly.

"Get to know him. Find out if he's doing okay. Let him know that he has brothers who still want him." Obie said quietly.

"Give me a second to see where he is this period." Mr. Hammond said as he started typing on his keyboard.

As he typed, he said, "I'm just going to take you to his classroom and let you see if this is your brother. If it turns out that he is, I'll call him to the office so we can have this discussion privately."

"Thanks for helping us." Obie said with a broad smile.

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"What are you looking at?" Arlo asked hesitantly.

"Are you really you?" Simon asked cautiously.

Arlo rolled his eyes, then said, "Yes Simon. I'm me. I have all my own feelings and memories and everything else that I had before. I just have some extra stuff that comes from Randolph too."

"It's that extra stuff that worries me." Simon said frankly.

"I know." Arlo said with a sigh. "And I can understand that. But try thinking about it this way. All of us have things that we're good at and other things that we don't do so well. Now that I have Randolph, he's kind of filling in and making up for some of my weaknesses."

"But it's our weaknesses that make us who we are." Simon said quietly. "And overcoming our weaknesses is what makes us stronger."

"You're probably right." Arlo conceded, "But I'm not like you, Simon. You've been through hell and now you're rebuilding your life. Every day you're getting better and stronger."

Simon reluctantly nodded his agreement.

"I'm not." Arlo whispered. "Ever since I got here... even before I got here, it's been like I've been on this plateau. And no matter what I do, no matter how hard I work, I'm still the same quiet, timid guy who's too unsure of himself to speak up or take action."

"You've never had a problem talking to me." Simon said frankly.

"That's true, but you're special." Arlo said with a fond smile, then continued more seriously, "But what I did with Donny today, that's a perfect example. Without Randolph, I might have had the idea to take Donny outside the Camp to prove to him that we're not prisoners here, but there's no way I would have acted on it. I probably wouldn't have had the courage to even suggest it to anyone."

"But Randolph gave you the courage to take Donny out of the Camp?" Simon asked slowly.

"Well, honestly, Randolph sort of took my idea and ran with it. I was kind of watching from the background at that point, just trying to figure things out." Arlo admitted shyly.

"He took over?" Simon asked with concern.

"Yes. But only because I let him. It's not like we're fighting each other in here. I had an idea, he thought it was a good one and wanted to go through with it. So I let him. I wouldn't have had the courage to do that, but he just walked over there and did it. And it was an incredible, wonderful feeling."

"How do you mean?" Simon asked curiously.

Arlo thought for a moment, then smiled as he said, "What if I gave you a magical amulet that would let you sleep soundly through the night. As long as you wore it, you would know that you wouldn't have any nightmares and even having the light turned off wouldn't bother you at all. When you woke up that first morning, wouldn't you look back at that night and just feel grateful for getting past something that had been holding you back for so long?"

"Yeah. I guess I would." Simon said thoughtfully.

"Randolph took action when I was too timid. He did the things that I would have done if I weren't so afraid." Arlo said seriously.

"But right now, he's... part of you. It's not like he's in the background. He's right here, mixed into you." Simon said carefully.

Arlo considered for a moment, carefully choosing his words before saying, "Earlier I said that Randolph filled the empty place in me. When he did that, it feels to me like he filled in the parts of me that were missing. Where I was missing courage, he filled it in with his own. So in a way he's here right now because I'm different because of him. But he's not controlling me. Right now he's kind of rummaging through my mind trying to make sense of what's happened in the last 175 years."

"175 years?" Simon asked with surprise.

Arlo nodded and said, "He died in about 1830. He wasn't really aware of the exact date, but I get the feeling that he wasn't in the habit of keeping track of it. I suppose you didn't need to know it as much back then."

"How did he die?" Simon asked quietly.

"It's uncomfortable for him to think about that very much, but from what he shared with me, I think he got a cold that turned to pneumonia. He was delirious at the end, so it's kind of hard to tell for sure." Arlo said thoughtfully.

"I guess I just kind of thought about him as a 'ghost'. You know, like a thing, not a person. This must be really tough for him." Simon said distantly.

"Well, from the way it sounds to me, since he died, everything's been like a dream to him. He hasn't really been aware of the passage of time. So that part wasn't so bad. I think the thing that bothers him the most is that he knows that he died alone. When he was sick, there was no one there to take care of him. When he died, no one cared that he had ever lived."

Simon thought about that for a moment, then gave Arlo a sorrowful look. He couldn't find adequate words to describe what he was feeling.

"How are things going with the Clan guys? Are they all caught up on their work?" Arlo asked, trying to change the subject and sound casual about it.

"Oh, um... I'll ask Dylan. I think he's keeping track of things." Simon said distractedly.

Arlo nodded, then as Simon got up from their table, he noticed Jerico watching him.

His first reaction was to avert his gaze and try to ignore Jerico. But Randolph's influence in him wouldn't allow that.

Not knowing what he was going to say, he got up from his chair and walked over to the Shaman to face what he needed to do, whether it turned out to be conversation or confrontation.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Well?" Donny asked as Obie walked out of the classroom.

Obie's gaze was on the floor as he shook his head sadly.

"It's okay. We still have two more to check out." Paul said as he hugged Obie to his side.

"I'm sorry he wasn't the boy you were looking for." Mr. Hammond said sincerely.

"Well, we'd better get going if we're going to get all three checked out today." Donny said with resignation.

"Would you mind showing me the information for the other two you need to look at?" Mr. Hammond asked hopefully.

"What for?" Obie asked cautiously.

"I have contacts at some of the other schools. I may be able to call ahead and arrange things for you." Mr. Hammond said frankly.

"That'd be great!" Obie said with a grand smile.

"Here you go." Donny said as he handed the paperwork to Mr. Hammond.

After a moment to look it over, Mr. Hammond said, "I should be able to help you out with both of these. And just between you and me, I hope it's this one. Erin Morrison."

"Why is that?" Paul asked curiously.

"Because I met with Erin a few times when I used to work at his elementary school. I can't say that I noticed anything that would indicate that he might have gone through what you described, but... I just think that if he found out that he had brothers who cared for him, it would really mean a lot to him."

"Let's check him out first, then." Donny said seriously.

"If you leave now, you should get there in time for lunch. You'll probably find Erin on the far side of the cafeteria, eating alone." Mr. Hammond said quietly.

"Let's go." Obie said seriously.

"Thanks for all your help." Paul said sincerely.

"It was a pleasure to meet all three of you." Mr. Hammond said with a smile, then added, "And Donny, it's amazing after... I can't even imagine what you've been through, and now you're working to recover a missing child... I think meeting you has restored my faith in humanity."

"Oh! Um, thanks." Donny said with astonishment, before turning to leave.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Are you still thinking about the exorcism?" Arlo asked as he walked to the table where Jerico was sitting.

"No. Actually I was trying to take the explanation you gave me and find some meaning in it."

"How so?" Arlo asked curiously, then gestured to a chair and asked, "May I?"

"Please do." Jerico said with a nod, then continued, "I know it's a fool's game to try and divine the intentions of the great spirit. But usually, in hindsight, things like this make sense. I was just trying to see if I could get some glimmer of reason as to why an earthbound spirit would be bound to you like this. Why him? Why now? Why you?"

Arlo thought for a moment, then quietly asked, "How much do you know about telepaths?"

Jerico was surprised by the question, but answered, "Probably about the same as everyone else. I've never done any in depth research on the subject."

"Humans didn't always have telepaths. How did they come to be?" Arlo asked slowly.

"The popular theory is evolution. They're a step further on the path to what humanity will someday ultimately become." Jerico said slowly.

"What if what I am is something like that?" Arlo asked seriously.

"How do you mean?" Jerico asked curiously, intrigued by the idea.

"It's just something that I've been thinking about, I guess to try and explain why I am like I am." Arlo said introspectively. "But what if I'm a new offshoot of humanity? Another evolutionary experiment? What if the reason I've been drawing ghosts like a beacon is because that's exactly what I'm designed to do? And now that I've found a compatible ghost, we've become a 'joined being' in sort of a symbiotic relationship."

"It's an interesting idea." Jerico admitted reluctantly.

"Like I said, it's just something I've been thinking about. I suppose there isn't any way to prove it either way." Arlo said with a shrug.

"No. But it's worth considering." Jerico said slowly.

"It looks like Simon is waiting for me." Arlo said as he stood.

"I'm going to be here for a while if you want to talk some more." Jerico said as he looked Arlo in the eyes.

"I thought you might be." Arlo said with a grin.

Jerico nodded, then watched as Arlo walked back to the table he was sharing with Simon.

\* \* \* \* \*

"That's him." Obie said as they walked into the large cafeteria.

"How can you tell from all the way over here?" Donny asked slowly.

"Because if I didn't know better, I'd swear to you that that was Mike." Obie said as he walked across the room with purpose.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Do you mind if we sit with you?" Obie asked quietly.

Erin turned with surprise and looked at the three boys with an expression that was nothing short of terror.

"We just want to talk." Paul said gently.

"How about we let Obie talk to him on his own?" Donny asked with concern at Erin's obvious panic.

"Is that okay, Obie?" Paul asked quietly.

"Yeah. Maybe you could get something to eat." Obie said with a smile, then turned his attention back to Erin.

"I see pizza." Donny said with a grin.

"We'll be back in a few minutes." Paul said quickly, then hurried to catch up to Donny.

\* \* \* \* \*

"You're Erin, aren't you?" Obie asked quietly.

The boy stared at Obie for a long moment, then slowly nodded.

"My name is Obie."

"What does it stand for?" Erin asked timidly.

"Huh?" Obie asked in confusion.

"O. B. What does it stand for?" Erin asked curiously.

Obie chuckled and said, "Well, it sort of stands for Obadiah. But everyone calls me Obie."

"Oh." Erin said as he looked down at the table.

"Erin, please don't be afraid of me. I'm not going to hurt you." Obie said quietly.

A quick glance was Erin's only response.

"Look. I came here today just to see you." Obie said seriously.

This time, Erin's glance lasted for nearly two seconds before it fell away.

"I don't know how to tell you this, so I'm just going to say it." Obie said quietly. "About six years ago, me and my brother Mike lost our brother. We were told that he was dead. But in the last couple days I kinda figured out that he might not have died, like we were told. Amos might have been taken away from us and adopted by another family."

Erin's head jerked up suddenly at the name 'Amos' and he stared Obie in the eyes as he quietly asked, "You think I'm him?"

"Yeah. I think so." Obie said seriously.

"Amos... That... That's my dream name." Erin whispered.

"Look. I can't stay here long. And I don't know if you even want to have anything to do with me and Mike. But if you do, me and Mike live at Camp Little Eagle. You can call us or email us or even come and visit." Obie said as he watched carefully for Erin's reaction.

"I could visit Micah?" Erin asked cautiously.

Obie smiled at the question and responded, "Yeah. In fact, if you wanted to, you could come to the camp and have dinner with us tonight."

"Yeah! But... I... I'd have to ask my mom." Erin finished hesitantly.

"Would it be better if I came over to your house and talked to your mom so she'll know that I'm not someone who's creepy and weird?" Obie asked carefully.

Erin thought for a moment, then slowly nodded.

"If you'll write down your address and let me know when to be there, I'll get someone to drive me over." Obie said happily.

Erin nodded, then took a spiral bound notebook out of his backpack.

"And you don't need to worry. I won't say anything to your mom about us being brothers. I'll let you tell her about that when you want her to know." Obie said with a smile.

"Thanks." Erin muttered, then handed Obie the piece of paper with the address.

After reading it over, Obie asked, "What time should I come over?"

"I get home at 3:30. Anytime after that, I guess." Erin said slowly.

"Okay. I'll see you then." Obie said happily.

"Do you really think I'm your brother?" Erin asked timidly, but a slight glimmer of hope found its way into his expression.

"Just wait until you see Mike. You'll think you're looking into a mirror." Obie said with a grin.

Erin stared at Obie with fear and hope vying for control of his expression.

"I'll see you tonight." Obie said, then unable to restrain his joy at finding his lost brother, he leaned in and hugged Erin tightly and gave him a kiss on the cheek.

"FAG!" Sounded from a neighboring table.

Obie turned and found an older boy looking at him with disgust.

"He's my brother, douchebag!" Obie said loudly as he looked the older boy in the eyes.

"So the fag has a faggy little brother." The older boy said with a chuckle.

"Yeah. So what? Are you jealous or something?" Obie asked as he stood, then noticed something flicker in the older boy's expression.

Obie's eyes went wide and he said in a much louder voice, "You ARE! So that's why you're screaming 'fag' at everyone else!"

"Is there a problem, Obie?" Donny asked as he hurried to Obie's side.

"This guy thinks he's big tough shit." Obie said to Donny, then looked the older boy in the eyes and said, "You're nothing. Do you think you're brave because you know how to bully people who are smaller than you? Let me show you brave."

Obie pulled Donny down and gave him a firm kiss that was a bit better than any eight year old should be able to manage.

After an initial moment of surprise, Donny returned the kiss, careful to follow Obie's lead.

As soon as the kiss broke, Obie turned to the bully and said, "You see that? You can't do that. You can NEVER do that. You're not brave enough. You're not man enough. How pathetic are you when a little EIGHT YEAR OLD kid has the balls to do something that you're too much of a coward to do? No, you're going to scream 'fag' at everyone else, then you'll become exactly what everyone expects you to be, because you don't have the courage to be anything else. You'll never be one bit better than you are right now, and I'm here to tell you, right now you're a pathetic piece of shit."

The bully was looking around nervously and could see that EVERYONE in the cafeteria seemed to be watching them.

"But now, everyone here knows the truth. Every time you bully someone smaller than you, they'll know it's because you really want to be kissing them but you're too pathetic and scared." Obie finished with a sneer.

"I think we should be leaving, Obie." Donny said quietly.

"Oh, okay." Obie said with distraction, then turned to Erin and said, "I'll see you tonight."

"Um. Yeah." Erin said in a daze.

"Where's Paul?" Obie asked as he looked around.

"Over there. Acting like he doesn't know us." Donny said with a grin.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Excuse me." A woman said as she hurried to catch up to the trio.

"We're leaving. You don't have to worry about us causing any more trouble." Donny said seriously.

"I just wanted to thank you." The woman said quickly.

"Thank us?" Donny asked with surprise, and stopped just outside the cafeteria to look at her.

"My name is Sylvia Davis and I'm a counselor here at the school." She said with a broad grin.

"It's nice to meet you." Donny said hesitantly.

"Lloyd Hammond called to let me know to expect three special boys to be visiting today at lunch." She said as she tried to restrain her chuckles. "But I was in no way prepared for *that*."

"He was being mean to my brother." Obie said defensively.

"I gathered that. Don't worry, honey. I'm not the least bit angry with you. In fact, I've been at my wits' end, trying to find a way to discourage Myron's bullying behavior. Now it turns out that all Myron needed was for someone to stand up to him. And it just delights me to no end that it was someone who was younger, smaller and a whole lot braver than he is." Sylvia said happily.

"Will you make sure he doesn't hurt Erin, please?" Obie asked hopefully.

"Yes. I'll keep an eye on him, but from the way he looked as you were leaving, I think he's too stunned to do anything, at least not right now." Sylvia said gently, then asked, "So Erin *is* your brother?"

"Yeah. He looks exactly like my brother Mike." Obie said seriously.

"That's wonderful. Lloyd will be so happy to hear that." Sylvia said with a broad smile, then continued, "I'd better get back in there to keep an eye on things, just in case. And I think you three were talking about leaving."

"Yes. Thank you." Paul said quickly.

"No. Thank YOU. You just made my entire semester." Sylvia said, before going back into the cafeteria.

\* \* \* \* \*

"I'm sorry that I kissed you." Obie said quietly to Donny.

"You are?" Donny asked with surprise.

"Well, no. I'm not sorry that I kissed you. But I'm sorry that I kissed you the way I did, you know, in front of everybody and without asking you first." Obie said shyly.

"I know what you mean." Donny said with a smile. "And it's fine. I'm not mad about that."

"Oh, good." Obie said with relief.

"And just so you know... that was a pretty good kiss." Donny said with a grin.

"Yeah?" Obie asked with surprise.

Donny nodded, then said, "And, believe me, I would know. I've done it professionally."

Obie's grin was ear to ear as the trio walked out of the school and toward the parking lot.

\* \* \* \* \*

"What do you think is going to happen to that kid... Myron?" Paul asked cautiously.

"I wouldn't worry about him. He'll be fine." Donny said dismissively.

"Are you sure?" Paul asked cautiously.

"Yeah. I've known quite a few like him." Donny said with resignation. "He'll probably grow up to be a politician or maybe a preacher. That way he can get up in front of people and scream about how 'evil' the gays are. Then when he gets back to his hotel room that night, there'll be someone like me waiting for him..."

"So you used to... um, do that?" Paul asked cautiously, then changed direction slightly when he spotted the truck.

"Well, I never walked the streets. But yeah. The guys who had me, made me earn my keep. Sometimes that meant going on 'dates'." Donny said frankly.

"Well, that ain't gonna happen no more." Obie said firmly. "All you got to do to earn your keep at Camp Little Eagle is help out in the kitchen one day every couple weeks."

"I think I can handle that." Donny said with a grin at Obie.

"So are we ready to go back to the camp?" Paul asked as he took out his keys.

"Wait. Before we do that, I think there's something serious that we need to talk about first." Donny said firmly.

"What's that?" Paul asked cautiously.

"Have you ever heard of 'double clutching'?"

## Chapter 11

"Well, if I've learned anything today, it's not to mess with Obie." Paul said with a grin at the younger boy before turning his full attention back toward the road.

"You don't get it." Obie said with an exasperated shake of his head, then turned to Donny and said, "What he should have learned is not to mess with my brothers."

Donny smiled and nodded his agreement to Obie's statement.

The rest of the ride back to the camp was quiet except for the occasional suggestion from Donny to help Paul become more comfortable with driving.

Once they entered the camp compound, Donny asked, "Where should we go first?"

"I just changed cabins, so I don't know. The cabin one guys have class with Mr. T in the morning, but since it's after lunch, they're in their next class by now. I guess we should check in with Mr. T in his classroom and he can tell us where we need to go." Obie said thoughtfully.

"I probably need to see if Jerico needs me to do anything. We might be moving here today." Paul added seriously.

"So it's your first day here, too?" Donny asked curiously.

"Yeah. They offered Jerico a job here last night and they said that I could move here with him." Paul said happily.

"That sounds great. Just let me know if you need any help with your moving. I mean, I don't know what they're going to have me doing the rest of the day, but if I'm free, I'll be happy to help you." Donny said honestly.

"Yeah. Okay. As soon as I find out what's going on, I'll let Jerico know that we have someone who'll help us." Paul said happily.

Obie walked ahead of the group and opened the door to Mr. T's classroom and held it so the older boys could precede him into the room.

\* \* \* \* \*

"How did everything go?" Mr. T asked as he walked away from the front of the classroom to greet the boys.

"I found my brother." Obie said happily.

"Really? That's wonderful, Obie! I'm so glad that worked out for you." Mr. T said with an honest smile.

"I was wondering if someone could drive me over to Amos' house this afternoon at about four? I asked him to come over here so he could meet Mike, but he thought that it'd be good if I met his parents and they could see that I wasn't some nutjob or pervert or something like that who was going to hurt Amos." Obie said frankly.

Mr. T chuckled at the statement, then said, "Just remind me a little bit before you need to go and I'll find someone to drive you. Did you guys have a chance to get anything to eat?"

"No. Almost, but we never made it to the front of the serving line." Paul said, then looked at Donny uncertainly, not knowing how much detail he should share about their adventure.

"Then why don't you three go over to the cafeteria and let Mrs. Birch know that you were out running an errand while lunch was being served. I'm sure that she'll take very good care of you." Mr. T said warmly.

"I'll show you where it is!" Obie said happily and led the way out of the classroom.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Mrs. Birch. We were outside the camp doing stuff when you served lunch. Is there anything for us to eat?" Obie asked hopefully as Donny and Paul stood back and waited for her reaction.

"Well, that explains it. I was wondering why we had so many leftovers today." Mrs. Birch said with a teasing smile directed at Obie, then said to the boys, "Why don't you two have a seat in the dining room. Obie can help me fix some plates for you."

Paul nodded, then quietly said to Donny, "This way."

\* \* \* \* \*

As soon as they were seated, Paul quietly asked, "How are you doing?"

Donny looked at Paul with question.

"You know, being in a new place, around new people, away from everything that's familiar... Are you okay?" Paul asked quietly.

Donny smiled, then said, "I've never had a home. I was always moving. Different cities, different countries, and there was never anyone in my life who was with me for very long, you know, like parents and stuff. I was handed off and passed around to whoever could make the best use of me. I was even lost in a poker game, once."

Paul looked at Donny in wonder, not able to imagine living that way.

"So, to answer your question, yeah. I'm doing fine. Being in a new place with new people isn't anything unusual for me. The only thing that I feel like I might have a problem with is that I don't know what I'm going to do. I mean, before, I always knew what was expected of me. Here, I don't have a clue." Donny said frankly.

"I don't know either. But I guess we can figure it out together." Paul said timidly.

"Here. Our food is heating up right now, so I brought us some water to drink." Obie said as he walked to the table with a pitcher and three glasses. "Can you guys pour the water while I get our food?"

"Sure. Thanks Obie." Paul said with a smile.

Obie responded with a quick smile, then dashed away.

"He's a good kid." Paul said, then started pouring their water.

"Yeah." Donny said distantly, and seemed to be disturbed.

"What's wrong?" Paul asked curiously.

Donny gave a slight shrug, then said, "I've known a lot of kids like Obie and, well, because of what I used to have to do, I had sex with them. And not all of them wanted to."

Paul looked at Donny with wide eyes of surprise.

When Donny noticed, he quickly said, "I didn't rape them... well, not really. But it's more like I talked them into it."

"Why?" Paul asked cautiously.

"Because I knew what would happen to them if they didn't go along with it. We were there to make money for the men who kept us. If we refused to do what they told us, they might not feed us, or they might beat us, or... it doesn't matter. What I'm trying to say is that when I look at Obie, I see those kids. I remember how they were when they were new and how the light would eventually go out of their eyes." Donny finished quietly.

"How did you get away from them?" Paul asked curiously.

Donny smiled, then said, "A couple days ago, just, all of a sudden, the cops stormed the place where I was staying. From what I heard later at the police station, some kids, the clan, I guess, saw some Internet porn and they were somehow able to track down where it was filmed and they tipped off the cops. I wasn't actually doing anything, you know, like porn stuff, when the cops showed up. But they knew who I was and... I guess it's my mind playing tricks on me, but it seemed like they were there just for me.... to rescue me."

"Maybe they were." Paul said frankly.

"So, anyway, after they got me out of there, they took me down to the station and asked me a bazillion questions, but it wasn't like it is on TV. They were nice about it and didn't try to bully me or scare me or anything like that." Donny said distantly, then reluctantly added, "After that I spent a couple nights at the CPS place. It was like my worst nightmare was coming true and there wasn't anything I could do about it."

Paul nodded that he understood.

"Anyway, first thing this morning, a couple of the detectives took me down to see the judge. I got a little bit freaked out when he wanted for me to go with him into his chambers, but it's not like it sounds. It's just an office. We sat down and talked for a little bit, you know, just talked like friends. He was really nice. Then, when we were done talking, he said that since I didn't have any relatives to stay with, that he was going to send me here." Donny finished with a downcast look.

"I'm guessing from your expression that you didn't want to go." Paul said slowly.

Donny shook his head and said, "Well, I'd never heard of this place before, so the first thing that I thought was that it was either a group home or a prison. I mean, there's no place *nice* for

a homeless teenager to go. I just figured that after that shithole CPS dungeon, the place he was sending me had to be like hell on earth."

"Makes sense." Paul said with a nod.

"Really?" Donny asked with surprise.

"Yeah. I don't know a lot about it, but if you weren't sent here, then it'd probably be like you said. You just lucked out." Paul said simply.

"Yeah. It looks like I did." Donny said as he looked around the cafeteria, then added, "When I got here, I was really planning on hating it. These guys, Cory and Sean tried to talk to me, but I wouldn't believe them. I was sure I was right."

"So, what changed your mind?" Paul asked curiously.

"Being able to leave the camp." Donny said frankly, then smiled as he continued, "We just... walked out. The guard at the gate waved at us and watched us go. Then, a few minutes later, you guys drove up."

"Oh! So that's what you were doing walking along the road in the middle of nowhere." Paul said with a smile.

"I've never felt anything like that before. For the first time in my life, I felt... free." Donny said with a smile.

"I hope you're hungry." Obie said as he walked into the dining room carrying a tray filled with plates.

Donny and Paul gave identical nods as they waited to see what Obie had brought for them.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Thanks Obie, this looks good." Paul said as he accepted his plate.

"Yeah, thanks." Donny said gratefully.

"I didn't even think about being hungry. I was too excited about finding Amos." Obie said as he put his plate on the table, then sat the tray aside.

"Are you nervous about meeting Amos' parents?" Paul asked curiously.

Obie chewed his food, then swallowed before answering, "A little

bit. I mean, they might not like me because I don't have a mom and dad and maybe because of that they'll think bad stuff about me and that I might get Amos into trouble."

"I don't think that will be a problem. Just be yourself when you're with them and they'll be able to see that you'd never hurt Amos." Donny said frankly.

"I guess. But I'm still afraid that they might be mean to me because they might think that I'm there to try to take Amos away from them." Obie said quietly.

"Are you?" Paul asked seriously.

Obie looked at Paul with surprise.

"Are you going to try to get Amos to move away from his parents so he can live here with you and your brother?" Paul asked reasonably.

"No! I just want for Amos to get to know me and Mike, so he'll know that he has family, you know, blood family, who wants him." Obie said quickly.

"Then, tell them that." Paul said simply.

Obie was silent as he thought for a moment, then he slowly said, "Yeah. If they know that I'm not trying to take him away from them, then maybe they won't be scared of letting Amos come over and visit me and Mike sometimes."

"It's worth a try." Paul said frankly.

"Gentlemen, would you mind if I interrupt your meal for a moment?" A man asked as he approached.

"No. That's fine." Donny said cautiously as he looked up at the man.

"I'm Dan Richardson, the kids call me Dr. Dan. Is one of you Donny?" He asked as he looked between Donny and Paul.

"I am." Donny said slowly.

Dan recognized the cautious response, and said, "Chief Tecumseh said that you're going to be moving into cabin seven today, just as soon as it's finished."

Donny hesitantly nodded.

"I have someone else who might be moving in there today. I wanted to talk to you for a few minutes to get to know you before I finalize the arrangements." Dan said carefully.

"Donny's nice. You don't have to worry about him." Obie said firmly.

Dan looked warmly at Obie's defense of Donny, then said, "I'm sure he *is* nice. But sometimes nice people have things that they strongly believe. When they're put in a situation where they're with people who believe differently, even very nice people can sometimes react badly."

"What is it that you're worried about? I don't believe in anything... or anyone, for that matter." Donny said frankly.

"I'm sorry to hear that." Dan said quietly, then added, "The resident, Ronny is his name, is in a place in his life where he's especially fragile. He's taking some really big steps right now and I'd like to do whatever I can to ease the way for him until he can become a little bit more self assured."

"Dr. Dan, I've been living as a whore for over five years. I don't know what this new guy has going on with him, but I can't think of any disgusting thing that anyone could possibly do that I haven't already done. So whatever this guy's problem is, I'm not going to judge him for it." Donny said frankly.

"Thank you, Donny." Dan said with a smile, then added, "But all I'm asking is that if you have a problem, if you can't handle it, don't go off on Ronny about it. Come find me and talk it out with me."

Donny was about to agree, then stopped to consider for a moment. Finally, he said, "Yeah. Okay."

"If you guys wouldn't mind waiting here for a couple minutes, I'll bring him in here to meet you." Dan said hopefully.

"We'll be right here." Paul said with a smile.

Dan looked relieved as he hurried away from the table.

\* \* \* \* \*

All three boys turned their attention back to their food as they each thought about what might be the new boy's problem.

"It can't be that he's gay. About half the guys here are gay, so that wouldn't be a big deal to anyone." Obie said speculatively.

"Yeah. And I know that some of the guys are like you, Donny. They had pictures and videos and stuff done of them. So, if that's his problem, there's lots of guys here who would understand." Paul added quietly.

Donny thought about Simon and Uri and slowly nodded his agreement.

"So, whatever it is, it can't be that bad." Obie said with certainty.

"Maybe not to you, but to someone who's new, it could be a very big deal." Donny said thoughtfully.

"What about you, Donny? You're new. Is there anything like that that you're having problems with?" Obie asked curiously, then quickly added, "So we won't, you know, like, talk about it around other people and stuff."

"The whole thing bugs me a little bit. I know in my head that I didn't have any other choice and that there are other guys who went through the same thing or worse. But I still feel like, maybe, I'm not as good as some people, because of it." Donny quietly admitted.

"That sounds like something that you're just going to have to live with. But since no one else around here is worried about it, you should be able to eventually accept that it is what it is." Paul said as he looked Donny in the eyes.

Donny slowly nodded, then said, "Yeah. And since I haven't done much of that for the past year or so, it isn't so fresh that it should bug me too much."

"What have you been doing for the past year?" Paul asked curiously.

"Actually, I've been doing some legitimate modeling. I was getting too old for the kiddie porn thing and I was still too young for legitimate porn, so someone got the idea of spreading around some of my pictures to different modeling agencies and I ended up getting a few jobs." Donny said with a slight smile, then noticed that he had finished all of his food.

"Are you guys still hungry? I can get us some more to eat if you are." Obie asked as he stood to start gathering their empty

plates.

"No. I'm fine, but that food was really good." Donny said gratefully.

"Yeah. I can't get over what good food they have here. My mom is a good cook, but this is better." Paul said with a smile.

"Wait. If you have a mom, what are you doing here?" Donny asked curiously as Obie carried their dishes away.

"You remember me saying that my cousin got a job here?" Paul asked seriously.

"Yeah." Donny said with a nod.

"I'm going to be living with him so I can help him out." Paul said happily.

"What will you be doing?" Donny asked curiously.

"I'm not sure, yet. Just helping him." Paul said simply.

Before Donny could think of what to say to that, he heard someone walking into the room.

"Ronny, here are the guys that I'd like for you to meet." Dr. Dan said pleasantly as they approached the table.

"Wait! Don't start without me!" Obie called as he scampered into the room.

Dan smiled and waited patiently for Obie to join them, then said, "Ronny, this is Obie and Donny. I don't think I've been introduced to this other young man."

"I'm Paul. I'm going to be living here soon." Paul said as he stood to offer his hand to Ronny.

"It's nice to meet you." Ronny said shyly.

All three boys froze at the sound of Ronny's voice.

"You're a girl!" Obie said with surprise.

Ronny looked like a perfectly normal teenage boy, perhaps a bit stout, but not in any way feminine. However, the sound of his voice was definitely not that of a teenage boy.

"Ronny has spent his entire life knowing that he's a boy, but living

in a female body." Dr. Dan explained carefully.

Obie looked from Ronny to Dan with confusion as he tried to make sense of what Dan was saying.

"Today, Ronny is going to take his first step to see if the reality of being a boy lives up to his expectations." Dan said as he watched Paul and especially Donny's reactions carefully.

After an uncomfortable moment of silence, Donny finally said, "Okay, I think I get that. So what is it you want me to do?"

Ronny looked uncomfortable with the question as Dan answered, "First of all, I want to know if you can accept Ronny the way he is. If you can, then I'd like to know if you'd be willing to help him out a little bit until he adjusts to his new life."

"That's it?" Donny asked with surprise.

"That's it." Dan confirmed.

"Of course I'll help him. You didn't even need to ask." Donny said a little bit indignantly.

"Well, good." Dan said with a smile, then added, "I'll be around all day. So if you need me for anything, just call the office and they can get in touch with me."

"What about my stuff?" Ronny asked quickly.

"All your things are in the admin building. You'll be able to move them to your new cabin just as soon as the workmen are finished. They should be done with it sometime in the next hour or two." Dan said with a smile.

"My stuff is there too." Donny said casually to Ronny.

"If there's nothing else, I'll leave you guys to it." Dan said cheerfully.

"Wait! Do you know where we're supposed to go next?" Donny asked quickly.

"No one told you?" Dan asked with surprise.

Donny hesitantly shook his head.

"I know that Obie should be going to Science class, but no one mentioned anything to me about the rest of you. Since Derek, I mean, Mr. T is going to be in charge of your cabin, he's the one

coordinating everything. Do you know where his classroom is?" Dan asked cautiously.

Ronny shook his head, but Donny answered, "Yes. I've been there twice today."

"Meet with him and he'll take good care of you." Dan said assuringly, then left the room.

\* \* \* \* \*

"I have to go to my next class." Obie said regretfully as the group walked toward the door.

"Don't worry about it, Obie. We'll be fine. Just focus on what you're going to do when you get to see your brother again." Donny said with a smile.

"Yeah!" Obie said happily.

"We'll see you later." Donny said as they walked outside.

"Yeah! And remember that I'll be in cabin one if you guys need me for anything." Obie said quickly before taking off across the camp toward one of the classrooms.

"What about you, Paul? Do you have something else that you need to be doing right now?" Donny asked curiously.

"I don't know. I'll have to catch up with Jerico and see what's going on." Paul said honestly.

"That's the guy who was driving the truck, your cousin, right?" Donny asked slowly.

"Yeah. When you met us, we were coming to the camp to help with an emergency... that turned out not to be much of an emergency after all. But anyway, we're supposed to be moving in here sometime soon." Paul said frankly.

"That's where we're going." Donny said to Ronny as he pointed at the classroom ahead of them.

Ronny nodded and seemed to be deep in thought.

"If you two are moving into a new cabin, does that mean that you're going to be roommates?" Paul asked curiously.

"I don't know how they do things here. There could be a dozen of us all bunking down in one big room." Donny said frankly.

"In cabin one, they sleep two to a room." Paul said quickly.

"That's how they do it in the girls' cabins, too." Ronny said casually.

After a long moment of silence, Donny asked, "So you've been here for a while, living as a girl?"

"More like, living *with* the girls." Ronny said with a grimace, then added, "Let's just say, I didn't fit in."

"Okay, I get that." Donny said with a grin.

Paul was chuckling and nodding his agreement as they opened the classroom door.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Oh good. I'm glad you're back." Mr. T said as he motioned for the boys to come to the front of the room.

"Ronny, I'm Derek Tecumseh, my students call me Mr. T. And, before you ask, the answer is 'yes', Chief Tecumseh *is* my father." Mr. T said pleasantly.

"It's nice to meet you." Ronny said cautiously.

"Boys, I'd like for all of you to meet Mrs. Morrow. By some great luck, we were able to entice her away from her job as a college professor to take on the challenge of being a teacher, here at the camp." Mr. T said as he indicated the woman standing to greet them.

"Luck and the fact that my Father-In-Law pointed out that this would be an ideal way for me to be able to take a step back from my career for a while and start a family without giving up my first love, which is teaching." She said warmly as she looked at the boys.

"Cynthia, I'd like to introduce you to Ronny, Donny and my nephew, Paul. All three of them will be starting classes next week." Mr. T said pleasantly.

"It's a pleasure to meet all of you." Mrs. Morrow said with a gentle smile.

"Yeah. Same here." Donny said for all of them, then added, "Maybe we'll be in one of your classes."

"Mrs. Morrow has been hired to work with only one student. Since he needs some special attention, we found the best possible person who could provide for his needs." Mr. T said seriously.

"You hired a teacher for just one student?" Paul asked with surprise.

"We do whatever it takes to see that our students have whatever they need to succeed. We would hire a teacher to work one-on-one with each of you if that turned out to be the kind of help that you needed." Mr. T said frankly.

"Well, even if we aren't going to have you for a teacher, it's still nice to meet you." Donny said to Mrs. Morrow sincerely.

"Yes. For me as well." Mrs. Morrow said warmly.

"Now, boys." Mr. T said, as he turned his full attention to them, "I was just told a few minutes ago that the workers are finished with your cabin. It's still going to be a while before you can move in. They're going to be putting in furniture and linens and all the other things you'll be needing. While they're doing that, I thought you could sit over here with Dylan and do a little testing?"

"Testing?" Donny asked with sudden anxiety.

"Yes. We just want to determine your grade level in the various subjects, so we'll know what to start with on Monday when you start classes." Mr. T said pleasantly.

"I haven't been to school for a, um, kind of a long time." Donny said reluctantly.

"Donny, look around this classroom. All the students are different ages and at different scholastic levels. These tests will help us determine your grade level so we can pick up with your studies where you left off. No matter where you end up on the academic scale, there are sure to be some students who will be able to work with you at your own level and a teacher dedicated to teaching you just what you need to know." Mr. T said honestly.

Donny thought about the words and finally nodded.

"Paul, the same goes for you." Mr. T said simply.

"Um, I really need to talk to Jerico to see what he has planned before I start on anything else."

"I already talked to him about this. Besides, he's busy talking with father, finalizing the arrangements for you two to move here and they might be a while." Mr. T said honestly.

"What should I do?" Ronny asked cautiously.

"You have a choice. You can either start back to work where you left off on your studies yesterday, *or*... you could take the placement test again and possibly improve your standing. Who knows? Maybe, if you try, you'll be able to test out of a few of your least favorite things." Mr. T said with a smile.

Ronny looked at Mr. T with surprise, then quickly nodded his agreement.

"Have a seat and I'll get you some testing materials. Just answer the questions that you know the answers to. Don't guess. There's no pass or fail. This is to show us what you know, so we can teach you what you don't know." Mr. T said with a gesture toward a table where one boy was already seated.

Ronny, Donny and Paul walked to the table and took seats.

"Don't worry about running out of time. You'll be doing more testing tomorrow, so go at your own pace. As soon as your cabin is ready, I'll stop the testing so you can go and see it." Mr. T finished with a smile.

"Don't worry, guys. It's not too bad." The bandaged boy said as he looked up from his test papers.

"Are you ready for a break, Dylan? You've been at it for a while." Mr. T asked with concern.

"Yeah. I feel like I'm starting to go cross-eyed, and that's something since I've only got the one." Dylan said with a smirk.

"Then why don't you take a breather while these guys wait for their test materials to arrive." Mr. T said casually.

"Yeah. Thanks." Dylan said gratefully as he sat up, then looked at Donny and Paul and asked, "So, how is the search for Obie's brother going?"

"Fine. Obie found him." Paul said frankly.

"Really?" Dylan asked with surprise.

"Yeah. He was at the second school we tried." Donny said with a

grin at Dylan's disbelief, then noticed that Ronny seemed to be feeling left out.

"I'm sorry, I forgot to introduce you. Dylan, this is Ronny. He's going to be moving into cabin seven with me as soon as it's ready. Ronny, this is Dylan, I met him this morning just after I got here." Donny said somewhat formally.

"Nice to meet you. I got here yesterday. That's why I'm doing the testing." Dylan said frankly.

Ronny nodded his understanding.

Before their conversation could continue, Mr. T turned to his companion and asked, "Cynthia, would you mind helping me gather the test materials for the boys so we can get back to our talk?"

\* \* \* \* \*

"How are you doing?" Simon asked with concern.

Arlo broke out of his thoughts for a moment, then gave Simon a weak smile before saying, "I'm really fine. Randolph just needs to learn so much that it's kind of overwhelming."

"Do you need for me to get Jerico?" Simon asked with concern.

"No. It's nothing like that." Arlo assured him. "It's just that everything that I've grown up with and that seems so normal to me is all completely new to Randolph. I know that he's doing his best not to distract me, but until he can get a handle on how things work in the twenty-first century, he needs for me to explain things for a while."

After a long, contemplative moment, Simon quietly asked, "You're really at peace with this, aren't you?"

"Yeah. I really am." Arlo said as he looked deeply into Simon's eyes to convey his sincerity.

"Okay. I'll try to ease up on you about it. I was just worried that something was happening to you that was going to hurt you." Simon said as he held Arlo's gaze.

"It might have been bad if the spirit was someone besides Randolph. But he's really okay, I promise. All he wants to do is live and grow and make some kind of contribution to the world.

"We figure that he and I can manage to do that together." Arlo finished with a smile.

"I don't mean to sound cold, and it's nothing against Randolph personally, but he had his chance. He lived, he died, and now he should move on." Simon said frankly.

"He can't. He's tried." Arlo said simply, then added, "Maybe this is why he's been bound to the earthly plane. He's trapped here because he's not finished, he still has something left to do."

"Then I guess we'd better help him do it, so he can move on." Simon said in a resigned tone.

"Thanks for trying to accept this, Simon. What you think of me matters to me a lot." Arlo said sincerely.

Simon smiled at the words and nodded.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Hey Paul, how are you doing?" Jerico asked as he walked into the classroom.

"I'm fine. I was just taking some tests so when I start school here, they'll know what to teach me." Paul said happily as he looked up from his test papers.

"Good. I just finished talking with Uncle Hawkeye, and he said that we can start moving in here as soon as Uncle Derek is done moving out of his cabin." Jerico said with a smile.

"So we're still moving into cabin one?" Paul asked to be sure.

"Yes. We talked about it and it seems like it's going to work out best for everyone like this. Uncle Derek has experience with helping new people, so it makes sense for him to move to cabin seven. The cabin one guys have been around for a while, so that'll give us a chance to learn our way around and get settled in, ourselves." Jerico said thoughtfully.

"After meeting the guys last night, I think I'm going to like it there." Paul said with a grand smile.

Jerico watched Paul's expression for a moment, then quietly said, "I have a feeling that it's going to be good for both of us."

"Gentlemen, I've just received word that the cabin is nearly done." Mr. T said as he approached the table.

"Do you want us to finish this?" Dylan asked as he indicated his test papers.

"No. Just set them aside and you can work on them tomorrow. Right now, why don't we all go over and look at cabin seven so Ronny and Donny can start moving in? And after we're done getting the guys settled in, Dylan can go to the admin building to meet with Dr. Dan." Mr. T said seriously, directing his last statement at Dylan.

"Why does he want to meet with me?" Dylan asked cautiously.

"Just to get an idea of your needs so he can present you with some choices." Mr. T said evasively.

Dylan looked at Mr. T expectantly, silently demanding a more satisfactory answer.

"Dylan, you've been through a lot in your life. There are undoubtedly things that you'll need to work through. So Dan would like to talk to you for a few minutes to get an idea of what your needs are, then he'll offer you a few choices about how you might go about getting those needs met." Mr. T said carefully.

"So, it's like, therapy." Dylan asked slowly.

"More like a very basic evaluation." Mr. T said frankly, then continued, "But it's nothing to be worried about. Like I said, he's going to present you with choices. You won't *have* to do anything. If you'll just go along with it for now and try to keep an open mind, he might come up with something that will be of help to you."

After a moment of thought, Dylan finally reluctantly nodded.

"Come on, the new cabin awaits!" Mr. T said happily, now directing his words to everyone at the table.

\* \* \* \* \*

As Arlo and Simon walked out of their first afternoon class to move to the second, they spotted a younger boy sitting against the wall outside the classroom door, hugging his knees and crying.

"What's wrong, Max?" Simon asked as he knelt by the distraught boy's side.

Arlo stared at the boy and was trying to understand what he was seeing.

"I don't want to be here." the boy, Max, mumbled.

"What's wrong? Just tell me what I can do to help." Simon said gently.

*"Stop being such a little crybaby! I raised you better than this!"* A vague cloud of energy screamed from Max's side.

"I miss my brother." Max said before breaking down into fresh tears.

*"I'm dead! Whimpering and crying ain't gonna bring me back. Now suck it up and be a man!"* the spirit said sourly.

"He can't hear you." Arlo said quietly.

Simon looked up at Arlo with question, then down at Max who was lost in his despair.

"Max is grieving. I'm sorry if that makes you angry, but it just means that he loves you." Arlo said as the cloud of energy started to take on a Human form.

*"Yeah. I get that. And I know that he loves me. After our parents died, it was just me and him. We're all we had. But he has to let go. Just because I died, doesn't mean that he should stop living, too."* The spirit said, now looking like a hazy, transparent young man.

"Who are you talking to?" Simon asked as he looked at Arlo curiously.

"Max's brother." Arlo said simply.

Max looked up at Arlo suddenly with tears running down his cheeks.

"Max can't hear what you're saying, but I think that he can feel your anger and frustration with him. That's just adding fuel to the fire of his depression." Arlo said carefully.

*"Can you please help him to understand? He needs to let go of me. I'm gone and he's in a good place where he has everything he needs to make a wonderful life for himself. But he's not going to achieve anything if he stays focused on what he's lost."* The spirit begged.

"Is my brother really here? Can I talk to him?" Max asked hopefully.

Arlo was about to respond, when a voice spoke to him internally.

After a long moment of contemplation, Arlo finally said, "Max, I've never done this before, so it may not work. But I'm going to try to make it possible for your brother to speak through me so you can hear him."

Max's face lit up with joy, then he looked to the seemingly empty space that Arlo had been talking to.

"If there's something you want to tell your brother, you can do it through me. There is a spirit here, his name is Randolph. He'll show you how." Arlo said calmly to the spirit only he could see.

Arlo closed his eyes and seemed to be concentrating.

Simon and Max watched and waited with anticipation, not knowing what to expect.

"Max. I love you, you little monster." A stronger and older voice said from Arlo's mouth.

"Wayne?" Max said in wonder.

"Yeah. Now listen up, Maxie. Cause I'm only going to tell you this once. I'm dead. I did everything that I was supposed to on this Earth, and now I've been called home. You're alive, you've still got stuff to do here. So stop whining and crying and start living. The sooner you start living your life and getting your stuff done, the sooner you'll get it all finished and you'll be able to join me." Wayne said firmly.

"But I miss you!" Max whined.

"I know, and I miss you, too." Wayne said in a softer voice, then added, "But I won't be able to move on until you let go. Little bro, you're keeping me out of heaven."

Max looked into Arlo's eyes with a mix of astonishment and horror.

"I'll always be watching over you, Maxie. But please, if you love me at all, please let me go." Wayne begged.

"I... I'll try. But I'm so alone." Max whispered.

"Yeah, but whose fault is that? Everyone in this place has been trying to help you, but you keep pushing them away. Listen to me Max, these are good people. They'll help you if you'll let them." Wayne said seriously.

"Okay." Max said reluctantly.

"This Randolph guy is telling me that I need to give Arlo his body back, so just remember what I said. You've got stuff to do. Get to it." Wayne said firmly.

"I will." Max muttered.

"Give me a hug, you little monster." Wayne said affectionately as he opened his arms.

Max launched himself into Wayne's arms and hugged him desperately.

"I'll be watching from the other side. Make me proud." Wayne whispered as he returned the hug.

"I will." Max promised.

"Laterz." Wayne said quickly, then Arlo's arms suddenly went slack.

"Wayne?" Max asked in panic as he backed away from Arlo and saw no expression on his face.

"Arlo, are you alright?" Simon asked as he moved closer to Arlo's side, to catch him in case he fell.

"The experience of allowing the ghost to speak through him has caused Arlo to become fatigued. Please, be assured that he is well. He simply needs to rest for a time."

"Randolph?" Simon asked hesitantly as he moved back a step.

"Yes. Arlo has receded and I will continue on in his place until he is rested." Randolph said properly.

"But if channeling that other spirit made him that tired, won't the same thing happen with you?" Simon asked curiously.

"No. Arlo and I share our essence, our energy. My presence does not diminish him. But allowing the foreign energy to flow through him was taxing on him." Randolph said seriously, then quietly added, "Arlo wishes to tell you something."

Simon looked at Randolph with surprise, then quickly nodded.

"I'm okay. Really. I just need to rest for a little bit. Will you help Randolph to cover for me in class so no one notices that I'm not really there?" Arlo asked in a small voice.

"Yeah. Go rest, buddy. Randolph and I will handle it." Simon said with a smile at his friend.

"Thank you." Arlo whispered, then his facial expression went blank.

Simon looked down at Max, who was watching everything with wonder. Finally he asked, "How are you doing, Max?"

The boy looked up at Simon, then at Arlo again before saying, "I don't know... but I'm late for class."

"What class are you supposed to be in right now?" Simon asked curiously.

"Mrs. Walking Eagle's math." Max said with a crinkled nose.

"I'll walk you to class and explain to her why you were late. You won't get into any trouble." Simon said assuringly.

Max blinked at him, then stammered with surprise, "Thanks."

Simon smiled, then gestured for Max and Arlo to walk with him.

"Who is Randolph?" Max asked Simon curiously.

"Why don't you ask him?" Simon said with a smile at the younger boy.

Max cautiously looked up at Arlo and quietly asked, "Are you a ghost, like my brother?"

Randolph seemed to be considering the question, then finally said, "Yes and no. Like your brother, I was once alive and am now dead. But unlike him, I didn't have anyone in the world of the living who I loved, or, in fact, who loved me."

"Then why are you still here?" Max asked curiously.

"Although I cannot be sure, I believe it is because there are still things here, on the earthly plane, that I am meant to do." Randolph said carefully.

"Things? Like what?" Max asked curiously.

"Perhaps, things like helping Arlo to help you and your brother." Randolph said seriously.

Before they could discuss it any further, they had arrived at Max's classroom.

"I'll be right back." Simon said to Randolph, then walked into the classroom with Max.

Randolph looked down at his 'flesh and blood' hands, then around at the beautiful surroundings of the camp. He was overwhelmed by a feeling of serenity that he hadn't known in all his life... or since.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Wow. This is nice!" Donny said when the group walked into the main room of the cabin.

"It's bigger than the girl's cabins." Ronny said as he looked around curiously.

"They've updated the design with each new set of buildings, taking into account what the people thought of the previous design. I guess someone thought that they needed more space in the common room." Mr. T said as he walked around slowly.

"Look at this view!" Dylan said with a smile as he looked out the picture window.

"Most of the cabins are situated to afford the best..." Mr. T started to say, then said in astonishment, "That view is breathtaking."

Jerico and Paul walked up on the left as Ronny and Donny walked up on the right.

"Okay, I was wrong." Donny said frankly. "This isn't a group home or a prison, it's a resort!"

"As good as." Ronny said with a nod.

"Let's check out the bedrooms. Since we're the first one's living here, we get to pick which room we want." Donny said with a grin, then looked at Mr. T and asked, "Isn't that right?"

"That's how it works." Mr. T said with a smile, then gently continued, "Go on."

Paul walked to the fireplace and looked at the large, ornate mirror hanging over the mantle.

"It's really very beautiful." Jerico said as he slowly looked around.

"It's got lots of nice things, but in the end, it's just a house. What's going to make it special is when everyone gets moved in here and we make it a home." Mr. T said seriously.

"Do you think it's going to be hard on the guys for you to move out of Cabin One?" Jerico asked cautiously.

"No. They're a fairly self sufficient group of guys. I could go for a week at a time without anyone knocking on the connecting door to my apartment." Mr. T said frankly.

Jerico nodded, then quietly asked, "Do you think I'll do okay as their house parent. I'm not that much older than Uri and Devon."

Mr. T chuckled, then said, "You'll be fine. They already respect you. That's the hard part. All the rest is just getting used to living together in the same space."

"Can we see the apartment?" Paul asked hopefully as he walked up to Jerico and Mr. T.

"Yes. That's a good idea. That will give you an idea of the layout for when you move your things in." Mr. T said frankly.

"When will that be, anyway?" Paul asked curiously.

"What with classes and all the different appointments, I think the best time for me to move will be after classes tomorrow. I suppose that you could move in anytime after that." Mr. T said thoughtfully.

"Would you mind if we borrow a couple of the guys to help us pack? It would make things run a lot smoother." Jerico asked carefully.

"Well, some of the guys have things going on today, you know, appointments and things like that. But if you can find a few who are free and willing to help, then I see no problem with it." Mr. T said, then opened the door to the apartment.

"I'll start asking around to see if anyone wants to help." Paul said happily.

Jerico smiled at his cousin and nodded his agreement before

walking through the door into the apartment with Dylan following a step behind.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Which one do you like best?" Ronny asked as he looked into one bedroom door, then another.

"Well, they're all great. But I think I really like the one next to the apartment door the best. It's got the best view and I just feel like I could really relax there." Donny said frankly.

"Yeah. Me too." Ronny said with a nod.

"I guess that since you're wanting to live as a guy, that you might want to room with a 'guy' guy. I mean, since I'm gay, I'm probably not going to act like a straight guy. You might want to talk about girls or monster trucks or whatever it is that straight guys talk about."

"Well, I can see what you're saying. And if you don't want me as a roommate, just say so. But as far as your argument goes, I think that you might be the ideal roommate for me right now, because I'm going through a transition. Going from girl to 'guy' guy might be too big a jump for me all at once." Ronny said frankly.

"Hey, as far as I'm concerned, you're the perfect roommate for me, too. You're a guy, so I can be comfortable around you. Since you got no dick, there's no chance that I'll get the hots for you and make everything complicated between us. Honestly, I can't think of anyone better." Donny finished with a grin.

"Well, I guess that since I'm into girls, you wouldn't have to worry about me getting hot for you either. And even though you're gay, you're not all femmy, so I think it'll work out great for me, too." Ronny said happily.

"Then I guess we need to go over to the admin building and get our stuff so we can move in." Donny said with a smile.

"Sounds good!" Ronny said, then turned toward the door.

\* \* \* \* \*

"How are you doing, Dylan?" Jerico asked him quietly while Mr. T was talking with Paul.

"Fine. Why?" Dylan asked hesitantly.

"You're being awfully quiet. There's just been a lot of things going on since you got here, and I could understand it if you were a little freaked out, especially by some of the more... 'paranormal' happenings." Jerico said slowly, obviously carefully choosing his words.

Dylan smiled, then said, "You don't have to worry about that. I lived on the streets for a lot of years. The people you meet there aren't... normal. The people who hear voices and see things that aren't there usually end up on the streets, fighting to survive. In a situation like that, you learn to accept that some people see a different reality, and you learn to buy into their point of view so you can understand them, at least a little."

"So you think we're all nuts?" Jerico asked hesitantly.

Dylan chuckled, then said, "No. I think the world is nuts. I know that I've seen enough to believe that there are ghosts and things out there that 'normal' people don't believe in. Some of the people on the streets try to fight it with Lukumi or Voodoo. But people like me just try to steer clear of anyone caught up in that."

"That sounds like a good idea." Jerico said quietly.

Dylan shrugged, then said, "It doesn't always work. Sometimes you get pulled in whether you want to be or not."

Jerico nodded his agreement.

"I think Arlo's like that. He didn't want to have anything to do with it, but it happened anyway." Dylan said frankly.

"What is his situation, as you see it?" Jerico asked curiously.

"It looks to me like there was this guy who died a long time ago. His spirit floated around, not really being able to do much of anything, until it found Arlo. When it went into him, it was like him being alive again. So now Arlo's got this spirit in him, who is just happy to be alive again, or nearly, anyway. And I think, from the way I understood it, Arlo feels like, because that guy is in there, there's no room for any more spirits, so he's safe from being taken over by something that would hurt him or his friends." Dylan said thoughtfully.

Jerico slowly nodded, then quietly said, "It does seem that way on the surface. I'm just concerned because there is a class of

spirit, the inhumans, that tend to mimic the actions of a weaker, more docile spirit until they've gained a foothold, then their true nature will come through. They're malevolent and extremely powerful."

"Do you think that's what Arlo has?" Dylan asked with concern.

"I don't know. The only thing I can do at this point is watch and listen." Jerico said frankly.

"I'll keep an eye on him for you. If he does anything that worries me, I'll let you know." Dylan said slowly, then added, "But I think this ghost is for real."

"I really hope so for Arlo's sake, because inhumans can be incredibly powerful. I don't think I could expel one on my own." Jerico said quietly.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Hey guys, how do you like the place?" Paul asked when he saw Ronny and Donny walking out of one of the bedrooms.

"It's better than my best dream." Donny said with a smile.

Ronny considered the response, then nodded his agreement.

"Do you guys have anything going on tonight?" Paul asked with a hopeful smile.

"No. We were just about to go get our stuff from the administration building, but once we're unpacked, I don't think we have anything going on at all." Donny said thoughtfully, then looked at Ronny for confirmation.

A shrug was Ronny's only answer.

"Well, if you guys want to, you could come over to my house and help me and Jerico pack our stuff so we can move here." Paul said in a rush, then hurried to add, "And you could have dinner with us and meet my family. It'll be fun!"

Donny looked at Ronny with question, obviously letting him decide for both of them.

"I haven't been outside the camp since I got here a couple weeks ago. I guess that maybe it'd be nice to go and do something." Ronny said uncertainly.

Donny smiled at the answer, then said, "Sure. If Mr. T doesn't have anything else for us to do."

Rather than respond to the statement, Paul dashed down the hallway and back through the door of the apartment.

"It's been so long since anyone wanted me, you know, like this... innocently. It's a good feeling." Donny said with a wistful smile.

"It's been a long time since anyone wanted me for anything at all." Ronny said frankly.

Donny looked at Ronny with concern, letting it be known with his expression that he'd be willing to listen.

"I'm sure you can imagine how it's been for me, you know, at home, at school, in the girl's cabin." Ronny said quietly, then looked Donny in the eyes as he continued, "For the first time in... maybe ever, I think that things are going to be better."

Donny thought about the words and couldn't think of any way to respond except to nod his agreement to the sentiment.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Guys! Uncle Derek and Jerico said that it's okay! You can come over!" Paul said joyfully as he raced back through the apartment door.

"Good. Then maybe, since we'll be helping you to move, you could help us get our stuff from the administration building?" Donny asked with a grin.

"Sure! That's only fair!" Paul said happily.

Ronny chuckled at Paul's innocent joy and happily followed along as Paul led the way out of the cabin.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Hey guys, how's it going with helping the Clan guys with their stuff?" Devon asked as he met up with Luke and Mouse outside their classroom.

"Everyone that we've talked to seems to be doing okay. They understand it and stuff, they just needed time to do their work." Mouse said frankly.

Luke silently nodded his agreement.

"Same here. I was afraid when we started this that we'd be getting in over our heads, but it looks like it's working out alright." Devon said frankly.

"Where's Uri?" Mouse asked as he looked around curiously. He wasn't used to seeing Devon without him.

"He wanted to check on Dylan. You know, since Dylan's new and everything, he just wanted to be sure that he's not feeling ignored." Devon said frankly.

"Yeah. It's tough being new." Mouse said thoughtfully, then lit up as he said, "Did you hear that Obie found his brother?"

"Yes. It's hard to believe that after all these years, they were able to find him in one morning." Devon said honestly.

Mouse shrugged, then said, "I guess they probably could have found him a lot sooner if they knew to look for him. They thought he was dead."

"As bad as that is, at least Obie's brother will know that someone cared for him and went to the trouble to look for him once they knew he was alive." Devon said darkly.

"What's wrong?" Mouse asked with concern.

"I don't know. I guess I've been thinking about my parents. It just bothers me that after everything that happened with my grandparents, they didn't come back or try to get in touch with me." Devon said quietly.

"Fuck them!" Mouse said firmly, then looked around quickly to see if anyone else had heard him. Once he was sure they hadn't, Mouse continued, "Everyone here at the camp loves you. EVERYONE! So if your parents are too busy to pay attention to their own kid, it's them that's got the problem. There's nothing wrong with you."

Luke smiled at Mouse, then looked up at Devon and nodded his agreement.

"Thanks, Mouse." Devon said with a smile at the younger boy, then put an arm around his shoulders as he said, "I guess I knew that, but every now and then it's nice to hear it."

"Come on, we're going to be late for art class." Mouse said as he quickly returned the hug.

"Right." Devon said with a smile, then put his other arm around Luke's shoulders and guided him to walk with them to the art building.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Is that everything?" Paul asked as they walked out of the administration building each carrying a few pieces of luggage.

"Yeah. I never was able to get too many things because I was always moving." Donny said frankly as he held up his two small suitcases as evidence.

"I just hate shopping. As long as I have a few jeans and a few shirts, I'm good to go." Ronny said casually.

"Getting you two unpacked shouldn't take very long then..." Paul said in a leading tone.

"No. I don't think it will." Donny said with a conspiratorial smile at Ronny.

"As far as I know, Jerico shouldn't need to do anything else around here. So we could probably leave as soon as you're done." Paul said happily.

"Do you have a lot of stuff to pack?" Ronny asked curiously.

"No. I mean, I've got more than you two, but not a lot." Paul said frankly.

"What about Jerico?" Donny asked as he glanced at Paul.

"I don't know. I've only been in his room a few times. But I don't think he has very much either. Mostly books." Paul said thoughtfully.

"What are we going to do about boxes?" Ronny asked suddenly.

"Oh, I hadn't thought about that." Paul said slowly.

Donny walked ahead of them and opened the front door, then stood aside as Ronny and Paul walked through.

\* \* \* \* \*

"It looks like you guys are getting settled in pretty well." Mr. T said as he looked into the bedroom.

"Yeah. Paul helped us carry our things over. Neither one of us had

that much." Donny said frankly.

"Uncle Derek, I'm going to need to pack my stuff, but I don't have any boxes. Do you know where we could get some?" Paul asked hopefully.

Mr. T smiled at Paul, then said, "We have some empty carryall containers in the store room. As long as you promise to bring them back when you're finished, you can borrow them for the move."

"Do you guys want to help me get them?" Paul asked Donny and Ronny hopefully.

"Did you have anything else that you needed for us to do before we go to Paul's house?" Donny asked Mr. T cautiously.

Mr. T made a show of thinking about the question, then said, "No. Although all three of you still have testing to do, it's nothing that can't wait until tomorrow. And I think it would do you two a lot of good to spend some time outside the camp, just to reassure yourselves that you're not prisoners here."

"Yeah. I'm sorry I said that." Donny said quietly, then added, "I guess I was just scared because I didn't really know what was going to happen to me."

"I think anyone in your situation would have felt exactly the same way. There's nothing at all for you to be sorry about." Mr. T said warmly, then looked at the three boys before continuing, "Just remember that tomorrow is a school day. Don't stay up too late and be sure to be to class on time. Testing starts at 9:00am."

"Me too?" Paul asked to be sure.

"You have testing to do, don't you?" Mr. T asked with raised eyebrows.

"Yeah. I'll be there." Paul responded with a smile, happy that he was being included as 'one of the guys'.

"Go to the admin building and ask Mrs. Hawk about the carryalls. She'll sign them out to you, and then you'll have everything you'll need to get started." Mr. T said with a smile at the boys.

"Thanks for, you know, being nice and not too strict with us, Mr. T." Donny said as he looked into Mr. T's eyes.

"The three of you are almost adults. It's about time someone trusted you and allowed you to make some decisions for yourselves. Now, go. Have fun. Enjoy some freedom." Mr. T finished with a smile.

Donny returned the smile, then urged his companions to walk with him, out of the room.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Are you guys ready to go?" Mr. T asked as he walked into the apartment.

"Yeah. I think I have a pretty good idea of how I'll make things work." Jerico said with a smile.

"Are you going to have enough room for you and Paul, both?" Mr. T asked with concern.

"Yes. It shouldn't be any problem. If everyone else in the cabin can share a bedroom, so can we." Jerico said casually.

"Well, if it turns out to be a problem, just let me know. We'll figure something out." Mr. T said as he looked into Jerico's eyes.

"Right. I will." Jerico said as he realized that Mr. T had some knowledge of his past.

"The guys are getting carryall containers at the administration building right now, so you'd probably better get ready to go." Mr. T said with a smile.

"Yeah. I wonder if there's going to be more packing or goofing around accomplished tonight." Jerico said with a grin.

"Don't begrudge them a little fun. It's good for the soul." Mr. T said warmly.

"I'll keep that in mind." Jerico said with a smile.

"Is there something that I should be doing right now?" Dylan asked uncertainly.

"No. You'll be having a talk with Dr. Dan soon, and depending on how that goes, you may be sitting in on one of the group sessions, later." Mr. T said as he gestured for the others to walk with him.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Dylan!"

At the sound of his name, Dylan turned and smiled when he saw the large teenager barreling toward him.

"Hi Uri. How are you doing?" Dylan asked happily.

"I am well. I simply wanted to see how you are doing." Uri said as he fell into place, walking at Dylan's side.

"I'm fine. Mr. T is just taking me to meet with Dr. Dan for a few minutes." Dylan said honestly.

"Have you made any plans for this evening?" Uri asked curiously.

"No. I mean, Mr. T said that Dr. Dan may want for me to sit in on some group therapy thing or something like that. But that's just 'maybe'. I don't know of anything for sure." Dylan said slowly.

"Hold on, Uri. It looks like Dylan may have some company." Mr. T said as he pointed to a man walking toward the administration building.

"Lieutenant Masterson!" Dylan called and waved, to get his attention.

The man turned and smiled when he saw Dylan.

"Dylan! You're looking a lot better today." Lieutenant Masterson said with a smile as he hurried to join their group.

"Are you here to visit me?" Dylan asked hesitantly, not quite willing to believe.

"Yep. I sure am. Do you like fish and chips?" Lieutenant Masterson asked with a big grin.

"Sure. I never met a food I didn't like." Dylan said happily.

"I was thinking that, if you wanted, we could go out and get something to eat, then maybe see a movie or walk around the mall." Lieutenant Masterson said hesitantly, then noticed Uri at Dylan's side and said, "You could invite your friend to come with us if you'd like."

Dylan was surprised and was about ready to explain that he and Uri were just friends, but after a moment to consider, he realized that he didn't detect any innuendo in the offer, it was simply an innocent invitation.

"Would you like to go for fish and chips with us, Uri?" Dylan asked

hopefully.

"Thank you, no." Uri said regretfully, and it seemed to Dylan that he was fighting back tears at saying the words.

"Why? Is something wrong?" Dylan asked with concern.

"It is just that... I can not. In accordance with my religious faith, I choose to keep kosher." Uri said in a voice so low that it could barely be heard.

Dylan thought for a moment, then turned to Lieutenant Masterson and asked, "Is there anyplace that you know of that serves kosher food where Uri could eat with us, too?"

"I don't know." Lieutenant Masterson said as he took out his phone, then said, "Give me a second."

"You don't have to change your plans for me." Uri hurried to explain.

"I know I don't *have* to." Dylan said slowly, then gave Uri a friendly smile.

"How about this?" Lieutenant Masterson said in prelude, drawing their attention back to him, "I'm really in the mood for some good fish and chips. There's a kosher deli a block and a half from the fish and chips place. So why don't we get carryout from both, and then have sort of a picnic in the park?"

"Hey, that sounds great." Dylan said happily.

Uri was stunned into speechlessness at the offer and was only able to manage to nod his head in agreement.

"Oh! I'm supposed to talk to Dr. Dan." Dylan said suddenly.

"Don't worry about that. I'll let Dan know that something important came up. You guys go and have fun." Mr. T said with a smile.

"Let's go in and get you guys signed out." Lieutenant Masterson said cheerfully.

Dylan smiled at him, and then up at his much larger companion.

"Thank you." Uri whispered as a single tear trailed down his cheek.

It took a moment for Dylan to comprehend just how much it

meant to Uri to be wanted and included. On impulse, Dylan put an arm around Uri and gave him a quick, firm hug, then said, "Come on. I'm hungry."

## Chapter 12

As Mr. T and Jerico walked back into the office, they saw that Mrs. Morrow was right where they had left her, sitting at the side of the desk, still filling out paperwork.

"Barring unforeseen circumstances, why don't we plan on me moving my things out right after classes tomorrow. You and Paul can move yourselves in anytime you like, after that." Mr. T said thoughtfully as he took his seat.

"From as excited as Paul is, I'm betting that he'll probably want to move tonight." Jerico chuckled.

"MR. T! IT'S TIME!" Obie called as he dashed into the administration building's outer office.

A long, stern glance caused Obie to realize that he had been a bit louder than necessary.

"I'm sorry." Obie said repentantly, then immediately perked up and said, "But it's time!"

A reluctant smile crossed Mr. T's face. Then, to keep from breaking into chuckles, Mr. T carefully said, "Mrs. Crow has already left for the day. Allow me a moment to find someone to drive you, then you can be on your way."

"If we're done here, I wouldn't mind driving him." Mrs. Morrow said pleasantly from the desk where she was gathering the collection of papers she had been signing, into a stack.

"I wouldn't want to put you to any trouble." Mr. T said hesitantly.

"If I understood all of this correctly..." Mrs. Morrow said as she held up the inch thick stack of paperwork, "...the moment that I signed them, I was a salaried employee. Besides, I think it would do my cynical old heart some good to see a boy reunited with his long lost brother. I can't think of a better way to start my time here."

"Well, if you're sure you wouldn't mind..." Mr. T began to say, but was interrupted by a twelve or thirteen year old boy rushing into the administration office.

He looked to be about to speak, but as soon as he realized that he was interrupting, he schooled his expression and put his hands behind his back to wait patiently.

"Obie can take you to the garage where you can get a van. Mr. Harjo can call me if he needs my approval." Mr. T said to Mrs. Morrow with a smile.

"I wouldn't mind taking my own car." Mrs. Morrow said honestly.

"It's easier this way. Since you're on salary with us, you're automatically covered by our insurance if anything were to happen." Mr. T said honestly.

"Come on! I don't want for Amos to have to wait!" Obie said urgently.

"Do you know where you're going?" Mr. T asked curiously.

"Here." Obie said as he held up a piece of notebook paper.

"You can look that up on the computer over there before you leave if you like." Mr. T said with a smile at Mrs. Morrow.

"That might be best." Mrs. Morrow said as she took the piece of paper from Obie.

The expression on Obie's face showed that he was about two seconds away from a total frustration meltdown.

"Keoh, did you have something to ask me?" Mr. T asked the boy by the door pleasantly.

"Me and Scott and Singh got invited to go and do some stuff with some friends of mine... you know, from before I came here. There's a boyscout thing they're doing on Saturday, and they said that we could come. Is it okay?" Keoh asked hopefully.

"If you can get an adult to call and speak with me or my father to make the arrangements, I'm sure that it won't be a problem." Mr. T finished with a smile.

"Thank you, Mr. T. I'll get Rudy's dad to call you, he's one of the scoutmasters that's setting the whole thing up. He's really nice." Keoh said in a rush.

Mr. T nodded, then watched with a smile as Keoh hurried away.

"I guess I should be going. I'm actually kind of surprised that Paul isn't here trying to rush me out the door." Jerico said with a fond smile at the thought of his cousin.

"It appears that he's made some new friends today. I probably

don't have to tell you this but... try to be patient with them. It's likely that they'll be loud and hyper and... I guess what I'm saying is to let them be kids. Allow them a night to be silly or loud or whatever it is that they need at this point in their lives. I don't know the whole story of what's happened to Donny and Ronny... I don't need to know. I think it's safe to assume that it was bad."

Jerico slowly nodded that he was following what Mr. T was saying.

"You seem to me to be a very quiet and controlled person... and that's fine. Honestly, I'm not faulting you for that. I'm just saying that the boys, especially when they're together, may get a little wild. Please keep in mind that that's not necessarily a bad thing."

"I'll remember that." Jerico said softly, then added, "Thank you. I could easily see myself overreacting. I'm used to being solitary and quiet. I have to be. But I'll keep what you said in mind and try not to rain on their party."

"That's all I'm asking." Mr. T said with a chuckle, then extended his hand for Jerico to shake.

"Are we going or what?" Paul asked as he poked his head into the room.

Jerico shook Mr. T's hand, then said, "Yeah, Paul. If you guys are all loaded up, we're going."

\* \* \* \* \*

After exchanging pleasantries with Mr. T in the outer office, Dr. Dan made his way into the conference room for his afternoon group session

As he walked to the end of the table, he noticed that only about half of the group that he had originally anticipated were present.

"When I planned this session, it was for a much larger group." Dr. Dan said casually as he took his seat.

The four boys that were present looked at each other curiously, but didn't respond verbally.

Dr. Dan took out his padd and brought up a file on it before saying, "I was looking forward to meeting with Ronny, Donny and Dylan this afternoon, but Derek informs me that they're all out of the camp at the moment."

"From what I heard, Ronny and Donny probably won't be back until tonight." Mouse said quickly.

"Derek didn't give me any details as to why they weren't here. It's not a problem, I hope." Dr. Dan said cautiously.

"No. They're gonna help Paul get packed so he can move here. They're over at his house." Mouse said happily.

"Paul?" Dr. Dan asked, knowing that he had met him earlier in the day, but couldn't seem to place a face with the name.

"Yeah. He's the new Shaman's cousin. And I think he's cousins with Mr. T, too... maybe. I'm not sure about that." Mouse finished uncertainly.

"Good. I'm glad it's not a problem of some sort. I'll look forward to meeting with them at our next group session. What about Dylan?" Dr. Dan asked curiously.

"From what I heard, he went with Uri and a Starfleet security lieutenant to do something outside the camp." Simon said frankly and Mouse nodded his confirmation.

"Security? Is there any reason to be worried about that?" Dr. Dan asked slowly, remembering all that he had read about the medical abuse the boy had endured at the hospital in Chicago.

"No. It's just for fun. The security guy seems like he's kinda looking out for Dylan, letting him know that someone cares about how he's doing. That's all." Mouse said with a smile.

"That's all?" Simon scoffed. "How many people in this camp would give anything in the world, would give up every single thing that they own, just to have that?"

"You've already got that." Arlo said as he looked Simon in the eyes.

There was a long moment of silence, then Simon smiled and said, "Yeah. Thanks."

Dr. Dan smiled at the exchange, then noticed Luke whispering something to Mouse.

Although he didn't say anything, Dr. Dan's inquisitive look caused Luke to fall silent.

"Did you have something that you wanted to say?" Dan asked

cautiously.

"He does, but it's not safe for him to talk." Mouse said honestly.

"Why? Has someone been sharing what's been said here outside the group?" Dan asked as he looked at the four boys with concern.

"No. Nothing like that. I mean 'not safe for *you*'." Mouse said firmly.

"I don't understand." Dr. Dan said slowly.

Mouse looked down at the floor for a moment, trying to put his thoughts into order before finally saying, "A lot's happened since the last time we saw you. Most of it happened to Arlo. He'll have to tell you about that. But, anyway, because of what happened to Arlo, Jerico was called to help. He's the new Shaman I was telling you about. His cousin is Paul."

Dr. Dan quickly nodded, prompting Mouse to continue.

"Anyway, as soon as the Shaman met Luke, he knew exactly what was wrong and why he couldn't talk." Mouse said seriously.

"Really?" Dr. Dan asked with surprise.

"Yeah! You know how the clan has telepaths and empaths and stuff all over the place? Luke's got something like that, except that he doesn't read your mind. He writes it."

"I don't understand." Dr. Dan said frankly and noticed that Arlo and Simon also seemed to be lost. In fact, Luke didn't even seem to be following that well.

"Luke doesn't hear what you think, he tells you what to think. He doesn't feel what you feel, he tells you what to feel. It's a big scary power and he's got to learn how to use it right or he'll end up hurting someone."

"But, if that's the case, why can't he talk?" Dr. Dan asked curiously. With all the psy phenomenon in the clan, he had very little trouble accepting that what Mouse was telling him was true.

"Well, I guess it's because when you talk, a lot of what you say is to try and get other people to see what you see or think what you think. When Luke talks, whatever he describes, you see. Whatever he believes, you believe." Mouse said earnestly, then

looked to Luke with question to see if he was explaining it right.

Luke considered for a moment, then gave a simple nod that indicated that he was happy with the explanation.

"That is a very... frightening power." Dr. Dan said with an apologetic look at Luke.

"Jerico has it, too. But he figured out that me and his cousin, Paul, have a power, too. I can block Luke's power... or, at least I *will be* able to when we've learned how to use it." Mouse finished shyly.

"So you have an ability that negates Luke's ability?" Dan asked to confirm.

"Yep. When we figure out how to use it, Luke will be able to talk all the time... well, at least when I'm around." Mouse said happily, then quickly added, "And I probably woulda been around him all the time anyway. He's my best friend."

Luke smiled at Mouse's words.

After a long silent moment, Dr. Dan turned to Arlo and asked, "So what big thing happened to you since our last meeting?"

"I was possessed." Arlo said frankly.

"Possessed?" Dr. Dan asked incredulously.

"Possessed." Arlo confirmed with a nod.

"Yeah. And Mr. T called for a Shaman, and Jerico showed up and it was all crazy and weird and then everything was fine." Mouse said in a verbal explosion.

Dr. Dan blinked a few times as he processed what Mouse had said, then looked at Arlo with question.

"Simon would probably be the best one to ask about that. I have no memory from the time I was possessed until I came back to myself." Arlo said seriously.

Dr. Dan looked at Simon questioningly.

After a moment to consider, Simon quietly said, "I think Mouse covered it all."

"So you're fine now?" Dr. Dan asked Arlo cautiously, sensing that he was holding something back.

"Well, the whole possession thing happened yesterday, and it all got fixed, but then, this morning... it kinda happened again." Arlo said uncomfortably.

"That's why Jerico and Paul came back today." Mouse interjected.

"But since you're here, I take it that they were able to help you." Dan said as he watched Arlo's expression carefully.

"Not exactly." Arlo said with a pained expression.

"That doesn't sound good." Dan observed.

"It's not bad... not really." Arlo hurried to explain.

"What happened, Arlo?" Dr. Dan asked slowly.

Arlo looked around the group and finally stopped as he looked at Simon, begging with his eyes.

"The spirit that entered Arlo this morning sort of took root in him. But he's not some evil poltergeist who's going to try to hurt people. He's a good guy. His name is Randolph Pettigrew." Simon said as he turned his gaze toward Dr. Dan.

"My heartfelt thanks to you, Simon. You do me honor by speaking so highly of me and remembering my given name." Randolph said in his strange British/New Englander/early nineteenth century manner of speech.

Dr. Dan's eyes went wide as he saw the changeover happen right before him.

One minute he was looking at Arlo, a patient he had worked with at some length and gotten to know quite well. Then, in the space of a heartbeat, he was looking at a complete stranger who seemed to be wearing Arlo's body.

"Unless you want to visit with a psychologist for a while, you'd better let Arlo come out and talk with us." Simon said with a grin at Randolph.

"I simply wished to thank you, Simon. Henceforth, you shall be sharing company with Arlo." Randolph said timidly, then the expression on Arlo's face changed to one of mild surprise.

"Is everything alright?" Simon asked gently.

"Yeah. It's just, getting yanked back and thrust forward like that

is kind of disorienting. It doesn't hurt or anything, but it's kinda freaky." Arlo said honestly.

Dr. Dan looked around the group to see that no one wanted to say anything, then quietly said, "Even though a lot of things have changed. I don't see any reason that we can't continue on with our regular group session. Let's look back at our objectives from last week and see what progress has been made."

Simon perked up and quickly said, "Even with all the bad stuff that happened along the way, for me it's been one of the best weeks I've had... probably ever..."

\* \* \* \* \*

A knock on the cabin door caused Devon to look up from his textbook.

It was an unusual occurrence for Devon to find himself alone during the afternoon. Of course, he wasn't *completely* alone. Jose and Trent were in their room presumably doing homework, but actually, they were probably playing. But Devon had been able to sit quietly in the main room, at the table by the picture window, and study his book in peace.

He knew the others were at the group therapy meeting. He used to attend those, but found that he really got more out of his one-on-one meetings with Dr. Dan. He had talked with Dr. Dan about how uncomfortable he was and they decided to let it go for a while.

When he got to the door, he peeked through the peephole and was surprised to see a familiar face.

As soon as Devon had the door open, he quickly said, "Officer Bridges, what are you doing here?"

"How many times do I have to tell you, outside the courtroom, my name is Maurice?" The man asked as he smiled.

"Sorry. I've always been taught to call people older than me by their title. It's just weird calling you by your name." Devon muttered shyly.

"That's fine, Devon. Just do what's comfortable for you." Maurice said gently.

Devon stared for a moment, then suddenly said, "Come in! Mr. T

isn't here, if he's who you were wanting to see."

"No. Actually, I'm here to see you." Maurice said as he walked into the room.

"Me? What did I do?" Devon asked in a sudden panic.

Maurice gave a good-natured laugh, then said, "Nothing. Well, at least, nothing that I've heard about. I just wanted to stop by and see how you're settling in."

"Um... fine. Really good, actually. I've got contact lenses and new clothes and no one thinks I'm too much of a nerd to talk to... I like it here." Devon finished with a smile.

"I'm glad to hear that." Maurice said warmly.

"You've always been really nice to me. I mean, you're kinda nice to everyone, but I feel like you're especially nice to me." Devon said disjointedly.

"I care about what happens to you." Maurice conceded.

"I just don't get why." Devon said honestly.

From the little that Maurice knew about Devon's home and family, he could easily understand why the young man would be desperate to know why a complete stranger cared for him when his own family didn't.

"I know you probably never noticed me, but I'm your grandparents' next door neighbor." Maurice said quietly.

"In the blue house?" Devon asked as he looked at Maurice carefully.

"With those horrible gaudy fake flowers? Please!" Maurice said dramatically, then said more quietly, "The mustardy yellow house with the *real* flowers."

"Oh, yeah. Um, no. I didn't go out of the house too much. I guess I never saw you." Devon said apologetically.

"I didn't think so. But I was the one who found you... you know, *that* day. I'm the one who called for the ambulance." Maurice said quietly.

"Thanks." Devon whispered.

"And I might have mentioned you to Judge Robison a time or two

before your case came before him." Maurice added cautiously.

"So you got him to send me here?" Devon asked with surprise.

"No. He did that himself. I just sort of made sure that he was aware of your whole situation before he made any judgments. The lawyers and CPS cronies don't always get the whole picture, and without complete information, the judge doesn't always make the best decision."

"Thanks for helping me, Maurice. I really like it here." Devon said with a smile.

"I remember what you said in court about your parents being in Africa." Maurice said without inflection.

Devon looked at him cautiously, not knowing what to think of the change in subject.

"I saw them last night, at your grandparent's house. They're back in town." Maurice said quietly.

Devon thought for a moment, then felt a tear sliding down his cheek.

Finally he said, "So? If they wanted to see me, they know where to find me."

"They don't hold all the cards, Devon. It's not entirely up to them." Maurice said carefully, then added more firmly, "If *you* want to see *them*, I can help you make those arrangements. I can see that you'll have all the support that you'll need and that they won't be able to hurt you."

"Why?" Devon asked as he wiped the tears from his eyes.

"Because I thought you might need it. I remember how troubled and confused you were in court. I don't know what questions or answers you've found since you've been here. But I thought that if there's anything you need from your parents to get... closure or to find your peace with the situation. Maybe I could help you to get it."

After a moment to consider, Devon quietly asked, "Before I answer that, could I ask you something?"

"Sure. You can ask me anything." Maurice immediately responded.

"You're here, checking on how I'm doing and offering me this

chance with my parents, just because you care, right? It's not, like, a case number or part of your job or anything like that?" Devon asked curiously.

"No. It's not part of my job. I can't explain my motives except to say that, I care how you're feeling and I want to give you every chance to be happy." Maurice said softly.

"So, what does that make us? Are you trying to be like my dad, or my big brother, or my friend?" Devon asked uncertainly.

"I don't know. A little bit of all of them, I guess. If you ever need a dad to hold you... I'd do that. If you need a big brother to help you do things. I could do that, too. If you felt like you needed someone to talk to and share things that you couldn't share with anyone else. I'd be good for that, as well." Maurice finished with a smile.

Devon thought for a moment, then said, "Then I don't need to see my parents for anything. All it would do is stir up a whole lot of hurt feelings inside me that I need to let go."

"If you ever want to go and do anything, I'm as close as the nearest phone." Maurice said in an obvious attempt to lighten the mood.

"What about now?" Devon asked hopefully.

"Sure. I've got no plans. What would you like to do?" Maurice asked curiously.

"It doesn't matter. I'd just like to get out of the camp for a little bit. We can do whatever you'd like." Devon said as he gathered up his study materials from the table by the window.

"How about the park? I can drive through and get us something to eat and we can hang around there for a while."

"Sure. That sounds great." Devon said, then suddenly stopped.

"Problem?" Maurice asked with concern.

"Um, no. But this might take a minute. I need to find Mr. T and let him know that Trent and Jose are here by themselves." Devon said thoughtfully.

"I'd like to spend a few minutes with them before we leave, if I could. I was also the bailiff in their cases and I'd like to see how

they're doing." Maurice said with a smile.

"So, you care about them like you care about me?" Devon asked curiously.

"I was there and heard about what happened to them. So I'm interested to know how they're doing. But I wasn't there when they were hurt. I didn't play a part in getting them help. I've made an emotional investment in you, young man. And, like it or not, I'm going to be hanging around and helping you out."

"I like it." Devon said with a grin, then asked, "Would you like to take Trent and Jose to the park with us? That way you can see for yourself how they're doing."

"That sounds good to me. Why don't you go get them and meet me over at the administration building so I can sign you out."

\* \* \* \* \*

Cynthia Morrow glanced at the fidgeting boy in the passenger seat and smiled.

"You're really gonna like Amos. He's the kind of kid that adults like, because he's quiet and respectful and stuff like that." Obie said ebulliently.

"I don't know. I think that spirited children are a joy to be around. It tells me more than words that they feel safe and free to be themselves." Mrs. Morrow said introspectively.

"You never got to meet my brother Mike, but him and Amos look almost exactly alike. It's gonna be so great when they can meet each other again. Me and Mike thought that Amos was dead." Obie said frankly.

"Why did you think that?" Mrs. Morrow asked with concern.

"Cause Mom told us so." Obie said simply.

Mrs. Morrow didn't know what to say to that.

"We think that Mom sold Amos for the money to buy drugs, like she tried to do with me." Obie continued.

Mrs. Morrow was shocked by Obie's words, and also by how he spoke of such a horrible thing so casually.

"Are we close? I really wanna see Amos." Obie said as he quickly

looked around the residential neighborhood they were traveling through.

"We'll be there in just a minute." Mrs. Morrow said gently as she focused more of her attention on finding the address they were looking for.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Is this okay?" Lt. Masterson asked as he motioned to a picnic table.

Dylan glanced at Uri to see if he had any objection, then answered, "That's fine."

The crinkle of paper bags sounded as all three of them sat their fast food lunches on the picnic table.

"So, Uri, why don't you tell me about you?" Lieutenant Masterson said casually as he began to unpack his food.

"There is not much to say. I am Israeli by birth, although I do not have documentation to prove it. I was brought to the United States by men who... did many illegal things. The Clan instigated an investigation and I was rescued and brought to Camp Little Eagle." Uri said haltingly and kept his head down in shame.

"It's okay, Uri. Lieutenant Masterson knows that I used to sell it on the streets and he doesn't treat me bad because of it." Dylan said comfortingly.

"It's now that's important. Who you are now. What you're doing now. And right now, I think you should be enjoying that food before it gets cold." Lieutenant Masterson finished with a smile.

"Yes. Thank you." Uri said gratefully, before starting to unwrap his food.

As Dylan was about to take a bite of his battered fish, he felt like someone was watching him and turned to see three younger children frozen in place, staring at him.

"I guess I'll have to get used to that." Dylan said as he set his fish back on the paper wrapper.

"I don't think so." Lieutenant Masterson said consideringly.

Dylan looked at him with an expression of need in his one visible eye.

"I've seen Dr. McCoy do some pretty amazing things over the years. Some of them I'd classify as miracles. Right now, you're hurt. You're at the beginning. But I bet that it won't take too long before the doctors have started to put you back to right, and before long no one will even be able to tell that you were ever hurt." Lieutenant Masterson said speculatively.

"Do you really think so?" Dylan asked hopefully.

"Yeah. You've got the Clan taking care of you, so you aren't going to have to worry about being able to afford the right treatment. And I know that they'll do whatever it takes to get the best doctors in the Federation to take care of you. With that kind of support, I can't see it ending up any other way." Lieutenant Masterson said frankly.

"He is correct." Uri said distantly, then continued, "Regardless of what words have been said, or what promises have been made, I have been witness to the 'actions' of the Clan. They will not rest until you have been fully restored."

"Thanks. I guess I just needed to hear that." Dylan said quietly.

"What would you guys like to do for some fun when we're done eating?" Lieutenant Masterson asked with a smile, wanting to gently steer them to a more cheerful topic of conversation.

"You said something about a movie... do you know what's playing?" Dylan asked cautiously.

"Give me a second." Lieutenant Masterson said as he took out his phone.

Uri and Dylan both began eating again as Lieutenant Masterson looked at the phone's display.

"Well... If you like Hilary Swank, she's got two movies in the theater right now, Million Dollar Baby and Vera Drake." Lieutenant Masterson said as he looked up from his phone to gauge the boys' reactions.

From their matching disinterested stares, he decided to continue, "How about Kill Bill, Volume 2 or Spiderman 2?"

"So, it's the Swanks or the part twos." Dylan said thoughtfully.

"I do not have a preference." Uri said simply.

"Maybe we could do something else." Dylan said with an apologetic look at Lieutenant Masterson.

"How about a trip to the mall? I know that Dylan didn't have anything with him when he arrived. Maybe we could help him get some things so he can get settled in?" Lieutenant Masterson asked with a smile.

"I believe that Sean and Cory were planning on taking Dylan to the mall this weekend." Uri said cautiously.

"Hey, you snooze, you lose. C'mon guys! What do you say?" Lieutenant Masterson asked enthusiastically.

"Sure. Sounds like fun." Dylan said with the beginning of a smile.

"Yes. I believe it will be." Uri finally conceded.

\* \* \* \* \*

It took a few minutes for the boys to finish what they were doing and get ready to go, but Devon didn't think it was an unreasonable amount of time, and was sure that Officer Bridges wouldn't be upset by having to wait a few extra minutes.

"Did he say where we're going?" Jose asked curiously.

"He said that we might drive through somewhere and stop at the park for a while.

"Then I need my frisbee." Jose said seriously.

"Go get it." Devon said with a nod, then looked down at Trent to see how he was doing.

"Is he g... g... g... going t... t... t...to try and r... r... r... rape us?" Trent asked anxiously.

"No, Trent. He's the bailiff that works with Judge Robison. When I was hurt, he called for an ambulance for me, and then he fixed it with the Judge so I could come here where I'd be safe." Devon said seriously.

"D... d... d... don't leave m... m... m... me with him." Trent said with an expression of pleading in his eyes.

"I promise, Trent." Devon said softly, then smiled as Jose walked back into the room, now wearing a backpack, which Devon assumed contained every outdoor toy that Trent and Jose owned.

"Let's go." Devon said with a smile, then stopped at a knock on the door they were approaching.

\* \* \* \* \*

Even though they had been packed into the truck like sardines, Ronny, Donny and Paul were nothing but smiles as they arrived at the old, well-used, house.

"Look! Lucy's cleaning out the car, so that means that it's mine now!" Paul said with excitement as he jumped out of the truck, almost before it had stopped in the driveway.

Ronny got out more slowly and stretched to relieve the tension of sitting in the confined space.

"Come on! You've got to see it!" Paul said as he stopped, half-way to the Fierro, urging Ronny and Donny to hurry.

Jerico smiled at his cousin's excitement and walked over to the car, to share in Paul's joy.

After a moment of looking the car over, Donny said, "Pop the hood so I can take a look at the engine."

Paul went to the driver's side and popped the hood, then stood back and watched as Ronny, Donny and Jerico promptly went under the hood to have a look.

"Sweet! Someone's already put a Chevy V8 in here! That'll make this roller-skate worth driving." Donny said happily.

"Nice! Whoever did the conversion knew what they were doing. This thing is tight!" Ronny said in an impressed voice.

"Are you as happy as you look?" Lucy asked, close to Paul's ear, causing him to jump.

After a giggle at being startled, Paul quietly answered, "Yeah. I'm moving out and getting the car, it's like a whole new chapter is opening in my life."

"Just don't forget about me and Mom. We'll still expect to see you around here sometimes." Lucy said with a smile.

"I don't know what's going to happen next, so I can't make any promises, but I'll try to come home on Sunday's to have dinner with the family." Paul said frankly.

Lucy nodded and said, "Me, too. Let's try to make that our family day."

"Of course, Mom may not want us showing up on her day off, expecting her to cook us a big meal." Paul said with a smile at his sister, obviously not believing it to be true.

"Yeah. You just try and stop her." Lucy chuckled.

Paul nodded and smiled as he looked back at the car where three asses were protruding from under the hood.

\* \* \* \* \*

Obie waited anxiously for the door to be answered as Mrs. Morrow kept a hand on his shoulder to somewhat try and comfort and ease him.

"Hello?" A woman answered cautiously.

"Is this Erin's house? He said I could come by to visit." Obie blurted out.

"Yes. He's in the kitchen. He just got home from school. You must be what he was trying to tell me about just now." The woman said as she stepped back and ushered her visitors inside.

"By the way, I'm Paula Russell." She said as she offered her hand to Mrs. Morrow.

"I'm Cynthia Morrow and this young man with me is Obie." She said with a tender look down at the boy who seemed to be about ready to strike off on his own to find his brother.

"Erin! You have company!" Paula called through a doorway, then looked back at Cynthia and Obie before saying, "You know, I don't think I've ever had to say that, before."

At Cynthia's curious look, she explained, "He's never invited anyone home... Please, come in and have a seat."

Obie looked as though he were about to start growling from the frustrated look on his face, but dutifully walked with Mrs. Morrow to take a seat on the couch.

"You came!" Erin said as he walked into the living room.

"I said I would." Obie said as he stood and walked to Erin to hug him.

Paula's eyes went wide as she watched the younger boy enthusiastically hug her son.

"Mom, I have something to tell you." Erin said shakily as he shifted Obie to his side, still holding him with one arm.

"I bet I can guess." Paula said with glittering eyes as she watched the two boys holding each other so tenderly.

After a moment to screw up his courage, Erin quietly said, "Obie's my brother."

Paula blinked with surprise, then absently said, "That's not what I thought you were going to say."

"Obie says that Micah and him live at a camp outside of town." Erin said imploringly.

"Oh my God. You mean, the Micah that you've been talking about since we adopted you? He's alive?" Paula asked as her legs seemed to give way and she fell heavily into a cushioned chair.

"And my name's really Amos. Obie called me that without me ever telling him." Erin said as he looked his mother in the eyes.

"We thought... When we adopted you, we were told that your family had died. The man who brought you to us, his name was Cecil, he told us that since you were so traumatized, it might be best if we gave you a new name and try to act as if none of your previous life had ever happened. He said that you'd forget in time." Paula said as tears fell down her cheeks.

"Family court workers should know better than that. A child has a right to know their history." Cynthia said gently.

"No. Cecil didn't... um... well... that is to say, we didn't adopt Erin in the usual way. Due to... circumstances... the court probably wouldn't have been inclined to grant any petition that we might have made, so we had to make other arrangements."

"I see." Cynthia said quietly.

"Cecil took care of everything, and in all these years, no one's ever had a problem with any of the legal paperwork he did for us." Paula hurried to explain.

"So, you were told that there was a little boy with no living relatives who needed for someone to care for him. And since you

knew that you couldn't adopt by the usual means, you decided to help him however you could?" Cynthia asked speculatively.

"Yes." Paula said as she dabbed at her eyes, then looked at Erin and Obie standing, holding on to each other.

Cynthia followed her gaze and smiled at the two boys who seemed to be waiting for them to do something.

"They don't look like brothers. I mean, they don't have the same hair or eyes." Paula said cautiously.

"We're not all-brothers, we're half-brothers. I don't know who Amos' dad is, but he probably ain't the same as mine. I don't know who my dad is anyway. Knowing our mom, she probably didn't know them either." Obie said frankly.

"But Obie says that Micah is my twin and looks just like me." Erin interjected.

"Yeah. They got the same dad, for sure." Obie said with a nod.

Before anything more could be said, the sound of knocking at the front door interrupted them.

As Paula went to answer it, she muttered, "No one visits for months at a time, then all of a sudden..."

\* \* \* \* \*

As Joce pulled into her usual parking place, she couldn't help but notice everyone gathered around the cars.

"Did you lock yourselves out?" She asked playfully as she slowly got out of her Toyota.

"I got the Fierro all cleaned out and Paul has the keys. Can we go and get my car now?" Lucy asked hopefully.

"I haven't even had a chance to change out of my work clothes! I'll take you to get the car after dinner." Joce said firmly.

"Mom, I'd like for you to meet Ronny and Donny. They both moved in at the camp today and they said that they'd help me pack my things." Paul said quickly.

"It's nice to meet you, boys. My name is Joce." She said gently.

"I invited them to have dinner with us. That's okay, isn't it?" Paul asked hopefully.

"Yes. Of course, that's fine." Joce said with a smile.

Lucy was glaring at Paul with a very unhappy look.

"You know, if I had help with dinner, we might get to go pick up your car sooner." Joce said casually as she started walking toward the house.

Lucy's expression changed at that, then she dashed past her mother, up the front steps.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Is Dylan here?" The little boy asked hopefully.

"Sorry, Jason. He got a visitor who took him out to do some things this afternoon." Devon said gently.

"Teddy was wanting to visit with him." Jason K said regretfully.

"I'm Jose, and this is Trent." Jose said to Teddy firmly.

"It's okay, Teddy. They're nice." Jason K assured his timid friend.

"We're going to the park. Do you want to come with us?" Jose asked hopefully.

"Jose, Officer Bridges is taking us, so he's the only one who can invite people along." Devon said firmly.

"Oh. I'm sorry. I guess you can't." Jose said to Jason and Teddy regretfully.

"Don't be sorry, get your butt over to the admin building and ask him if they can come along. I bet he'll say yes." Devon said with a smile.

Jose's eyes went wide, then he dashed away at full speed.

"Is there gonna be room for all of us?" Jason K asked cautiously.

"Yeah. He's got a big silver SUV." Devon said frankly, then motioned for everyone to walk with him.

"Do you go and do stuff with him a lot?" Jason K asked curiously.

"No. This is the first time. But Officer Bridges lives right next door to where I used to live." Devon said seriously, as they walked at a casual pace.

"So, has he been your friend for a really long time?"

"I never talked to him when I was living there... I don't think I ever even saw him. But he was there when I needed someone the most. So, even though it hasn't been too long, I still think he's a really good friend." Devon said with a smile, then saw Jose dash out of the admin building and run toward them at top speed.

"He said yes!" Jose said happily.

"I thought he would." Devon said with a smile as he herded the increasing group of boys toward the admin building.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Hello?" Paula said hesitantly as she stood in the doorway with her hand still on the door.

"You don't know me none, but our kids is in school together and I guess my boy's been being his usual self and causing yours trouble. Myron gets being an asshole from his dad's side of the family." The woman confided.

"Please, come in. My name is Paula, by the way."

"Oh, right. I'm Karen, and this little asshole punk wannabe is Myron." She said as she guided the boy in with her hand held firmly on the back of his neck.

As soon as Myron was fully in the room he spotted Obie and said, "That's him! That's the guy that told everyone I was queer!"

Karen smacked Myron on the back of the head and said, "We's inside. Quiet down."

Myron looked anxiously at Obie, but didn't say anything more.

"I have to admit, I have no idea what kind of trouble your son is causing, but I think that there are three little boys here who might be able to fix that." Paula said as she looked from one boy to the next.

Obie looked her right in the eyes and said, "Myron's been picking on Amos, I mean, Erin, and calling him a fag and stuff like that. The thing is, Myron's gay. He's probably never told no one, but he is. I guess he calls other people that so no one will look at him and notice that he is."

"But I'm not!" Myron barked.

Karen again smacked him on the back of the head to get him to

quiet down.

Obie rolled his eyes, then walked across the room to where Myron was standing at his mother's side and pulled him into a firm kiss.

Everyone watched, stunned at the sight.

Obie had one hand on the back of Myron's head, guiding him to return the kiss. His other hand drifted down Myron's back then stopped and took firm hold of Myron's ass, guiding him to grind, ever so slightly.

When Obie finally released Myron, he quietly said, "A straight guy wouldn't have enjoyed that."

"But I can't be gay." Myron said as tears filled his eyes.

"Sorry. You don't get a choice. I mean, you can choose not to do gay things. And you can choose not to be around gay people and even to hate them if you want. But you don't get to choose if you're gay or straight. That happens all by itself." Obie said regretfully.

"My dad'll kill me." Myron whispered as his tears fell.

"You don't need to worry none about that. By the time your daddy's up for 'good behavior' you'll be out on your own, living your own life. And, knowing your daddy like I do, I'm betting he won't be getting no good behavior. That man could screw up a free lunch." Karen said wearily.

"Obie?" Erin asked as he walked to Myron and Obie hesitantly.

"Yeah?" Obie responded cautiously.

"If you could tell about Myron, just by looking at him, can you tell about me?" Erin asked with hope and fear vying for control of his expression.

After a moment of looking, Obie shook his head and said, "It doesn't work with everyone. Some people, like Myron, I can just look at him and know, without a doubt. Someone like you, I don't know if maybe you're in the middle and could go either way, or if it's not decided yet. But I can't tell."

"So, are you okay with this, Karen?" Paula asked with concern.

"Yeah. It don't make me no never mind. But I hate to think of

what it's gonna be like for Myron at school. The school called me and told me to come and get him today because he got 'outed' at lunch and was getting bullied and beaten up by just about everyone in the class." Karen said with the first hint of motherly concern that she had displayed with them.

"I know we just met, but if there's anything I can do to help, please let me know." Paula said seriously.

"Myron's never been well liked, always something of a bully, really. But since his dad got sent to prison... he's been even more of a handful."

Cynthia looked on with concern, regretting that she didn't have any words of wisdom to offer.

"I talked to the people in the office about moving Myron to a different school, but they said that the district don't allow that." Karen said regretfully.

Paula glanced at the clock, then said, "If you can hang around here for just a few more minutes, I might be able to help you with that."

As Karen was about to ask what she was talking about, the front door opened.

\* \* \* \* \*

"I guess it's time to do what we came here for." Donny said as he started toward the house.

Ronny walked at his side and gave him a curious look.

"To help them pack." Donny clarified.

Ronny nodded as they walked up the front steps.

"What'd you think I meant?" Donny finally asked.

"I don't know about you, but I came for the home cooking." Ronny said with a grin.

"My room's up here." Paul called as he dashed up the stairs ahead of them.

Donny and Ronny shared a smile as they followed, much more slowly.

"See. Here's my fishtank. The Neon Tetra, his name is Leviathan."

Paul said as he pointed at something that looked like a piece of a gum wrapper floating in the water. In Ronny's opinion, anything that wouldn't fill a dinner plate, wasn't really a fish.

"The black one with the 'C' shaped tail, her name is Molly. She's a Molly. Oh, and she eats her babies. And since I haven't seen her mate, Roger, in a while, she may eat her husbands, too." Paul said as he squatted to look carefully into the tank.

"Women!" Donny said with a grin at Ronny.

A roll of his eyes was all the response Ronny would give.

"There's another fish with big buggy eyes named Tipton... that's the fish's name, not the eyes." Paul stammered to explain.

Donny and Ronny were both fighting to contain their laughter at this point.

Paul was so sweet and sincere that they wouldn't want to hurt his feelings, but some of his bumbling and stammering was actually funny.

As Donny fought to control his laughter, something caught his eye and he said, "Oh! I see that you're straight!"

"Why do you say that?" Paul asked curiously.

"Because no gay man would be able to stay in a room with window treatments like these." Donny said frankly.

"Then, I guess that means that you're gay. Because no straight man would call those curtains 'window treatments'." Paul said with a self-satisfied smile.

Ronny broke into laughter at the exchange and was soon followed by Paul and eventually even Donny.

\* \* \* \* \*

"What's going on?" The woman asked as she walked into the living room, like she owned the place.

"Julie, I'd like for you to meet Karen and her son Myron. Myron goes to Erin's school." Paula said carefully.

Julie offered her hand and shook firmly when Karen accepted it. "Julie Morrison."

"A pleasure." Karen said cautiously.

"And over here we have Cynthia Morrow and Obie. Apparently, Obie is Erin's younger brother." Paula said cautiously as she watched for Julie's reaction.

"Are you here to take Erin away from us?" Julie asked firmly.

"No. Obie lives at Camp Little Eagle. I work there. We don't want to take your son away. Just reunite him with his siblings." Cynthia hurried to explain.

"How sure are you, I mean, that they're brothers?" Julie asked as she took a seat in the nearest chair.

"You'll know when you see my brother, Mike. Him and Amos are identical twins." Obie said seriously.

"Micah." Julie said in a resigned whisper.

"What is it?" Paula asked with concern.

"Just what he used to say when we first got him. We always thought he was grieving for the family that he lost, but he was actually calling out for the brother he had been taken from." Julie said regretfully.

"We just believed what we were told." Paula said gently.

"We believed what we wanted to believe. We both knew that Cecil Thompson was up to no good. We were pretty sure that the story he was giving us was a lie. But it got us what we wanted when there was no other way, so we went along with it." Julie said frankly.

After a long silent moment, Karen quietly said, "We should be going."

"No. Please, wait just a moment." Paula said quickly, then turned to Julie and said, "Karen's son was outed at school today, and she's trying to get him into another school as quickly as possible."

"What am I missing?" Julie asked as she looked from Karen to Myron.

"What?" Paula asked in confusion.

"I get that her gay kid is getting bullied. Sorry to hear it. But, what is she doing here?" Julie asked bluntly.

"Oh! She came to apologize for her son picking on Erin at school. I

take it that that's what brought about the whole 'outing'." Paula said quickly.

"Myron called Erin a fag. Since I could tell that Myron's gay, I called him on it." Obie said frankly.

"...In the cafeteria." Myron added in a pained voice.

"...at lunch." Erin said with a nod.

"And since then, Myron's been bullied and picked on to the point that they called me to come and get him." Karen said seriously.

"So, it was suggested that Myron might get along better at another school." Paula finished with a smile.

"I work at a camp for abused and abandoned children. I've only just started there, but I could put in a good word for you if you'd like to try that. At least if he went there, I know that his sexual orientation wouldn't be an issue." Cynthia said carefully.

"I guess Paula hasn't told you what I do for a living." Julie said with a smile.

"Do you wrestle?" Obie asked curiously.

Julie laughed at the question, then said, "No. But thanks for the thought. I work at the school district office. And part of my job is to oversee the transfer of students among the schools. I'll give you my business card and you can come by tomorrow and sit down with me and we'll have Myron into another school as soon as possible."

Myron walked a few feet to where Obie and Erin were standing together.

"I'm sorry I was so mean to you. I never hated you or anything." Myron said shyly.

"I'm quiet, so people pick on me a lot, because it's easy." Erin mumbled regretfully.

"Well, anyone's treating you bad and you need someone to talk to them..." Myron started to say.

"I'll call Obie." Erin said with a shy smile as he looked at his younger brother.

Myron was surprised by the statement, but finally nodded and

said, "But if your brother's too busy, you can call me and I'll help you. I kinda owe you one."

Erin looked shyly at Myron and smiled as he nodded.

"If you run into any trouble, I'm at Camp Little Eagle." Obie said seriously.

Myron had thought that Obie was talking to Erin and was surprised to find the younger boy focused on him.

"I know some people who are gay and a whole lot more who don't care where you wanna stick your dick. If you ever need help, call me. I'll see that you get the help you need." Obie said seriously.

After a long moment to consider, Myron quietly asked, "But what if I just need someone to talk to about this stuff. I don't understand everything and I'm scared."

"Call me and I'll get you the help you need." Obie said again.

"Say goodbye. I got a late shift tonight, so we gotta get going." Karen said unenthusiastically.

"Bye, Erin. I'm really sorry." Myron said softly.

"I know." Erin said gently.

"Bye, Obie. I'd say that it was nice to meet you except that meeting you was probably the worst thing to ever happen to me in my whole life." Myron said with a weary chuckle.

"When things get bad, just remember one thing..." Obie said seriously.

"What's that?" Myron asked anxiously.

Obie stepped forward and, once again, pulled Myron into a full, deep kiss.

"Look at'em go!" Julie chuckled.

"Little guy's got some moves." Karen said in an impressed voice.

Cynthia checked her watch, and was considering whether or not it was time to intervene.

"Remember that." Obie said as soon as the kiss broke.

Myron was staring wide eyed and trying to catch his breath.

"What you just felt, *that's* what being gay is all about. If someone calls you a fag or a queer or a homo, just look'em in the eyes and remember what that felt like. You don't have to wave a flag or march in a parade, but don't ever deny who you are." Obie said intensely.

"Okay, Obie. I promise." Myron said firmly.

Obie smiled and said, "I believe you."

Karen put a gentle arm around Myron's shoulders and guided him toward the door.

As they were leaving, Julie asked, "So Obie is Erin's younger brother?"

"Yes." Paula said cautiously.

"I think we should invite him over often."

\* \* \* \* \*

"Well, this is it." Jerico said as he gestured around his somewhat spartan bedroom.

"I don't think you guys need me. I'm going to get back to helping Paul." Donny said before leaving.

"If you'll get the books, I don't think I'll need help with anything else.

"No problem." Ronny said as he placed the first carry all container by the desk. "So, what's it like, being a Shaman? I have to admit that I don't know much about what it means."

"It's like being a priest, but of Native American beliefs rather than Christian ones." Jerico said simply.

"So... I don't know, right? So that's why I'm asking. What do Native Americans believe about people like me?" Ronny asked hesitantly.

"Not much. I suppose most of what you would encounter today would have to do with how they were raised and the beliefs of their local Shaman, and little to do with the ancient teachings." Jerico said frankly.

"So, there aren't any people like me in your history?" Ronny asked regretfully.

"No! I didn't mean that at all. The Two-Spirit Tradition dates back

to the ancient times. The Two-Spirits were respected and believed to be blessed above others with spiritual gifts. What I was trying to say was that in Native American society, today, you're likely to find the same prejudices that you find anywhere else." Jerico quickly explained.

"So, there are really people like me in your tradition?" Ronny asked to confirm.

Jerico looked at the bookcase by his desk and selected a particular book, then handed it to Ronny. "This has quite a bit of good information on the subject."

"Can I look at this now?" Ronny asked hopefully.

"We have all night to pack and I don't have very much stuff. You can take as long as you want." Jerico said with a smile.

Ronny immediately sat down and started reading.

Jerico watched for a moment, then went back to work, packing his clothes.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Well, since I don't have anything planned for dinner, and we have Erin's brother visiting with us, why don't I take us all out to eat?" Julie asked with a smile at Cynthia and Obie.

"Actually, Obie and I would like to invite the three of you over to Camp Little Eagle to have dinner with us. That way, Erin could finally reunite with his twin brother." Mrs. Morrow said hopefully.

"I have to admit that I'm a little bit nervous about this." Paula said honestly.

"Could we ever deny our son anything, especially the chance to know his blood family?" Julie said in return.

Paula nodded, then turned to Cynthia and said, "Of course we'll accept. I just can't help but worry."

"No matter how this goes, we'll all be there to help the boys through it." Cynthia said as she watched Obie and Erin talking in hushed whispers.

\* \* \* \* \*

At the call for dinner, Paul, Donny, Ronny and Jerico emerged

into the hallway at the same time.

"It smells like Mom made catfish. You're going to love this." Paul said as he hurried down the stairs.

Lucy was setting serving dishes on the table as the boys entered.

"Go ahead and get started dishing. Mom will be here in a minute." Lucy said as she took her seat.

"Is this cucumber salad?" Ronny asked with a smile.

"Yes. I made that. I hope you like it." Lucy said pleasantly.

Ronny took a big helping before handing the dish to Donny.

"So do you guys work at the camp, too? Or do you live there?" Lucy asked curiously.

"I just moved there today." Donny said simply.

"I'm living there until I can figure out what I want to do after high school. Things have been crazy for me for a while, so I haven't had much of a chance to think about it until now." Ronny said honestly.

"If you think about what talents you have, maybe you could focus on finding a job doing something like that." Lucy said consideringly.

"Yeah. But I'm not really good at anything." Ronny said regretfully.

Donny noticed Lucy's friendly smile and how interested she seemed to be in them.

His eyes went wide with realization and he quickly said, "I get that you're into us. But before this goes too far, you should probably know that I'm gay and even though Ronny is a nice guy and everything, you probably don't want to go there. Since he doesn't have a dick."

Lucy was stunned into silence at the declaration.

"Nice cock-block, asshole. And for your information, I *do* have a dick, I just didn't bring it with me since I didn't think I'd be needing it." Ronny growled.

Lucy looked from one to the other and realized

what was happening. "For your information, I'm not interested in teenage 'boys'. I was just trying to be nice to my 'little' brother's friends!"

Ronny and Donny gave her matching incredulous looks, not buying it for a minute.

Joce walked into the room with a large pan of fish and could feel the tension in the room. "Did I miss something?"

Lucy gave an aggravated growl before stomping out of the room.

"I don't know. She's just being overly emotional, or something." Donny said with a shrug.

"Must be that time of the month." Ronny said with a nod, then helped himself to a serving of the catfish.

Paul was looking around in puzzlement, obviously not following along with what had just happened.

Jerico was keeping his head down and fighting to keep his expression neutral as he ate his dinner, internally laughing himself silly.

Donny glanced over at Ronny and quietly said, "She's totally into us."

Ronny nodded as he continued to enjoy his food.

\* \* \* \* \*

"This place is beautiful." Paula said as she looked at the camp nestled in the middle of a thick wooded area.

"The cafeteria is over there." Obie said as he urged his brother to walk faster.

The three women followed with indulgent smiles.

\* \* \* \* \*

"There's Mike!" Obie said happily and dragged Erin even faster across the room.

The three women slowed and watched from a distance, silently holding their collective breath.

"Mike!" Obie called as he approached.

"Obie! I was beginning to worry about you." Mike said as he turned in his seat and froze.

For a moment, Mike felt like he was in a dream, since the only time in the past six years that he had seen Amos was when he was dreaming.

Just as quickly as the feeling had washed over him, it was gone. Mike launched himself from his seat and pulled Amos into a firm hug.

Obie watched for a moment with a huge smile plastered across his face, then finally, he turned back to the three women who had brought them.

"Where you going, Obie?" Mike asked as he held his twin tightly.

"You guys need some twin time. I'll be over here with Erin's moms whenever you're done." Obie said contentedly.

Mike debated within himself for a moment, but finally agreed and guided Amos to walk with him back to the Cabin 3 table.

\* \* \* \* \*

"You did a very good thing today." Cynthia whispered to Obie.

"I did lots of good things today. But I think that Micah and Amos getting to be together turned out the best." Obie said happily.

"What else did you do?" Cynthia asked curiously.

"I got Myron to admit who he really is. And

even though he might not be really happy about it right now, I bet that it won't be long before he's a whole lot happier than he ever was before because he doesn't have to hide it anymore." Obie said honestly.

"Yes. You certainly seemed to enjoy kissing him. Do you like him?" Cynthia asked with a smile.

"No. Not really. I'm just a good kisser. Donny said I was, and he'd know. So when Myron was standing there about to tell us how gay he's not, I figured I'd prove to him and everyone else how gay he is." Obie said with a smile.

"You managed to do that." Cynthia chuckled.

"I hope he's okay." Obie said with concern.

"He knows how to get in touch with you if he needs help or has any questions, right?" Cynthia asked gently.

"Yeah. I made sure he knew that." Obie said seriously.

"Then I think that's all you can do." Cynthia said honestly.

Obie slowly nodded as he thought about all the varied happenings since he woke up that

morning and finally said, "It's been a good day."