

180

by MultiMapper



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Chapter 1

"Doctor, he's coming around." the nurse said into the phone beside my bed.

"Yes, yes. I'll hurry." she said quickly, then hung up the phone.

I tried to sit up, but couldn't seem to move. So I turned my head to follow the nurse and watched her as she tugged on the straps on my wrists and ankles.

She walked toward the door and paused to look at a large uniformed police officer with his hand resting on the gun in his holster.

"I'm sorry ma'am... Orders." the officer said with sincere apology in his voice.

The nurse gave an ironic chuckle before whispering so low that I barely heard, "Personally, I'd feel a lot better if you'd kill the son-of-a-bitch. But it's not up to me, now is it?"

"No ma'am. We're just doing our jobs." the officer said with a note of regret as he glanced at me and seemed to take more of a grip on his gun when he saw me watching.

Then in a louder voice directed at me, she said, "The doctor will be right with you. Don't go anywhere."

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"Well Jason, how are you feeling today?" a doctor asked as he walked into my room.

I pondered the words for a moment and considered.

Jason.

It sounded right.

I don't think I would have known my name if he had asked me, but since he said it, I'm pretty sure that that's it.

When I broke out of my mental wandering, he was looking at me quizzically, waiting for an answer.

"Oh, I'm sorry doctor. I'm feeling fine, I guess." I said as I considered how I was feeling.

"Any dizziness, nausea, headache?" he asked, more to his clipboard than to me.

"No, I feel kind of spacey and I'm having a little trouble with my memory." I said carefully.

"Oh really?" he asked, as he looked up from his clipboard and devoted his full attention to me.

"Yeah. Before you said my name, I didn't remember it and... I don't really know where I am or what I'm doing here." I said hesitantly, watching for his reaction.

"Excellent! Just try to relax for a bit longer, while I order the tests that I'm going to need. I think this is a good sign, a very good sign..." He was still saying as he walked out of the room.

I lay there and puzzled over what few facts that I had to work with, but I finally decided that I didn't have enough to make sense of whatever was happening.

The nurse walked in and looked at me with disgust.

She placed a syringe on the tray beside my bed and pulled on some latex gloves.

Then she turned to the police officer and quietly asked, "Could you leave me alone with him for about two minutes?"

"As much as I'd like to, I have my orders." the officer said, in a low voice.

After a moment, the nurse picked up the syringe again and muttered, "Pity."

The police officer nodded his agreement and watched as the nurse plunged the needle into my arm.

I winced at the sudden jab and fought to keep from screaming.

"Oh, did that hurt?" She asked with a smirk as she drew my blood up into the syringe.

I didn't make a move, afraid that any reaction from me would cause her to mistreat me even more.

"Good." She said with satisfaction, then withdrew the needle with a

jerk.

"The doctor can see to the rest of it himself. There's no way I'm going to be in the room when they release those restraints." The nurse said, as she walked toward the door.

"They're going to release him?" the police officer asked in astonishment.

"The doctor wants an MRI and he'll have to be released for something like that." She said as she paused at the officer's side.

"I'm going to call for some backup then. We're not letting this one get away." the officer said, as he pulled the radio off his belt.

"If you would have let me have those two minutes, you wouldn't have to worry about it." the nurse said coldly, then walked out of the room.

The officer keyed his radio, then said, "This is Morgan. I'm going to need two more officers down here at the psych ward for guard duty."

A moment later the radio responded with something that sounded like static to me, but I guess it made sense to him because he seemed satisfied with the response.

The police officer stood silently with his hand on his gun, as if daring me to make a move.

I rested back and closed my eyes as I tried to draw up any memories to explain the situation that I was in.

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"Oh, what I would give to have nurses who actually understood what I'm trying to accomplish." the doctor said, in a tone of long suffering as he walked back into the room.

Since he had been the nicest person I'd met so far, I decided to take a chance and ask, "What are you trying to accomplish?"

The doctor smiled at me and said, "I'm trying to correct a very serious neurological condition which has had some unfortunate side effects. Unless I miss my guess, my new therapy may have done the trick."

"Great." I said weakly, not really knowing anything more than before I asked.

"I'm going to take you down to the first floor, so we can do an MRI on you. Do you remember what that is?" the doctor asked, as he moved behind me where I couldn't see him.

"Magnetic resonance imaging. You put me in a machine and it takes pictures, like thin slides of my insides." I said carefully, but I didn't really know how I knew it.

"Can you remember if you've ever had the procedure done?" the doctor asked curiously, as he started checking to see that all my restraints were fastened tightly.

I searched my memory, but couldn't see past the fog that seemed to have fallen over my mind.

"No. I can't remember." I said distantly.

"Good. That's just as it should be." the doctor said happily, then started to push my bed toward the door.

"I'm sorry doctor, but I need to wait for backup before I can let you take him out of the room." the police officer said firmly.

"Well get them here. He may only be stable for a few minutes and I need to get these readings." the doctor said impatiently.

"They should be here any minute." the officer said without emotion, letting it be known with his expression that he wasn't in the mood to argue about it.

"Are you still feeling alright?" the doctor asked, as he came around the side of the bed where I could see him.

"Yeah. I'm still feeling spacey, but I'm not in pain." I said carefully.

"Good. You let me know immediately if you have any discomfort at all, no matter how minor." the doctor said firmly.

"Um, does that include what the nurse did to my arm just now?" I asked quietly.

The doctor glanced at my arm for a moment, then said, "I'm sorry about that. I'll do what I can to find you a more sympathetic nurse

when I get you moved to a private room."

"Good luck." The police officer chuckled under his breath.

The doctor looked up at him with irritation for a moment, then moved to a cabinet along the wall and did something with his back to me.

He pulled on a pair of latex gloves, then swabbed my arm with a wet cotton ball and finished it off by placing a band-aid over the puncture.

There was a knock on the door that made all of us look up.

The police officer opened the door and two other uniformed police officers walked in.

"We're ready when you are doctor." the first police officer said seriously.

The doctor nodded, then moved behind my bed to move me out of the room.

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As I moved down the hall with my police escort, everyone who saw us stopped and stared.

"Is that him?" I heard a young woman ask as she watched us pass.

I wanted to close my eyes and pretend that they weren't all watching me. But at the same time, I wanted to know what was going on.

Finally we arrived on the first floor of the hospital and the doctor pushed me down the hallway with purpose.

"You should have an orderly doing that." one of the nurses said as we passed.

"If you can find me one who will do it, I'll be glad to let him. Send him down to testing." The doctor said without slowing his pace.

He guided us through some double doors and finally settled my bed beside the large machine that I knew was the MRI.

"Now Jason, when I release the restraints, I'm going to help you move over to the platform of the MRI. Please don't make any sudden

moves or our local constabulary might feel threatened." the doctor said as he looked me in the eyes.

I nodded that I understood, then felt as he unfastened the large Velcro straps that were holding me in place.

"You've been laying in bed for quite a while, so you might feel weak or light headed when you stand. Just hold on to me and I'll help you over." the doctor said quietly.

"I will." I said just as quietly, then felt it when he pulled my legs to the side of the bed.

He was right.

As soon as I was upright, it felt like all the blood rushed out of my head and I thought I might pass out.

The doctor was half holding, half guiding me as I took two steps and turned to sit on the MRI.

"Do you need any help?" A young man who looked to be about eighteen asked as he hurried into the room.

"I've got it Josh, but I would appreciate it if you would help him back onto his bed when we're finished."

"Yes doctor." Josh said and moved to stand out of the way, just inside the door.

"Now Jason. I need for you to lie perfectly still. Any movement can invalidate the entire test and we'll have to start over. Can you do that for me?" the doctor asked carefully.

"Yes. I'll be still." I said as I tried to be sure that I was in a comfortable position.

"Hold on. I need to check to see that he didn't get anything out of your pockets." One of the police officers said as he walked up beside the doctor.

"He didn't." the doctor said firmly.

"We need to check." the officer repeated as he stared the doctor in the eyes.

The doctor turned to look at me as he said, "I'll be glad when this

whole mess is over so I can have some authority in my own hospital again."

The police officer checked my hands, my mouth, then patted up and down my body. I was just wearing a paper thin gown, I don't know where he thought I was going to hide something but he roughly patted and groped every inch of my body before he was satisfied.

"Okay Jason. Just stay still. Don't be surprised when the table starts to move. That's supposed to happen. Just remain still and quiet until I tell you it's okay to move." the doctor said, and waited for me to nod and acknowledge my understanding.

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While I was waiting for the table to move me into the MRI unit, I heard the doctor say, "I thought you were off for the next two days. If I'd known you were here I would have asked for you to be here. Is everything okay?"

I didn't turn my head to see who he was talking to, but a moment later I heard the young orderly respond, "I traded shifts with Yasmina so she could spend time with her brother who just graduated high school."

"That was nice of you. It's going to make a long week for you isn't it?" the doctor asked casually.

"Ten days. I've had worse." Josh said dismissively.

"Do you have anything major on your schedule today?" the doctor asked, then I heard a humming noise from the machine near my head.

"Bedpans and random cleaning. You know the drill." Josh said in a lighthearted tone.

"I would like for you to be assigned to attend to Jason while I look over his tests. Would that be alright with you?" the doctor asked hopefully.

"Sure. I guess. If you don't need me for a few minutes, I can take care of that right now." Josh said quickly.

"Go ahead, this will take a while." the doctor said, then I felt the

table start to move me into the large humming machine.

I couldn't hear much of anything after that.

About twenty seconds later, I felt an itch on my nose.

Curiosity about my situation, the police and everything else since I woke up was forgotten as I concentrated on not moving to scratch the itch.

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With nothing to mark the passage of time inside the machine, it felt like I was in there forever.

The noise and slight movement of the table beneath me did little to distract me from the infuriating itch.

Eventually the test was over and my table reversed direction and emerged from the MRI unit.

"You can move now Jason." the doctor said casually.

I immediately reached up and scratched the itch on my nose.

The doctor chuckled and said, "I don't know why it is, but everyone seems to get an itch during this exam."

Before I could lower my hand, I noticed that my wrists were red and raw, probably from pulling against the restraints that I had awoken in.

"Josh, if you'll get a wheelchair, you can take Jason to his room." the doctor said while examining something with his back to me.

"He needs to be restrained." one of the police officers said firmly.

"Excuse me officer Perez, but unless you have a PHD in psychology, I don't think you're qualified to make that determination. I understand your need to be here, but you do not have the authority to dictate the treatment of my patient." the doctor said firmly.

"We'll see." Officer Perez said coldly, then glanced at the two other officers before walking out of the room.

"Shit." the doctor said with irritation.

I turned to look at the doctor in time to see him hurry to the phone.

"Melissa, I need you to get me an appointment with Judge Harmon as soon as you possibly can regarding Jason Kerbo." the doctor said quickly.

Kerbo?

Yeah, that sounds about right. My last name is Kerbo... Jason Kerbo.

"If you can get a hearing that's fine, but I'll settle for five minutes in his chambers if he can spare the time."

"Thank you Melissa, please hurry." the doctor said, then hung up the phone.

He turned to face me with an unconvincing smile.

"Everything is going to be fine. It's possible that you might be restrained again for a while, but I'm working on it." the doctor said hesitantly.

"It's okay doctor, if it will be easier for everyone, I can get back on the bed and you can restrain me now." I said quietly.

The doctor was surprised by my offer, but quickly recovered and said, "Thank you Jason. I think that would be very helpful."

I slowly sat up on the MRI table and felt the dizziness wash over me again. After a moment for me to find my balance, I got up and got onto the gurney that I had arrived on.

"I'll try to get you released from this some time today if I can." the doctor said as he started to secure my ankles and wrists.

"Thank you doctor... what is your name?" I finally asked.

The doctor smiled at the question and said, "Doctor Finley. I'm sorry I didn't introduce myself earlier."

"That's fine doctor. Thank you for taking care of me." I said quietly.

The doctor nodded that he heard, then turned as the doors opened. I couldn't see the door from where I was lying, so I just relaxed and listened.

"We won't be needing the wheelchair after all, Josh. Would you take Jason to his room and stay with him until I've finished going over his tests?" Doctor Finley asked hopefully.

"Yes doctor. I'm cleared to stay with him for my entire shift." Josh said, and he sounded happy.

"Good. Now if I could just find a nurse that I could trust to take care of him, I would be able to concentrate on my work."

"Well, I think I know of someone, if you could arrange it." Josh said hesitantly.

"Who might that be?" Doctor Finley asked with interest.

"Nurse Valenzuela. She's really good, and I couldn't imagine her ever intentionally hurting anyone." Josh said quietly.

"She works in the terminal ward, right?" Doctor Finley asked carefully.

"Yeah, but I'm pretty sure she'd appreciate a break from it for a day or two. It gets kind of depressing in there after a while." Josh said more slowly.

"Take Jason to his room and I'll see if I can get Nurse Valenzuela reassigned. Thanks Josh." Doctor Finley said, and it sounded like he was smiling.

"Anytime doctor." Josh said from directly above my head.

"You ready guy?" Josh asked as he leaned down over me.

"You're the driver." I responded with a smile.

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"You're going to keep him in the restraints aren't you?" one of the police officers asked as we traveled down the hall.

"Yes. The only way I'll release him is if the doctor tells me to." Josh said seriously.

"Alright then." the officer said, then turned to his companion and said, "Willy, you baby-sit the psycho while I find Javier and check in with the station. Call if you need us."

"Got it." the officer, Willy, said without enthusiasm.

Then in a whisper I barely heard, "Keep your gun handy. I've seen this little fucker in action."

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Once we were in the room, I looked around and noticed that it wasn't the same room I'd been in before.

"Is it okay if I move him into his bed?" Josh asked the officer who had followed us into the room.

"I'll need to call for backup before you can do that. Just to be safe." the officer said, not revealing any emotion in the statement.

Josh reluctantly nodded, then flashed me an apologetic look as he asked, "How are you doing? Do you need anything?"

As much as I didn't want to say it, I didn't really have a choice.

Reluctantly I whispered, "I have to pee."

Josh gave me a quick uncertain look, then walked to a door in the room that I assumed was a bathroom, and returned a moment later with something that looked like an oddly shaped pitcher or watering can.

"I'm sure you know the routine by now." Josh said casually as he approached.

"Actually I don't. I don't remember anything before a couple hours ago." I said reluctantly.

"Really? You don't remember us doing this before?" Josh asked with surprise.

"No. I didn't even know I'd met you before." I said hesitantly.

Josh looked at me curiously for a moment, maybe trying to determine if I was being honest. Finally he said, "I'm Josh Harmon and I'm your own personal orderly for at least the rest of the day, possibly the rest of the week."

"It's nice to meet you Josh, I'm Jason Kerbo and I really need to pee." I finished with a smile.

"Oh, right. Okay Jace, it's pretty simple. You don't have to do much except wait for me to get the urinal into place." Josh said as he put on some latex gloves.

He moved quickly and professionally as he slightly lifted my gown

and did just what needed to be done down there.

It was odd to feel someone handling me like that, but he was gentle in his handling of me and his expression was very detached.

"Okay Jace, let 'er rip." Josh said with a smile.

It took a few seconds for me to be able to release it, but when the urine finally let loose, it was like a river. I thought it was never going to end.

"Wow. It must have been a while. I've never seen anyone overflow one of these things, but I think you almost did it." Josh said in an impressed voice.

"I aim to please." I said shyly, knowing from the prickly sensation on my face that I was blushing.

Josh smiled at me as he carefully took the urinal away and made sure that my gown was covering me.

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When Josh finished emptying the urinal, he came back into the room and seemed as lost as I was at what he was supposed to do next.

I waited for him to say something, but when the silence had stretched on too long, I finally asked, "What was I like when you met me before?"

"What?" Josh asked with surprise.

I looked into his eyes and hesitantly said, "I just get the feeling that I might have been... um, not nice."

Josh stared at me wide eyed for a moment, then abruptly let loose a loud laugh.

Being strapped down to the gurney, there wasn't much I could do but watch him as he doubled over with laughter.

"I'll take that as a yes." I said weakly as I watched him fight his way over to one of the chairs at the edge of the room.

"Not nice!" He squeaked, then started laughing again.

I glanced over at the police officer standing just inside the door to find him watching us with a stone faced expression.

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"I'm sorry Jace. I didn't mean to laugh like that." Josh said as he tried to get his laughter under control.

"It's alright. But can you tell me about how I was before. I'd like to understand what's going on." I said in a somewhat timid voice.

"You really don't remember anything?" Josh asked carefully.

I shook my head slowly.

He thought for a moment, then carefully said, "I don't know everything, but from what I do know, you're probably better off the way you are for now."

I looked at him with surprise for a moment before cautiously asking, "You're not going to tell me?"

"No. At least not until Doctor Finley comes back in. If you were in the hospital for a broken leg, I'd go ahead and tell you whatever you wanted to know. But you're in the psych ward. I wouldn't want to take the chance that I might tell you something that you couldn't deal with and end up hurting you." Josh said sincerely.

I looked into his eyes for a moment, then reluctantly nodded my acceptance.

"Just try not to worry about it right now. Everything is going to be fine." Josh said assuringly.

"Do you really think so?" I asked as I made eye contact again.

He started to answer me, but caught himself before he said anything.

After a moment of consideration, he reluctantly said, "No. Actually, I don't really think so."

"Oh." I said in nearly a whisper.

"I'm sorry Jason, I'm not trying to upset you but I don't want to out and out lie to you either. From what I know of things... I don't see any possible way that they'll ever be anything close to fine." Josh said with a worried look in his eyes.

"That bad huh?" I asked quietly.

He nodded slightly, then something seemed to occur to him. His worried expression seemed to dissolve and he flashed me a quick smile.

"What is it?" I asked hesitantly.

"You can't remember anything, right?" He asked with a smile.

"Yeah. That's right." I said cautiously.

"Then for right now, nothing that happened outside this room really happened as far as you're concerned, right?" He asked, and seemed almost happy.

"Yeah. I guess so." I said reluctantly.

"Then for the short time that you have this blissful ignorance of the outside world, let's construct a past for you. Not your real past, but one that's the way you would like for things to be." Josh said with cheer.

I considered for a moment and finally decided that it actually sounded like a good idea.

If my own past were something so horrible that the cops and nurses wanted to kill me, then maybe having this fantasy would help me through some difficult days ahead.

"That sounds like a good idea. How do we start?" I asked curiously.

Josh smiled and said, "Well, I hope you don't mind, but I'm going to pull a chair over."

"Is there any way you can raise up this bed so I can sit up a little?" I asked hopefully.

"If you were in your hospital bed it wouldn't be a problem, but the gurney can't..." he trailed off.

"Well DUH! I can just do it the old fashioned way. Let me just get a few more pillows and I can prop you up." Josh said as he walked to the little closet at the side of the room.

I smiled as I watched him gather the extra pillows from the closet, then the pillows from the bed.

"Okay, I'm going to sit you up and jam these things in behind you."

Josh said and placed a hand on my shoulder.

"Be careful." the police officer warned from the door.

"I'll be fine." Josh said with assurance, then helped me sit up with one hand while stuffing the pillows behind me with the other.

"I've almost got it..." Josh said slowly.

"I'm done. You can lie back." He said in a voice of accomplishment.

I lay back with his help and was propped up into an elevated reclined position.

"Thanks." I said as I tried to find a comfortable position with my arms strapped down to the frame of the bed.

Josh took his chair beside my bed and looked at me expectantly.

After a moment of thought, I said, "I don't know how to start."

"Just try to imagine what kind of life you'd like to have when everything else is settled." Josh said quietly.

I nodded absently as I thought.

"Where would you like to live?" Josh prompted.

"I don't know. I guess I'd just like to have a normal home." I said carefully.

"How do you define normal?" Josh asked with interest.

"I don't know. A mom, a dad... maybe a brother or sister..." I said hesitantly.

"Do you want your brother or sister to be older or younger?" Josh asked casually.

I thought about it for a moment, then said, "I don't know... maybe close to my age so I'd have a friend."

Josh nodded and said, "Where would you like to live?"

After a moment to consider, I said, "Someplace kind of remote. You know, like in the country or in a small town."

Josh nodded and said, "Yeah. The city life can be kind of stressful."

A long moment of silence settled in between us as Josh waited for me to continue.

Finally I said, "It's never going to happen is it?"

"Why do you say that?" He asked with concern.

"I don't know what's going on, but with the way everyone has been acting since I woke up... I'm probably going to be stuck in a nut house or something for the rest of my life." I said reluctantly.

"I really don't know, but it won't hurt to dream about a better future." Josh said quietly.

"I suppose not." I said as I stared off at nothing in particular.

A knock on the door broke me out of my thoughts and I looked up to see who it was.

"I've been assigned to attend to this patient. May I come in?" A timid voice asked from the doorway.

The police officer stood away from the door and allowed the nurse to walk in.

She was carrying a clipboard and read it for a moment before turning her attention to me.

"Hello Jason, I'm Nurse Valenzuela. You can call me Roberta if you want." She said in a low voice.

It was a guy. I may not have any memories before today, but from the sound of her voice, I knew without a doubt that this nurse was not female.

Hesitantly I said, "It's nice to meet you Roberta."

She smiled at my reaction and said, "Please don't be shy honey. I'm not going to bite you."

I smiled at her statement and relaxed a little bit.

"Hello Josh, how are you doing today?" She asked as she surveyed the room.

"I'm fine. I'll be even better when Doctor Finley can get approval for Jason to be removed from the restraints. It hurts me to see him like this." Josh said with a pained look in my direction.

"Are you in any pain honey? Do you need anything?" Roberta asked as she moved to my side.

"No. I'm fine. Josh has been taking good care of me." I said honestly.

"He's going to be a fine doctor someday." Roberta said gently as she moved behind me to fuss with the stack of pillows I was resting on.

I looked at Josh with question at the statement.

"I'm working as an orderly this summer and I'll be starting medical school this fall." Josh said timidly.

I smiled at him and said, "I think you'll be a great doctor."

He returned my smile and shyly said, "Thanks."

"I'm going to check your vitals now. Just relax." Roberta said as she pulled on some latex gloves.

"Okay." I said quietly.

Over the next few minutes she took my pulse, temperature and blood pressure, recording each reading as she went.

"Everything looks good so far. Are you feeling discomfort of any kind?" She asked gently.

"Nope. I'm good." I said, drawn in by her friendly nature.

"I'm going to go now and see if there's any word from Doctor Finley about getting you off that gurney. And when I come back I'll have a special treat for you." She said with a playful smile.

"What's that?" I asked cautiously.

She leaned in close to me and whispered, "I give great sponge baths."

From the prickly sensation on my skin, I knew that I was probably blushing all the way down to my toes.

She gave a delighted giggle and said, "I'll be back in a few minutes."

"I'm not going anywhere." I said as I watched her walk toward the door.

She stopped for a moment at my statement, then smiled at my feeble attempt at humor.

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"What did she say to you? Even your arms were blushing." Josh asked curiously.

"She said that she was going to give me a sponge bath." I said shyly, and could feel the blush rising again.

"Oh. Well, you probably do need one, but if Roberta doing it bothers you. I could take care of it for you instead." Josh said quietly, and I could tell from the caring look in his eyes that it was a genuine offer of help.

"I think that maybe I'd rather you do it. Roberta is nice and everything but, I don't know... it'd just feel funny." I stammered.

Josh smiled and said, "If she ends up giving you a sponge bath you won't have to worry. She's a professional and she'll take really good care of you."

"She's a guy isn't she?" I asked hesitantly.

"Yeah. But I've been around her long enough to think of her as a woman. She's a preoperative transsexual." Josh said as he rested back in his chair.

"So she's going to have her, um... penis removed?" I asked in a pained voice.

"Yeah. I know it sounds freaky, but once you get to know her you'll understand. She's a woman who was born in a male body. Having the operation will just correct something that has been wrong all her life." Josh said quietly.

"Wow. That must be really difficult for her." I said as I considered how it must feel.

"I think what makes it most difficult is the way people treat her. Some people can be very cruel." Josh said with a look of concern.

"I can imagine. Do you think she'll be insulted if I tell her that I'd rather have you do the sponge bath?" I asked cautiously.

"It depends on how you tell her. You're the patient and both of us will do our best to make you comfortable." Josh said with a slight smile.

I nodded, then looked again at the stone faced police officer standing inside the door.

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After a knock on the door, the police officer admitted Roberta who was looking casual and friendly.

"I talked to Doctor Finley's secretary and she said that he's waiting to talk to Judge Harmon right now. We should know something before very long." Roberta said as she walked to my side and did a quick visual inspection to see how I was doing.

"Could you stay with Jason for a few minutes? I need to do something." Josh said quickly.

"Sure. I don't have any other duties except to attend to young Mr. Kerbo." Roberta said gently.

Josh whispered, "Thanks." as he rushed out of the room.

"Are you ready for that sponge bath now?" Roberta asked cheerfully.

"Um, would you mind very much if Josh gave me the sponge bath?" I asked hesitantly.

She gave me a look that barely concealed an expression of hurt, but quickly recovered and said, "That will be fine. I know he'll do a good job, I'm the one who taught him."

"Roberta?" I called quietly.

She looked at me with question.

"I'm sorry if I hurt your feelings by asking that. I'd just feel funny having a beautiful woman bathing me, I might not be able to um, keep from... you know." I said as the blush returned full force.

"Thank you Jason. It was sweet of you to say that." She said as she reached over and brushed the hair back off my forehead.

I didn't know what to say in response. I might not have been able to speak past my embarrassment anyway.

Before the silence became even more uncomfortable, the door opened to admit three men wearing lab coats.

"Nurse Valenzuela? I'm surprised to see you here." The oldest of the three said in a neutral tone.

"Doctor Finley asked for me to be assigned to take care of Jason.

Apparently there are a few of my colleagues who aren't able to behave professionally with him." Roberta said seriously.

The man seemed to accept her explanation, then turned to the younger men who had followed him in and said, "This is Jason Kerbo. Although he was admitted for psychiatric treatment, he was later found to have a curious physical condition. Dr. Branson, would you examine the patient's left foot?"

I watched as one of the younger men pulled back the sheet and began to examine my foot carefully.

I looked up at Roberta with question.

She leaned close to my ear and whispered, "Those two are new resident physicians and Dr. Simmons is training them by taking them to see all his patients."

"Oh. Okay. Thanks." I said as I turned my attention back to where both the young men were now looking carefully at the sole of my foot.

Doctor Simmons watched their examination for a minute or so more before saying, "Doctor Branson, upon encountering this symptomology, what would you recommend?"

The young doctor looked me in the eyes with an expression of helplessness, then said, "I think I would order a battery of tests for common allergens. Or possibly refer the patient to a dermatologist."

"Do you concur Doctor Lee?" Doctor Simmons asked, not revealing any emotion in his question.

"No. I think the first thing I would do is order a Rapid Plasma Reagin Test, then if that came back positive, I'd follow up with a Fluorescent Treponemal Antibody Absorption Test." Doctor Lee said speculatively.

"But he's only... what? Fourteen?" Doctor Branson asked in a bewildered voice.

"Fifteen. That doesn't have any bearing on the diagnosis. Doctor Lee, here are the results of the blood tests." Doctor Simmons said as he handed a clipboard to the young doctor.

Doctor Lee and Doctor Branson both looked over the results, then Doctor Branson glanced at me with wonder.

"The patient has been confirmed to have second stage syphilis. We have administered antibiotic treatment in the form of benzathine penicillin. We have no reason to expect anything less than a complete recovery, provided that the patient completes the recommended antibiotic therapy." Doctor Simmons said instructively.

Doctor Lee looked carefully at the clipboard, then said, "If he's been receiving treatment for two days, then he shouldn't be contagious, right?"

"That is correct. But we would prefer to err on the side of caution so we're avoiding skin contact for the time being." Doctor Simmons said professionally.

Both the young doctors seemed to agree that it was a wise precaution as they paid their full attention to their teacher.

"Now Doctor Branson, I'll give you a chance to redeem yourself with the next patient." Doctor Simmons said as he gestured toward the door.

"Thank you." Doctor Branson said shyly, then glanced at me curiously before following the other two out of the room.

* * * * *

"I have syphilis?" I asked Roberta timidly.

"Yes, didn't you know?" Roberta asked with surprise.

"No. I don't remember anything before today. Do you know how I got it?" I asked as my mind whirled.

"I'm sorry. I only just met you. I have no idea." Roberta said as she took the seat by my bed.

"That's why you and Josh were so careful to put on gloves before touching me." I said distantly.

"Yes. Don't worry though. You heard the doctors, you're not contagious anymore." she said gently.

"I must have had some kind of crazy life..." I said absently.

"I think that's safe to say." Roberta said with an understanding smile.

* * * * *

The door burst open and the police officer immediately drew his pistol.

Josh put his hands up and quickly said, "Sorry, I forgot."

The officer slowly lowered his gun, but did not look happy.

"You'd better be careful Josh. I'd hate to see you get hurt." Roberta said with concern.

"Yeah. Being shot would probably ruin my day too." Josh said, then took a few long slow breaths to calm himself down.

"You look like you've been running. I hope that means you have some good news." Roberta said speculatively.

"Yeah. Really good news." Josh panted as he continued to try to get his breath back.

"Good. I think Jason could use some good news about now. He just found out about the syphilis." Roberta said quietly.

I looked at Josh cautiously to see his reaction. I would probably understand it if he didn't want to be near me knowing that I was... unclean.

Josh must have noticed my apprehension because he gave me a full warm smile before saying, "It's nothing to worry about Jace. There are a lot nastier things out there that you could have caught, and syphilis can be completely cured with penicillin."

I smiled at him with relief. I would hate to lose one of the two friends that I had made in the one day of my life that I can remember.

"Anyway, I don't want to give away too much because everything isn't for sure yet. But I'll just tell you that my dad let me sit in on the meeting with him and Doctor Finley." Josh said quickly.

"Your dad?" I asked cautiously.

"My dad is Judge Harmon, the judge that um... committed you to

psychiatric care." Josh finished timidly.

I nodded slowly that I understood, and that I didn't have any hard feelings about being committed.

"So... Let's see... After Doctor Finley said this big long thing that even my dad probably didn't understand, he finally explained everything to us in the 'Psychiatry for Dummies' version. That's when they called your dad and put him on the speaker phone and I even got to say my part." Josh said with mounting excitement.

"So what happened?" I asked, being drawn in by his enthusiasm.

"Um... I can't tell you." Josh finished abruptly.

I looked at him with what, I'm sure, was a begging expression.

"Doctor Finley said his thing about how his treatment worked exactly the way it was supposed to and fixed something that was wrong in your brain that made you act... um, bad." Josh finished cautiously, obviously not comfortable with the understatement.

"Anyway, so then he starts telling my dad about how you need to start fresh and not have too many reminders of your old life, and then your dad said... well, some stuff that I don't want to tell you in case it doesn't happen." Josh said quickly.

I couldn't help but smile at his bumbling way of telling a story.

"So then I told them about the stuff that we talked about... I hope that's okay... you didn't say it was a secret or anything." Josh finished and looked at me with concern.

I nodded to let him know that it was okay.

"Well, that's when they kind of threw me out so they could make some decisions. But I think my dad is really on your side and everything might actually end up working out for you." Josh said happily.

"I hope so. Thanks for doing that." I said quietly.

"I need to give Jason his medication, then I think he would appreciate a sponge bath before he ripens." Roberta said as she stood from the chair.

Josh seemed to be almost glowing with his happiness as he took a small basin out of the cabinet, then walked into the bathroom.

I looked around the room and noticed that the stone faced officer was the only one there now.

He wasn't looking at me with hatred as the other officer had, but he also wasn't looking at me with concern.

If I had to guess at what was going through his mind, I'd say that he was probably calculating the pay on his next paycheck.

A moment later Roberta walked into the room carrying a small cup of pills and a pitcher of water.

After pouring a cup of water, she helped me take the pills and wash them down.

My life would be a lot easier if I didn't have my hands restrained.

* * * * *

"I'm going to go get my lunch while you're doing that. I'll probably be at the nurses station by the time you're finished... just hit the call button if you need me for anything." Roberta said as she left the room.

While Josh was preparing the things he would need to bathe me, he casually said, "If things turn out the way I'm hoping, you'll have a good reason to want to be cleaned up."

I watched as he rolled a tray table beside my bed, then put on a fresh pair of latex gloves.

"This might get a little embarrassing, but just let me know if anything I'm doing is making you uncomfortable." Josh said seriously.

"I understand. I appreciate you doing this for me. I'm sure Roberta would have done a good job but I'm glad it's you doing it." I said quietly.

Josh smiled at me, then took a towel off the stack on the tray table.

"If you can roll a little onto your right side, I'm going to put the towel under you so I don't get your bed wet." Josh said as he walked around the bed.

I shifted my weight onto one hip and turned as much as I could with my arm attached to the bed.

"That's fine, give me a second then roll to the left." Josh said as he walked quickly around the table.

Within a few seconds he had towels spread out underneath me.

"Now just relax and close your eyes while I wash your face." Josh said quietly as he wet a wash cloth.

I rested back as he had said and tried not to react when I felt the cool damp cloth wash over my eyelids.

"You've got some pretty serious eye boogers here man." Josh said as he gently washed my eyes.

I couldn't help but smile at the comment, but did my best to remain still for him.

He stopped for a moment, then I heard the sound of water splashing and knew that he was rinsing out the wash cloth.

The feeling of him gently moving the wash cloth over my face was somehow arousing to me.

I guess it's not every day that you have someone touch you like that, and his touch was so gentle and caring that it brought me feelings of peace and comfort.

"You can open your eyes now." Josh said gently as he turned away to get a fresh wash cloth.

I carefully opened my eyes and immediately noticed that I was pitching a tent farther down in the bed.

Josh followed my gaze, then smiled at me and said, "Don't worry about it Jace. It happens to most guys when they get a bath."

His words made me feel a little better, but I couldn't help but feel shy about it.

Josh started washing the outer part of my left ear, then behind it and around the back of my neck.

He moved around the bed and did the same to my right ear before saying, "I'll come back and do your hair last."

I didn't respond to his statement, I probably couldn't if I wanted to. My tent was now more pronounced and I was almost painfully erect. "This part might be a little tricky. If you can sit up just a little bit, I'm going to unfasten the gown behind you so I can get your back." Josh said as he guided me to sit forward.

A moment later he was washing my back in long slow strokes.

Too soon he was guiding me to lie back on the bed, then he started trying to pull the gown down my arms.

"I haven't had to do this with someone wearing restraints before, I'm not really sure... I think I'm going to need to lift the gown up to get to everything." he said apologetically.

"It's okay." I said in a whisper.

Josh took another one of the towels off the tray table and as he lifted up my gown, he immediately draped the towel over my groin.

"Thanks." I said in a raspy voice as I tried to relax myself.

"That works." Josh said absently as he more or less rolled up the gown to just under my chin, then started to wash under my left arm. If you would have asked me before the sponge bath if the armpit is an erogenous zone, I would have said, 'of course not'.

Well, I'm here to tell you...

...it is.

I wouldn't have been surprised if the towel covering me had been catapulted off when I felt his tender caress in my armpit.

"Like that, huh?" Josh asked with a gentle smile.

I opened my eyes and whispered, "Yeah."

"I'm glad." Josh said, then turned to rinse out the wash cloth.

I had much the same reaction when he washed my right arm pit.

After that I just closed my eyes to try to enjoy the sensation.

I heard the sound of water again, then I felt as Josh began to slowly wash down my chest.

As soon as he touched my right nipple, I let out a gasp at the

sensation.

"Oh, did I find a good spot?" Josh asked quietly.

"Real good." I mumbled.

He continued on, and seemed to give my nipples a little extra attention, giving each one a gentle pinch before moving on.

As the wash cloth moved lower, my breathing became more shallow.

"You're going to hurt yourself if you keep pulling on your restraints like that." Josh said absently as he got to my navel.

I didn't even realize that I had been pulling on the restraints, but I didn't care.

I felt the towel over my groin shift, then all movement stopped.

I opened my eyes to see what he was doing.

Josh had stopped moving and was looking at the police officer with question.

"Just do it." the officer said, and I could tell from the lump in his uniform pants that he was getting into this on some level.

"Jason, do you want me to?" Josh asked quietly as he looked me in the eyes.

I nodded quickly, not trusting my voice at that point.

Josh took a small bottle off the tray table and squirted something into the palm of his gloved hand.

The flowery scent of lotion filled the air as I felt cool cream come in contact with my painfully erect cock.

Josh's touch was gentle, but firm as he slowly began to pump my shaft with one hand and massage my balls with the other.

I let loose a series of gasps and moans at the sensation as Josh skillfully worked me to higher and higher levels of arousal.

I felt the biting pain of the restraints on my wrists and ankles as I pulled with all my strength.

Being restrained and being completely helpless as Josh pleased me seemed to enhance the experience in some indefinable way.

Too soon, I reached the point of no return and my body arched up on the bed, completely independent of my own will.

It seemed that every muscle in my body tensed and strained with the force of my release.

Wave after wave of the orgasm washed over me until I finally came to rest on the bed, feeling completely spent and relaxed.

"Wow." Josh said in wonder.

I cracked one eye open to look at him with question.

"I don't think I've ever had one like that." Josh said in a stunned voice.

I began to chuckle as I said, "Even though I don't remember anything before today, I doubt that I have either. If every time was like that, I'd never leave the house."

Josh smiled at the statement, then picked up one of the damp wash cloths to begin cleaning me up.

"It's a good thing I saved washing your hair until last." Josh said as he carefully cleaned me.

"Why is that?" I asked, feeling completely relaxed.

"Because you shot some on your face and hair." Josh said with a smile.

I chuckled as Josh made a point of wiping along the left side of my face.

"Well, now that that's done, let's get this bath finished before Doctor Finley gets back." Josh said with an amused smile.

I rested back and closed my eyes in contentment at the wonderful feeling of ultimate peace that was radiating through my entire being.

* * * * *

I was relaxed through the rest of the sponge bath. Even though the police officer was watching our every move, I was at a point where it didn't matter in the least.

Even while Josh was washing my butt crack, I didn't blush or worry if

the police officer was watching or not.

The hair washing was another wonderful experience.

The hand job had been great and the release was wonderful, but the hair washing was almost as good in a very different way.

Josh took his time and was so gentle that the entire experience touched me on an emotional level. I can only imagine that this is what it must feel like to be loved.

"I'm sorry to interrupt you guys, but Doctor Finley is back." Roberta said from just inside the door.

"I was just putting things away." Josh said as he guided me to roll to one side so he could get the towels from under me.

"Let me help you." Roberta said quickly and grabbed the basin of water off the tray table.

"Thanks." Josh said as he gathered the last of the towels into a pile and deposited them all on the tray table.

Josh pushed the tray table out of the room as Roberta emerged from the bathroom.

She took the call button and placed it in my hand as she said, "We'll be at the nurse's station if you need us for anything."

"Thanks." I said quietly as I watched her leave.

* * * * *

"Hello Jason. How are you feeling this afternoon?" Doctor Finley asked as he walked into the room with another man.

"I'm fine. Thank you for getting Josh and Nurse Valenzuela to take care of me. They're both really nice." I said quickly.

"I'm glad. I've known Josh since the day he was born. His father and I are old friends." Doctor Finley said with a smile.

I looked at the other man in the room curiously.

He seemed to have a hesitant expression, something like expectation.

"Jason, do you know who this is?" Doctor Finley asked cautiously.

I strained my memory, but finally shook my head.

I had the feeling that I might have met him before, but he didn't really seem to be all that familiar.

"This is your father, David Kerbo." Doctor Finley said quietly.

Chapter 2

"Oh. Um, it's nice to meet you." I said hesitantly... I mean, what else was I supposed to say?

The man... my dad, turned to face Doctor Finley and asked, "How certain are you that he won't go back to the way he was?"

"Mr. Kerbo, as I explained to you while I was talking to Judge Harmon, the alteration of Jason's brain chemistry could account for a shift in his personality, and if that were the only effect of the treatment, then I couldn't make any guarantees. But I did a full MRI series after Jason awoke from the final treatment, and it confirmed that ultra-sound bombardment in combination with the drug therapy have physically altered Jason's brain. There is no chance of him reverting to his previous behavior... ever. The malformation that was the root of the problem was completely destroyed." Doctor Finley said firmly.

"So what do we do now?" My dad asked quietly, seemingly not able to completely accept Doctor Finley's explanation.

"Well, I'm going to arrange things with Doctor Hakim to see when he has time to examine Jason. Perhaps while I'm doing that, you could explain things to him?" Doctor Finley asked hopefully.

My father nodded slowly, then watched as Doctor Finley left the room.

* * * * *

"How are you feeling?" My dad asked me quietly.

"I'm fine... How are you?" I asked timidly, not knowing what else to say.

My dad smiled slightly before saying, "Things seem to be looking up." I nodded hesitantly, hoping that he would explain what was going on.

"How much do you remember?" He asked cautiously.

"I don't remember anything. So far, I know my name and my age but that's only because they told me." I said honestly.

"Well, the doctor thinks that in time you'll start to remember things. I'm not sure how it all works, but because of Doctor Finley's treatments, most of the links associated with memory have been destroyed. All your memories are still there, your conscious mind just doesn't know where to look to find them. Over time, some of your memories will come back." My dad said quietly.

"Some?" I asked, to be sure.

My dad nodded and said, "Some. From the way the doctor explained it, every now and then your brain will accidentally connect with an existing memory, but for the most part, your life began today."

"So it's not all going to come back someday?" I asked in a quieter voice.

"No. But... well, it's probably best. If Doctor Finley would have given me a choice, I would have asked him to let you forget." My dad said with sympathy in his eyes.

"What did I do?" I asked him in a pleading voice.

My dad closed his eyes and a tear fell down his cheek.

"Doctor Finley says that it's too soon for you to deal with that." My dad said, as he turned away.

"Okay. So what's going to happen now?" I asked cautiously.

"Well... I'm working on that. If I can get everything arranged, you're going to be moving to Ohio." My dad said quietly.

"I'm moving... alone?" I asked hesitantly.

My dad nodded, then turned to face me again as he said, "That's right. You can't stay here, Jason. There are too many people who... please, just trust me. You'll be much happier in Ohio."

"Where will I be staying in Ohio?" I asked hesitantly.

"With my cousin Jason... you were named after him. He's been my best friend my whole life. I called him before I came to the hospital and he said that you could stay with him and his family." My dad said quietly.

"For how long?" I asked slowly.

My dad stopped for a moment to think about the question, then said, "Maybe for a long time. There's a restraining order against you. You're not allowed to have any contact with your mom or sister, and you're not allowed within 200 yards of them under any circumstances."

"What did I do?" I asked in a whisper.

"That wasn't you. That was the disease that took control of you. But you're still stuck with the consequences." My dad said in a pained voice.

I nodded slowly to acknowledge that I had heard.

"Jason, you get to make a new start. My cousin will take you in and I know that he'll love you and care for you just like one of his own kids. He's the best person that I've ever known." My dad said, trying to sound cheerful.

"Okay." I said reluctantly.

"And you might want to thank your friend Josh when you see him again. I might not have even thought about you going to stay with Jason if he hadn't been there and told us about the kind of life that you wanted to have." My dad said gently.

I looked up at him with surprise.

"My cousin lives on a large piece of land a few miles from Elyria. There are lots of wide open spaces and trees. It's really beautiful." My dad said with a small smile.

"Does he know about... well, the stuff that I don't know about? The stuff that I did before?" I asked cautiously.

"He knows about most of it. I've been talking to him once or twice a week for the past four years..." Dad said uncomfortably.

I nodded, silently letting Dad know that he didn't need to explain.

"He won't hold it against you. I've told him about the treatment and that you've been completely cured." Dad said assuringly.

I thought for a moment before saying, "But what if I'm not?"

My father looked at me with surprise at the question.

I knew I probably shouldn't think that way, but it needed to be said.

"What if what the things Doctor Finley did only made me better for a little while? What's going to happen if I go back to how I was before?" I asked as my vision started to blur from the tears in my eyes.

My dad took a tissue from the box beside the bed and dried my tears as he said, "Then we'll bring you back here and try something else. No matter how bad things got, I never gave up on you, and I never will."

I looked up into his eyes and saw the sincerity there.

"I'm going to be flying you back to Colorado at least once a month for a while, so Doctor Finley can track your progress. If you're having any problems at all, I want you to tell him. And if something happens that bothers you while you're in Ohio, all you have to do is pick up the phone and call me." Dad said, as he stepped back to throw the tissue away.

"Okay. If I notice that I'm having any problem at all, I'll tell you or Doctor Finley right away." I said as a vow.

Dad smiled and said, "I really think you're going to be fine. From the way Doctor Finley explained things, you really are completely cured... I've got my son back."

I felt the warmth of his smile in my heart.

* * * * *

The door opening stopped any further conversation, as Doctor Finley and another man in a lab coat walked into the room.

"David and Jason, I'd like for you to meet Doctor Hakim. Hakim, this is David Kerbo, and there, in the bed, is my patient, Jason." Doctor Finley said in an almost cheerful voice.

"A pleasure to meet you." Doctor Hakim said formally, as he shook my father's hand.

"Could we perhaps have some privacy so Jason and I may speak?" Doctor Hakim asked in a very professional and detached tone.

"Jason, as soon as Doctor Hakim is finished, I'll have Nurse

Valenzuela bring in your lunch." Doctor Finley said, as he guided my father toward the door.

"Thanks. I'm starting to get hungry." I said as I watched them go. Doctor Hakim looked at the police officer expectantly.

"I'm sorry Doctor, but I have my orders." the officer said firmly. Doctor Hakim seemed about ready to protest, then appeared to think better of it.

* * * * *

Have you ever played 20 questions?

Well Doctor Hakim and I played something like that, except that it was 16,000 questions.

I don't know how long it went on, but Doctor Hakim just kept on and on for what seemed to be hours, asking me an endless barrage of questions.

By the time we were finished, I was tired, my neck was sore from looking over at him in the chair and I was so hungry I felt like I could eat anything.

After the last question he sat for about five minutes writing notes on the clipboard he had been holding the whole time.

When he was finished, he just got up and left without giving me any clue if I had done well or not.

About ten seconds after he had walked out, Josh was hurrying into the room.

"How did it go?" Josh asked quickly.

"I really don't know. The whole time he was in here, his expression never changed." I said, honestly.

"Roberta is getting your food now, you must be starved." Josh said as he stood by my side.

"Yeah. I don't remember the last time I ate." I said, as I looked up into his eyes.

"If anyone else said that to me I'd just think they were being

dramatic." He said with a genuine smile.

I couldn't help but smile in return.

"So do you know why Doctor Hakim was asking you all those questions?" Josh asked, as he took a seat in the chair.

"No. I kind of figured from the questions that he was trying to determine if I was crazy or not." I said, frankly.

"Well, yeah. But do you know why?" Josh asked expectantly.

I slowly shook my head.

"My dad, your judge, asked him to do an independent evaluation of you. Right now, Doctor Finley is showing him your MRIs and explaining what he did to you." Josh said with excitement.

"Yeah?" I said hesitantly.

"When Doctor Hakim is finished, you'll have a new hearing. Probably later today or if not, then the first thing tomorrow morning. If he agrees with Doctor Finley that you've been cured, then no more cops or restraints or anything like that. All the charges against you will be dropped." Josh said happily.

"Charges? Um, do you know what I'm being charged with?" I asked cautiously.

Josh stared at me for a moment, then hesitantly said, "Yeah. At least I know most of it."

"Will you tell me?" I asked, hopefully.

Josh shook his head and said, "Jason. Please, just trust me when I tell you that you're better off not knowing. If everything works out just right, you can leave all this behind, and hopefully you'll never find out what happened before."

"If you were in my place, strapped down to a bed and not knowing what you did and who you hurt, wouldn't *you* want to know?" I asked desperately.

Josh looked at me with understanding and said, "I know what you're saying, but please try not to think about it. And to answer your question... if I were in your place and didn't know what I had done..."

I probably would want to know. But I also think that if someone told me that I did all those things that I would probably wish I could forget."

I could see the concern in Josh's eyes for me, and I reluctantly nodded.

The door opened to reveal Roberta with a large tray of food.

"I had to do some fast talking, but I was able to get you a little extra since your lunch is so late." Roberta said, as she moved the tray along side my bed.

"Who do you want to feed you Jason? Am I too pretty to do that too?" She asked with a teasing smile.

I giggled at the statement and probably blushed a little.

She took that as an answer and moved the tray over my lap and prepared to feed me.

"You'd better enjoy this royal treatment, Jace. With any luck you'll be able to feed and bathe yourself by dinner time." Josh said, as he watched from the chair.

"That's too bad, I was hoping for another sponge bath." I said playfully.

"No promises, but we'll see." Josh said, and I noticed that he was blushing.

"Oh, so I'm guessing that you got the sponge bath with benefits..." Roberta said speculatively.

Before I could answer, she placed a bite of food in my mouth.

"Don't answer that Jace. Just remember, Roberta is the one who taught me how to give a sponge bath." Josh said with a smile.

I looked at Roberta with surprise for a moment, then smiled as I chewed.

* * * * *

"We need to get Jason ready for court." My dad said as he walked into my room.

"Already?" Josh asked with surprise.

"Doctor Hakim faxed his report to Judge Harmon and the Judge set up the hearing for four o'clock... that's less than an hour from now." My dad said quickly as he looked in the small closet.

After a long moment of going through the closet, my dad said, "He can't wear these to court."

Josh ran to my father's side and looked at the clothes.

After a moment, Josh said, "You really were a punk, weren't you, Jace?"

"You would know better than I would." I said with a chuckle.

"You were." My dad said firmly, then muttered, "I don't have enough time to get back to the house to get him anything decent... and I doubt that he has anything that would be appropriate for court anyway."

"Let me see." Roberta said as she edged her way in between Josh and my dad.

"I think my brother Julio's clothes would fit him. It's only a ten minute drive if you can drive me..." She trailed off as she looked at my father.

"Let's do it." My dad said and hurried toward the door.

Roberta followed close behind.

"They make a cute couple." Josh said with a snicker.

I looked at him with surprise for a moment, then began to laugh.

"I'm glad to see you in such good spirits, Jason." Doctor Finley said as he walked into the room.

"It's hard not to be with Josh around." I said as I tried to get my chuckles under control.

"I've always thought so." Doctor Finley said with a quick smile at Josh.

When I noticed the doctor looking around the room I said, "My dad and Roberta went to get some clothes for me, so I can go to court."

"Oh, that's a very good idea. Since Judge Harmon saw you in one of your more colorful moments, it would be good if he could see you

well dressed and respectful now." Doctor Finley said consideringly.

"Is this another one of those things that I'm better off not knowing?" I asked Josh cautiously.

"You shit on the courtroom floor." Josh said frankly.

"I didn't really do that did I?" I asked, hesitantly.

"Yep. He told me about it when he got home that night. You just dropped your pants and took a dump right there in front of the bench." Josh said, and seemed to be trying to fight down his laughter.

"Wow. I hope your dad doesn't have any hard feelings..." I said quietly.

"Well, you screaming 'EAT IT! EAT IT!' as the bailiffs dragged you off might have put him off a little, but at least he has a new story to tell." Josh said with a chuckle.

"Abe understands that you were mentally ill. I think he'll just be happy that we were able to help you overcome it." Doctor Finley said with assurance.

"Yeah. I know it tears him up when someone comes into his court that needs help and either can't get it or won't accept it." Josh said seriously.

"Thanks for telling me." I said shyly.

"It's best for you to know in advance, in case he asks about it later." Doctor Finley said consideringly.

I nodded, then thought to ask, "Josh was saying that I'm probably better off not knowing most of the stuff that I did before I got cured... is that right?"

Doctor Finley considered for a moment, then said, "I think so. You're going to have quite a bit to deal with in the coming weeks and months to adjust to your new situation. Someone who is completely secure with a strong safety net of friends and family would have difficulty facing some of what's in your past. Just let it be for a while and let me know when you feel that you're ready to face some new challenges."

"Okay. Thank you doctor. It's hard knowing that I did stuff before and I don't remember it. But if I know that you'll tell me when I'm ready to handle it, I think I can stop worrying about it as much." I said consideringly.

"Good boy." Doctor Finley said happily, then turned to face the police officer.

"Do you need to call for backup or something so we can transport young Mr. Kerbo to the courthouse?" Doctor Finley asked, seriously.

"No sir. If 'young Mr. Kerbo' will promise to behave himself and wear handcuffs when we leave the room, I would feel comfortable escorting him by myself." the officer said without expression.

"I'll behave. I promise." I said earnestly.

"Well, then would you mind if we released him from the restraints so he'll be ready to change when his clothes arrive?" Doctor Finley asked casually.

"As long as he stays where I can see him and stays on that side of the room." the officer said firmly.

Doctor Finley and Josh started undoing my restraints as the officer looked me in the eyes and said, "I promise you that if you make one wrong move, I *will* shoot you."

"I know." I said in a whisper.

* * * * *

As soon as the restraints were off, I got up off the bed and started walking around one half of the room, making sure to stay well away from the police officer.

The door opened suddenly and the police officer had his gun in his hand in a flash.

"Sorry." Roberta said as she backed away.

"He's not pointing it at you." I said, as I looked down the barrel of the revolver.

"We got your clothes." Roberta said, as she thrust a stack of clothing into my arms.

I accepted the clothes, then watched as the police officer slowly put his gun away.

"We don't have much time. Josh, get his socks and shoes ready." Roberta said as she handed the socks and shoes to him.

"I'll get him into his pants...*Pappi*, you get him into the shirt. I never could make a tie come out right." Roberta said quickly as she pulled the dress slacks out of my hands.

I looked at my dad in time to see the surprised look on his face at being called 'Pappi'.

I noticed that Roberta copped a feel at one point during her dressing duties, but besides that, everything seemed to go smoothly.

"Did we miss anything?" Roberta asked as she stepped away.

"His hair." My dad said cautiously.

"I've got more hair stuff than you can imagine, I'll be right back." Roberta said as she rushed out of the room.

"Does it look okay?" I asked, as I looked down at myself.

"Yeah... Officer, can he go in the bathroom to see himself?" Josh asked hopefully.

"I can't let him out of my sight." the officer said firmly.

After a moment he continued, "But, I could follow him to the doorway so he can look."

"Thank you Officer." I said quietly as I walked into the bathroom.

"My name is Martinez. Take a look quickly so we can get you to the courthouse." Officer Martinez said quietly.

I looked into the mirror and was shocked at what I saw.

I didn't really have any image of myself in my mind, so I wasn't expecting anything but... my eyes.

I had deep steel blue eyes, just like my dad's. They were so bold that they seemed to jump out of the mirror at me.

Nothing else really surprised me. I had brown hair that was a little bit shaggy, but not too bad.

I was kind of on the skinny side, but not actually sick looking. Except for my eyes, I was just kind of plain and normal looking. "Here we go. Let's get you all nice and beautiful for the judge." Roberta said with excitement.

I moved out of the bathroom and let Roberta fuss and brush and fluff and spray stuff on my hair.

"We've got to leave now, if we're going to make it on time." Doctor Finley said quickly.

"Young Mr. Kerbo is in police custody, so that means I'll have to be the one to transport him. If you'll just get your vehicles and meet me by the parking lot exit, I can give you a police escort and have us to the courthouse with time to spare." Officer Martinez said, then held up a pair of handcuffs.

I put my arms behind my back and turned so he could cuff me. When he finished, I was surprised to feel his hand on my shoulder as he gave it a brief squeeze before leading me out of the room.

* * * * *

The ride to the courthouse was quite an adventure.

Lights. Sirens. Speeding.

Officer Martinez didn't really say much of anything to me on the ride over, but he was careful that I didn't bang my head when I got in and out of the back of his police cruiser.

As we walked into the courthouse, my dad, Doctor Finley, Roberta and Josh were all hurrying to catch up.

"Now remember Jason. Just be honest and respectful while we're in there. Judge Harmon knows everything that's happened, so you don't have to hide anything from him." Doctor Finley said as we walked.

Officer Martinez motioned to the courtroom door and said, "I need to take 'young Mr. Kerbo' to the holding room until his case is called. I'm sure it will only be a few minutes."

"Please take good care of him." Doctor Finley said with an expression of worry.

"It's okay. He'll be fine. I promise." Officer Martinez said seriously, then guided me away.

* * * * *

We walked into a small room past the courtroom and Officer Martinez walked us up to a woman at a small desk.

"I've got Jason Kerbo here for Judge Harmon."

She looked at me with surprise and asked, "*That's* the Kerbo kid? What the hell did they do to him?"

"From what I overheard, they destroyed part of his brain, and pumped him full of drugs." Officer Martinez said frankly.

The woman blinked a few times, then quickly looked at her computer screen.

"His case will be coming up any minute... do you want to put him in the tank?" She asked uncertainly, seeming to be in a daze.

"No, I think he'll be fine out here." Officer Martinez said, then he turned to me and whispered, "Sit down over there."

I was a little confused by his abrupt change in attitude, but obediently did as I was told.

"Oh my God Willy. It's like something out of a science fiction novel." the woman said, as she stared at me.

"They did a pretty good job from what I can tell." Officer Martinez said casually.

"Maybe. But to tell you the truth, it scares the hell out of me." she said as she turned her gaze to him.

"I know what you mean Heather. But in this case, I really think it was the right thing to do." He said quietly.

A beeping on her computer drew her attention.

"They're ready for him." she said, as she looked at me again.

"Come on Kerbo. You're up." Officer Martinez said and gestured for me to join him.

It was difficult to gain my balance with my hands cuffed behind me,

but it only took me a second to stand.

"It's almost over." Officer Martinez said quietly as he escorted me through the door past Heather's desk and into the courtroom.

* * * * *

"Is this the same young man who was brought before me two weeks ago?" Judge Harmon asked, as I took my seat.

"Yes your honor." Doctor Finley said firmly.

The judge looked down at some paperwork, then at me with a look of uncertainty.

"Your honor, the people would like to prove..." A well dressed man began to say.

"Mr. Hendrix, the people were able to present their case two weeks ago in this courtroom. We have stood in recess pending the psychological evaluation of the defendant. Unless you have new evidence to introduce, there is no need for you to address the court at this time." Judge Harmon said firmly.

After a long silent moment, Judge Harmon asked, "Do you have new evidence to introduce?"

"No your honor" Mr. Hendrix said quietly.

"Then please take your seat so we may continue." Judge Harmon said with some irritation in his voice.

After a long moment of silence and looking through the papers on the desk before him, the judge seemed to come to a decision and said, "Officer Martinez, please take the juvenile to my chambers. I'd like to have a talk with him before we proceed any further."

"Yes your honor." Officer Martinez said as he stood, then grasped me by the upper arm and helped me to stand.

"This court will stand in recess until I've had a chance to speak with the minor Jason Kerbo." the judge said, then banged his gavel.

"Your honor, I would like to be present at the meeting in your chambers." Mr. Hendrix said in a demanding tone.

"Denied Mr. Hendrix. This court stands in recess." the judge said with

irritation, then reached back and banged his gavel again.

* * * * *

"Officer Martinez, do you think it would be safe to remove the handcuffs?" Judge Harmon asked cautiously, as he joined us in his office.

"Yes your honor. I believe so." Officer Martinez said, then guided me to turn away so he could uncuff me.

"Jason, please have a seat. I'd like to talk to you about some of the reports that I've received, before I make any judgment in your case." the judge said in a slow, firm voice.

I took the seat across from him and waited expectantly.

"The change is so dramatic... tell me honestly, are you drugged half out of your mind right now?" the judge asked frankly.

"No your honor. The only drugs that I'm aware of taking are some antibiotics." I said quietly.

"Oh, I didn't see any reference to that in the paperwork. Do you have an infection?" the judge asked curiously.

"Syphilis." I said, and from the feeling in my cheeks, my face was probably somewhere between red and purple.

"Oh yes. I do remember seeing something about that. You don't happen to know where you picked that up do you?" the judge asked casually.

"No your honor. I don't really remember anything before this morning." I said shyly.

"I see. So you don't remember the last time you were in my courtroom?" the judge asked cautiously.

"No your honor, but Josh and Doctor Finley told me what happened... I'm sorry." I finished weakly.

The judge gave me a small smile and said, "Well, thank you for that. Now to the matter at hand..."

I waited for him to continue, not having any idea of what to expect. After what seemed like a very long silence, the judge quietly said,

"You have been charged with some very serious crimes. But Doctor Finley contends that you were compelled to behave in such a manner by a defect in your brain. Therefore you were not guilty by reason of insanity. So I suppose the real question that I'm faced with now is, are you going to have another such instance of insanity in the future, or are you really cured? According to Doctor Finley and Doctor Hakim, the source of your problem has been completely and forever eliminated. But I have to admit that I have my doubts." he said distantly.

"So do I." I whispered.

"What was that?" Judge Harmon asked, curiously.

"Well, I don't understand all the psychological stuff that Doctor Finley does. But it seems to me that if I was born this way and it happened once, that it might be able to happen again." I said slowly.

"And is there anything you can think of to do to prevent that?" the judge asked with interest.

"Well, since Doctor Finley was able to figure it out the first time and fix it, then maybe if I go back to him for checkups, he'll be able to find it and fix it if it happens again. You know, before it makes me nuts." I said in thought.

"That sounds like a very reasonable precaution. So let me ask you... do you think that you're cured?" the judge asked carefully.

I thought for a moment before answering, "I think so. I don't really know how I was before, but from the way people talk and act around me, I guess I was a really bad person. I don't know about being cured, but I know that I don't feel like I would want to hurt anyone or cause trouble or anything like that."

"I think in other circumstances, I would probably be less inclined to believe in a 'miracle cure' and insist on a few months of observation before considering dropping such serious charges. But one of my oldest friends has come to me insisting that his patient has made a miraculous recovery, then my son comes to me and tells me that someone who hurt him so badly just a week before has suddenly become a good friend..." the judge trailed off with a shake of his

head.

"I hurt Josh? What did I do?" I asked with concern.

"Well, you didn't physically hurt him. But from what I understand, you verbally attacked him with some of the most vile insults that he ever heard... Oh, and you urinated on him when he tried to assist you with your bedpan. When he got home that night I could tell that something was really bothering him." the judge said quietly.

"I'm surprised that he doesn't hate me." I said, as I thought about what a good friend Josh had been to me.

"I don't think he would have volunteered to help you if it hadn't been for Thom... I mean Doctor Finley. He's been like an uncle to Josh since the day he was born. Now after all that happened, Josh is sitting out in my courtroom ready to take the witness stand and swear before God and everyone what a good person you are." Judge Harmon said, with an ironic chuckle.

"I don't think I'll ever be able to thank him enough for everything he's done for me today. I woke up into a new world not remembering anyone or anything, and he helped me deal with it. I don't know if I'd be here right now if it weren't for him." I said honestly.

"Well, we've gotten off the subject again. I've got a courtroom full of people waiting on me to make my judgment. Do you have anything else to add before we go back in there and I make my ruling?" Judge Harmon asked curiously.

"I had one question that's been kind of bothering me." I said hesitantly.

"What would that be?"

"Well, Doctor Finley said that I wasn't ready to deal with the things that I've done. You know, it would just be too much hitting me all at once." I said slowly.

"Yes. He mentioned that even hearing a list of the charges against you might be more than you could bear." Judge Harmon said thoughtfully.

"Well, I was just wondering if you could tell me... Did I kill anyone?" I

asked hesitantly.

"No son. I promise, you didn't kill anyone." the judge said gently.

I let out a gust of breath in relief and said, "Okay. I don't think I could have lived with myself if I had killed someone, even if I didn't remember it."

"Just to satisfy my own curiosity, what would you ask me to do if you found out that you *had* killed someone?" Judge Harmon asked quietly.

"I'd want you to put me away where I couldn't ever hurt anyone again. Even though I would hate being locked up, I'd know it was for a good reason and that everyone else would be safer because of it." I said firmly.

"Thank you Jason. Let's go out and get this done, shall we?" Judge Harmon asked as he stood.

"Yes, Your Honor." I said with a smile, as I stood to join him.

Officer Martinez held up the handcuffs, looking a little apologetic.

"I think we can continue without those, what do you think Jason?" Judge Harmon asked quietly.

"Whatever you say, Your Honor." I said with a smile.

* * * * *

"Your Honor. The district attorney's office requests that whatever evidence was introduced in chambers be entered into the official court transcript for the purposes of cross examination." Mr. Hendrix asked firmly.

"Denied. No new evidence or testimony was offered in chambers. I simply wanted to determine to my own satisfaction if the defendant was cognoscente of his situation and not being presented to the court in a drug addled state to give the appearance of being 'reformed'." the judge said firmly.

"Your honor. The district attorney's office requests that the defendant be examined by another psychiatrist to corroborate Doctor Finley's conclusions about the defendant's condition."

"Denied. This court has already requested and received the results of an independent psychiatric evaluation of the defendant. I know that your office was faxed a copy of the report at the same time mine was." Judge Harmon finished irritably.

"Your honor. The treatment that Doctor Finley performed on the defendant has not been proven as an effective treatment for any psychological condition."

"Nor has it been disproved. It is still in the experimental stage. The matter before the court is not the status of Doctor Finley's treatment. It is the matter of the innocence or guilt of the minor, Jason Allen Kerbo. The statement and medical evidence provided to this court by Doctor Finley and substantiated by an independent doctor appointed by this court have proven to my satisfaction that the minor Jason Allen Kerbo was suffering from a congenital malformation of his brain, which caused him to have behavioral problems that became increasingly more pronounced as he grew older."

"But your honor..." Mr. Hendrix said desperately.

"I would hate to have to hold a representative of the district attorney's office in contempt of court. Both sides have had the opportunity to argue their case. Unless you have new evidence to introduce, sit down and shut up. This is my time." the judge said firmly.

After a long moment of silent glaring at the attorney, the judge continued, "As I was saying, if the defendant had come before me with that evaluation alone, I would have accepted the statement of the doctors and found the defendant not guilty by reason of insanity. Doctor Finley's treatment has no bearing on the question of innocence or guilt."

"However, another matter has been introduced into evidence that is quite out of the ordinary in my experience. Doctor Finley has not only diagnosed a physical cause for the defendant's behavior, but also administered treatment to correct it." the judge said slowly.

Mr. Hendrix seemed to be ready to say something but snapped his

mouth shut when the judge glared at him.

"Now, since a physical cause for the behavior has been determined to my satisfaction and was clearly shown in the defendant's MRI scans of two weeks ago. And since treatment has been administered which has physically altered the defendant's brain in such a manner as to completely eliminate the brain abnormality, as evidenced in the MRI scans of this very morning. And taking into account the psychological evaluations of Doctor Finley and Doctor Hakim, stating that Jason Kerbo is not a threat to himself or others..."

The judge paused to look around the courtroom, making sure he had everyone's undivided attention.

"It is the ruling of this court that the minor Jason Allen Kerbo be found not guilty on all charges levied against him by reason of insanity." Judge Harmon said firmly and banged his gavel to emphasize the point.

"Now, on to the matter of what is to be done with Mr. Kerbo..." Judge Harmon said as he looked through the papers on his desk.

He seemed to find what he was looking for, then continued, "In the matter of the minor Jason Allen Kerbo, it is the order of this court that he remain under psychiatric care until his eighteenth birthday at which time a determination can be made as to the need for further treatment. The psychiatric care may be in a clinical setting or as outpatient visits as his psychiatrist believes to be appropriate. But I will insist that he receive regular examinations, both physical and psychological, by Doctor Finley or another court approved psychiatrist and that reports on Mr. Kerbo's status be presented to this court no less than four times a year." the judge said, then flashed me a quick smile as he tapped his gavel.

"Your honor, I would like to strongly object..." Mr. Hendrix began to say.

"You can object from a jail cell Mr. Hendrix. I find you in contempt of court. Bailiff, please remove Mr. Hendrix from my courtroom and have him detained in a holding cell until I can speak to the district attorney's office about what to do with him." Judge Harmon said

coldly.

Everyone was silent as they watched the bailiff escort Mr. Hendrix out of the room.

"Mr. Kerbo, it is my sincere wish that you will be able to put all the past events behind you and start off with a clean slate in your new life." Judge Harmon said toward me, then in a louder tone he said to the entire room.

"Court adjourned."

Chapter 3

I was immediately surrounded by hugs and lost myself in the experience until I noticed that Judge Harmon was approaching.

"So Thom, what's going to happen to Jason now that the legal matters have been dispensed with?" Judge Harmon asked with a kind smile.

"Well, we will need to go back to the hospital for another MRI and blood work. But if all goes as I expect, I think that he should be able to be released tonight." Dr. Finley said speculatively.

"Then I suppose I should arrange a hotel room for a few days. It's going to take a little time to get Jason the things he's going to need in Ohio." My dad said thoughtfully.

"A hotel room? That sounds awfully lonely. Why don't you stay with us, Jace? We've got plenty of room and it would be nice to have some company." Josh asked hopefully.

Dad seemed hesitant to accept, but finally asked, "Are you sure it wouldn't be a problem for you?"

"No problem at all. We have a guest room just sitting there waiting for Jason to use it." Judge Harmon said with a warm smile directed at me.

"Yeah. And it would probably be better for Jace to have someone around to talk to." Josh said hopefully.

"What do you say, Jason? Do you want to?" My dad asked me, still sounding uncertain.

I didn't even have to think about it. I just automatically answered, "Yeah. I think staying with Josh sounds great."

"And if Jason were to have any unexpected difficulties, Josh and Abe can call me at home and we'll see that Jason is taken care of." Dr. Finley said with a smile of approval.

"Then I suppose it's settled. Let's get you to the hospital so you can get your tests taken care of. I'll pick you up in the morning, so we can go shopping for a new wardrobe and luggage." My dad said with a

note of tenderness in his voice.

"If you'll meet me at the admitting desk, I'll go on ahead and get everything arranged." Dr. Finley said seriously.

"We'll take good care of Jason." Roberta said with a happy smile. I didn't even realize it before, but she was still hugging me.

I smiled up at her and returned the hug.

"Then I suppose we'd better get going." My dad said as he led the way toward the door.

As we started to walk as a group, I noticed that Officer Martinez had been standing to the side, watching everything.

"Just a second." I said quietly and separated myself from Roberta.

"Thank you Officer Martinez. I appreciate all your help." I said as I looked him in the eyes.

"Just stay out of trouble. That's all the thanks I'll need." Officer Martinez said in a very professional voice.

"I just received a call asking for confirmation about the verdict. I think there are news crews on the way." A young female police officer said as she rushed into the hall.

"You'd better hurry." Officer Martinez said, then urged me toward my father.

* * * * *

I got into the car with my dad and suddenly realized that I didn't know anything about this man who was my father.

"I can't even tell you how happy I am right now." My dad said in a voice of wonder.

He was just sitting there in the driver's seat and seemed to be lost in his thoughts.

Whatever was going on inside his mind, he seemed to be so happy that I didn't want to do something to mar the experience.

Finally Dad took in a deep breath and said, "I guess we'd better go."

"Yeah." I said quietly.

I know it's not a great speech or anything, but what are you supposed to say to someone who's so happy he's about to burst into tears? I really wanted to say something, but anything I could think of sounded stupid or inadequate.

"I'll be able to come and visit." Dad said out of nowhere.

"Do what?" I asked cautiously.

"In Ohio, I'll be able to fly in on weekends and spend some time with you." Dad said gently.

I smiled as I said, "That sounds nice. I think I'd really like that."

* * * * *

We were both silent for a few minutes.

I had so many questions, but anything I could think to ask had to do with stuff that we weren't supposed to talk about.

I noticed a serious look on my dad's face and was worried by it.

"Is something wrong?" I asked hesitantly.

"No. Not wrong. I just feel... I just don't have words..." My Dad trailed off with difficulty.

Even though I couldn't find the words any better than he could, I was pretty sure that I understood what he wanted to say.

"Sometimes words get in the way of what you're trying to say." I said as I turned to look at his profile.

"You're here." I said in an urging tone that caused him to turn and meet my gaze.

My dad glanced at me with a look of question.

"Even though I don't know what happened before today, I'm pretty sure that you had plenty of reasons to give up on me... but you didn't. So don't worry about trying to explain it. I understand and I love you for standing by me." I finished in a choked whisper.

"You... love me?" My dad said as tears began to fill his eyes.

I stopped and thought back over my words, then broke into a smile as I said, "Yeah. I love you Dad."

He seemed to be at a loss for words at my declaration, so I continued, "I don't remember the things that happened before, but I know how I feel right now."

* * * * *

As we pulled into the parking lot of the hospital, Dad slowed down. Someone was running directly toward us.

It was Josh.

Before I could say anything about it, Dad had pulled to the curb and rolled down the car window.

"Jace, you need to come with me." Josh said as he ran up to our car.

"What's wrong?" I asked quickly.

"I'll explain later, hurry." Josh said urgently, then began to walk quickly toward the side of the building, away from the front door.

"Go on. I'll park the car and catch up to you." My dad said with concern sounding in his voice.

Sensing Josh's urgency, I quickly got out of the car and hurried to catch up to him.

"What is it?" I asked as I finally reached his side.

"Reporters." Josh said darkly as he slowed down to open a small side door.

It took a moment for the significance of the word to register as I followed Josh down the hallway.

"Wait here." Josh whispered, then walked forward to peek around the corner.

I watched as Josh stepped out into the main hallway and tried to look casual as he looked both ways.

"It's clear, come on." Josh called to me in a stage whisper.

I hurried to Josh's side and he guided me to walk beside him down the hall.

"I'm going to take you in the back way, through the lab. We're less likely to run into reporters that way." Josh said frankly.

"What about my Dad?" I asked quietly, not wanting to seem uncooperative or ungrateful for his help.

"Roberta was waiting by the front door to catch you in case I couldn't get you to stop. When she finds out that you're already inside, she'll bring him to us." Josh said seriously.

After snaking our way through a few hallways, Josh pushed open a door, surprising a few lab technicians by doing so.

"Just passing through..." Josh said repentantly as he hurried across the room.

"Is that?..." One of the lab techs asked before he could catch himself.

"Yeah. Would you run interference if any reporters come around asking questions?" Josh asked as he paused by the door at the far side of the room.

"We've got you covered." One of the men said with determination. Josh smiled at the man, then gestured for me to precede him into the next room.

* * * * *

"I'm so glad you're here Jason. Get up on the table so we can get this started." Dr. Finley said in a voice that sounded to be much relieved.

"Do I need to undress or anything?" I asked as I walked to the huge MRI machine.

"I suppose you can if you want, but I'm only going to be scanning your head." Dr. Finley said with a barely suppressed grin.

"Oh. Okay. Then I guess I'm ready." I said as I rested myself back into a somewhat comfortable position on the table.

"Here we go." Dr. Finley said as he brought the machine to life.

* * * * *

I guess all the excitement of being in court and everything else that had gone on was enough to distract me from the MRI.

After what only seemed like a few minutes, Dr. Finley was telling me that it was okay for me to get up again.

"What do I need to do now?" I asked as I sat up and looked around.

"I think the best thing would be to wait here while Dr. Finley looks at the test results." Josh said thoughtfully.

From the tone of his voice and the way that he kept looking at the door, I could tell that he was worried.

The sound of movement from behind us caused both of us to turn with a jerk.

"Freedom of the press can be a real pain in the ass." Roberta said as she led my father into the room through the lab entrance.

"I think we lost them in the pediatric ward." My dad said as he walked to stand by the table I was still sitting on.

Without a thought, I got up from the table and pulled my dad into a hug.

Even though he was nearly a complete stranger to me, I felt that I needed the assurance of a hug and from his expression, he did too.

"Don't worry *Pappi*, this should only take a few minutes. Then you should be able to leave and you won't have to come back." Roberta said from Josh's side.

I glanced up to see a ghost of a smile flit across my dad's face at being called 'Pappi'.

Josh seemed to be lost in thought for a moment, then walked to the other side of the room.

"I'm glad you're going to be alright." My dad whispered as he hugged me just a little bit tighter.

"Me too." I said in an equal whisper as I did the same.

"Here. This is my address and phone number." Josh said as he approached us.

"As soon as Dr. Finley says it's okay for Jace to leave, I'll take him home with me." Josh said as he handed a slip of paper to my dad.

"Thanks Josh. There's no way I'll ever be able to repay your kindness." My dad said as he looked at the paper in his hand.

"Sure there is." Josh said in a cheerful voice.

At my dad's questioning look, Josh said, "You can stop by now and then and let me know how Jace is doing."

My dad smiled and gave a slow nod of agreement to the arrangement.

"Or, if you'll give me your address, I could send you letters and let you know how things are going." I said quietly.

"Yeah." Josh said happily, "Sounds like a plan."

"Good news!" Dr. Finley said as he burst into the room.

I think Roberta was the only one in the room who didn't nearly have a heart attack at the abrupt entry.

Dr. Finley must have noticed, because after a look around the room, he shyly said, "Sorry about that."

"That's fine. What's the good news?" My dad asked imploringly.

Dr. Finley's apologetic look changed back into one of happiness as he said, "After a careful examination of the MRI, I have concluded that the treatment worked even better than I could have hoped."

"How's that?" My dad asked cautiously.

Dr. Finley looked at my dad thoughtfully, obviously thinking of how to phrase what he wanted to say in layman's terms.

"I guess you can think of it this way." Dr. Finley said in prelude.

"Before his treatment, Jason had a malformation deep in his brain which seriously effected his behavior. As he grew older, it grew bigger and had an even greater influence." Dr. Finley said slowly as he looked my dad in the eyes.

"Yes. I understand that." My dad said darkly, as he hugged me just a little bit tighter.

"Well, the challenge of my treatment was to eradicate the malformation without disturbing the surrounding, very necessary, tissue." Dr. Finley said carefully.

I felt the movement as my dad nodded.

"I administered my treatment which, to be honest, is far too technical for me to explain here and now, but suffice it to say that it

worked. The results of the MRI not only confirmed that the malformation was completely destroyed, but also that the surrounding tissues weren't disturbed at all." Dr. Finley said with a trace of excitement creeping into his voice, then turned his gaze on me and continued, "To put it in even simpler terms. The bad brain tissue was nearly 100% destroyed while the good brain tissue was virtually undisturbed."

I nodded at the doctor, that I understood. Truth be told, I understood it the way he explained it to my dad, but whatever. I didn't mind hearing it again.

"So I suppose the only challenge we still have facing us is to get Jason out of here without seeing it on the 11:00 news." Dr. Finley said frankly.

"I have an idea about that..." Josh said hesitantly.

When all attention turned to him, he said even more quietly, "If Roberta wouldn't mind sharing some more clothes."

I think the room went silent, but I'm not sure. I may have just blocked it all out when I realized what Josh was suggesting.

"Mind? Don't be silly! I love playing dress up." Roberta said with a smile of delight, then rushed out of the room.

* * * * *

"Is this going to be okay with you, Jason?" My dad asked quietly from my side.

"I guess so." I said cautiously, not really knowing how I felt about it yet.

"Try not to worry about it, Jace. We just need to hide your identity until we get you out of the hospital. You can put up with it that long, can't you?" Josh said imploringly.

I looked around and suddenly realized how much trouble everyone was going to, just for me.

"I'll be fine." I said quietly to Josh, then more to the room in general, I continued, "Thank you for everything you're doing to help me."

"I want to thank you too, Jason." Dr. Finley said in a serious voice. I looked at him with question, not knowing of anything that I had done that he could possibly have reason to thank me for.

"About six years ago, I was referred a case of a child, about seven years old, as I recall. He was having almost 'Jekyll and Hyde' behavioral swings. After exhausting nearly every diagnostic test available to me, I stumbled on a very small tumor, deep in his brain." Dr. Finley said in a low voice.

"Was that like what I had?" I asked cautiously.

"No. It was the same general area of the brain, but what you had was a congenital defect. What the child had was a cancerous tumor." Dr. Finley said carefully.

"Oh." I said in a small voice, then hesitantly asked, "Were you able to help him?"

Dr. Finley slowly nodded and said, "Yes. But the treatment was horrible."

"The tumor was so deep in the brain tissue that surgery was not an option." After a moment to gather his emotions, Dr. Finley continued, "Chemotherapy is basically a cocktail of poisons. Radiation, by its very nature, is destructive to living tissue. Even though I'm sure that he and his family would agree that it was worth going through all of it. I felt as though I was trying to swat a fly with a snow shovel."

Although I got what he was saying, I couldn't help but puzzle over the strange analogy.

"Since then I've been working on developing a treatment option that could target the problem area without putting the patient through untold hell." Dr. Finley said frankly.

"And Jason was the first patient you received who turned out to be a candidate for your new treatment?" My dad asked quietly.

"Not exactly." Dr. Finley said, then looked at me with concern.

"I've had quite a few patients that might have benefited from my treatment, but conventional treatments were also an option for

them. So I continued using chemo and radiation, even though I believed that I had a far less traumatic way to treat them." Dr. Finley said with regret.

"So Jace was the first patient you got who had no other options?" Josh asked cautiously.

Dr. Finley nodded and said, "It was either this or a mental institution for the rest of his life. Fortunately, Mr. Kerbo was willing to allow me to use my experimental treatment."

"You said that if it didn't work, Jason wouldn't be any worse off for having had the treatment. That being the case, I think any father would have made the same decision." My dad said quietly.

"Perhaps." Dr. Finley said slowly, then continued, "But I doubt that there are many other fathers who would be able to finance the treatment out of their own pockets. I'm sure that the insurance companies wouldn't even consider covering something this experimental."

"It's just money. It means nothing in the face of something like this." My dad said as he hugged me firmly to his side.

* * * * *

"My foundation is too dark for your skin, but I think I have everything else that you'll need." Roberta said in a rush as she hurried into the room.

"Foundation?" Josh said with surprise, then continued, "We're just going from the hospital to the car. I don't think Jace needs makeup." Roberta flashed Josh a pitying look then muttered under her breath, "Men."

"Is there anything we can do to help?" Dr. Finley asked with amusement as he watched the proceedings.

"Get him out of these 'man' clothes so I can make him beautiful." Roberta said as she started to sort out the stack of things she had carried into the room.

"Are you really okay with this, Jace?" Josh asked me cautiously.

I don't know if it was Dr. Finley's story, or maybe it was just from having one emotional revelation heaped on top of another all day, but for whatever reason, I just couldn't manage the emotional energy to do anything but say, "Just do it."

* * * * *

I suppose I should have felt embarrassed.

I mean, my dad was right there. Roberta was there, looking all... female.

Dr. Finley was there, sort of an authority figure.

I should have felt embarrassed.

But I didn't.

I felt nothing but a desire to help them as they tried to change my appearance enough to get me out of the hospital and past the reporters.

"I wish I had a wig for him. There's so much I could do." Roberta said as she backed away to survey her work.

"Maybe we can get him a hat or something." Josh said uncertainly.

"Hat's are sooooo out this season." Roberta said in an exaggerated voice, then seemed to be assaulted by inspiration.

"Did I bring it? Oh, tell me I have it with me." Roberta muttered as she started rifling through the large carpet bag of a purse that she had brought in.

I glanced around to see that my dad, Josh and Dr. Finley were all watching to see what Roberta was going to pull out of the bag next.

A coat rack?

"Is something wrong Jace?" Josh asked me with concern.

I blinked, then realized that everyone was looking at me.

"I think I just remembered something." I said distantly.

"Tell me about it." Dr. Finley said immediately.

"It was silly." I said dismissively.

"It was a memory. Jason, I can't even tell you how important this is. I

need to know exactly what you remembered and how it made you feel."

"It's fuzzy." I said as I thought about the strange thing I had remembered.

"It's like a dream... but I remember someone with a large purse like Roberta's. She was looking through it just like Roberta was doing... and she pulled a coat rack out of the bag." I said as I strained to remember.

"Marry Poppins." My dad said suddenly.

I looked at my dad with question.

"That used to be one of Jason's favorite movies." My dad said with a loving smile directed at me.

"An associative memory. That's interesting." Dr. Finley muttered to himself.

"Is something wrong?" Josh asked with concern.

"No. I don't think so." Dr. Finley said, then seemed to notice that we were all looking at him with question.

"Much of the human mind is still a mystery to us. A side effect of my treatment caused Jason to lose much of his long term memory... that was expected. But I had assumed that when the occasional memory returned, that it would be in a somewhat random fashion." Dr. Finley said thoughtfully.

After a moment to consider his words, Dr. Finley continued, "It appears that Jason's memories will return as associative links are reestablished."

"Is that bad?" Josh asked cautiously.

"No. It's neither good nor bad." Dr. Finley said with a smile. "This is simply an interesting development from an academic standpoint."

"If it's not a problem, then can we finish and get Jason out of here?" Roberta asked cautiously.

"Yes. I think that's a very good idea." Dr. Finley said with a smile.

"Here Jason, let me do this and I think we'll be done." Roberta said

as she approached me with a small piece of something that looked like terry cloth.

She stretched the thing between her hands, then brought it up over my head and under my hair line.

"Perfect!" Roberta said with triumph as she stepped away.

"Wow!" Josh said as he looked at me with surprise.

"Thank God and Wal-Mart that I thought to keep a hair band with me. I usually don't wear those things but I just had the feeling that it might come in handy someday." Roberta said happily.

"Well Jace, are you ready to go?" Josh asked with a smile at me.

"I guess so." I said uncertainly, then asked, "Do I look okay?"

"Yeah. You look lovely." Josh said with a teasing grin.

"I'll see you in the morning. I hope you have a good night." My dad said as he moved in to give me a hug.

"I'll see you then." I said as I returned the hug, then whispered, "Thanks again."

"I love you." My dad said as he pulled back to look me in the eyes.

"I love you, too."

* * * * *

"Here's the plan." Josh said, then peeked out of the lab door.

I waited, hoping that we weren't going to have a problem.

"I'm parked in the employee parking lot behind the hospital. If we go out through the cafeteria, we should come out pretty close to my car." Josh said, then motioned for me to follow.

"Lead the way." I said as I glanced up and down the hall to see if anyone was looking.

"Just try to look casual." Josh said as we walked slowly down the hall.

"That may be hard for me to do." I said cautiously.

Josh looked at me with concern and asked, "Are you really nervous?"

"A little, but it's more because these pantyhose are itching." I said

uncomfortably.

"Well, if we can get out of here without any problems, I'll have you out of those pantyhose in about twenty minutes." Josh said, then waggled his eyebrows in a suggestive fashion.

I couldn't help but break into a laugh at the suggestive tone that he had used.

"There's the side door to the cafeteria. That way we can completely bypass the dining room." Josh said as he put an arm loosely around me.

I glanced up at Josh with question at the move.

"If anyone asks, you're my girlfriend." Josh said as an explanation.

"Sounds good." I said, then cautiously put an arm around Josh's waist.

* * * * *

"Mrs. Shin? Would it be okay if we leave through your back door?" Josh asked as he guided me through the bustling kitchen.

"You know that's against the rules, Josh." A tiny older woman said in a firm, authoritative voice.

"I know, but there are some reporters out in front of the hospital that we'd really rather not have to talk to." Josh said imploringly.

Mrs. Shin looked at me for a moment, then said, "Oh. I see."

I waited, wondering just what we would do if she said 'no'.

"It's been a few weeks since we've had to facilitate a 'celebrity escape'. I guess we were due." She said as she took a ring of keys off her belt and led the way toward the back door.

"Yeah. The reporters should be able to understand that if someone is at the hospital, they probably don't want to have their picture taken." Josh said, then looked down at me and gave me a wink.

"Vultures feast on the misfortune of others. Asking them to do otherwise is asking them to go against their nature." She said as she turned the key on the push bar door to disable the alarm.

"Thanks." Josh said appreciatively, then led me out the door.

* * * * *

As soon as the door had closed behind us, Josh froze and I looked around to see what was wrong.

"Shit!" Josh gasped as two men approached.

"Hey, did you see that Kerbo kid while you were in there?" One of the men asked quickly as he approached.

"I don't think so." Josh said as he clutched me to his side, then in a slightly louder voice he said, "I'm going to be a daddy!"

I blinked with surprise at the declaration and would have gasped except that Josh had swooped in to give me a deep kiss.

"Oh, um... that's nice kid." the reporter said, then motioned to his partner to move away.

Out of the corner of my eye, I could see that the two men had taken up a position a few feet away to return to their stake out of the cafeteria exit.

At first I didn't realize it, but my hands had automatically moved up Josh's back and I was returning his kiss full force.

"Come on. Let's go home." He whispered against my lips.

"Yeah." I whispered, and I'm sure that I probably had the most goofy, love-struck expression on my face that ever was.

"Good luck you two." The reporter said as we walked past him toward the employee parking lot.

"Yeah. Thanks." Josh said as I continued to walk with him, arm in arm.

* * * * *

"Are you okay Jace? You're awfully quiet." Josh asked as he drove.

"Yeah. Fine." I said absently.

I didn't know what I was thinking or feeling at that moment, I just knew that whatever it was, I didn't want it to ever end.

"Is it something you don't feel like talking about?" Josh asked quietly.

"No. It's nothing like that. It's just... that kiss." I said with difficulty.

"Yeah. I'm sorry about that. It was kind of an impulse thing to get us away from the reporters." Josh said hesitantly.

He didn't mean it. That's what he was saying, he was doing what he needed to do. It didn't mean anything.

"You aren't mad at me, are you?" Josh asked hesitantly.

"No." I said slowly, then quietly added, "I liked it."

Josh seemed surprised by my admission.

"I mean, I know you were just trying to distract the reporters and that it didn't mean anything..."

"Hold on." Josh said firmly.

I stopped and looked at him curiously.

"I *was* trying to distract the reporters, but when I kissed you, I meant it." Josh said seriously.

"Yeah?" I asked hopefully.

"Yeah." Josh said with a shy little smile.

The trip to Josh's house only took a few more minutes, which passed in silence.

I used that time to replay that kiss in my mind and wish, that maybe, there might be a chance for me to get another.

* * * * *

"There you are!" A woman said as we walked into the house through the back door.

"Were you waiting for me?" Josh asked timidly.

"Your father called and explained what was going on. I was getting worried that you might have been caught by the reporters or something worse."

"I had to smuggle Jace out of the hospital and it took a few extra minutes." Josh said quietly. "Mom, this is Jason. Jace, this is my mom, Amanda Harmon."

"It's nice to meet you Mrs. Harmon." I said respectfully.

"Yes. It's nice to meet you too Jason." Mrs. Harmon said formally,

then in a mischievous voice she continued, "Although I've got to admit that you're not at all what I expected from the way my husband described you."

I puzzled over the statement for a moment, then realized that I was still dressed in women's clothing.

"We had to disguise Jace to get him out of the hospital." Josh hurried to explain.

"That's good to know." Mrs. Harmon said with a chuckle, "I was beginning to think that all Josh's friends were transvestites."

"Trans-gendered." Josh corrected gently, then added, "And Roberta is the only one so far."

Mrs. Harmon smiled at the explanation, then said, "Why don't you take Jason upstairs and get him something more comfortable to wear. Your father should be home by the time you're finished, then we'll have supper."

"Okay." Josh said with relief, "Thanks Mom."

"Go on." Mrs. Harmon said with a chuckle.

* * * * *

"It looks like the only thing I'm going to have that might fit you are some sweats and a t shirt. Is that going to be okay?" Josh asked timidly.

"Yeah. That will be fine." I said frankly.

"Here you go. The bathroom is right next door if you want to wash that goop off your face." Josh said casually, then added, "You'd probably have time to take a shower if you want."

"That might be fun, if you'd join me." I said hopefully.

Josh got a pained look, then hesitantly said, "I don't think that'd be such a good idea with my parents downstairs."

"I'll save the shower until later then." I said with regret.

"Jace." Josh said in an urging tone.

I turned back to look at him curiously.

Rather than say anything, he just stood there and opened his arms to me.

I felt a smile creep across my face, then hurried into the embrace.

"Everything is going to be fine. I know it is." Josh said as he held me close to his chest.

"Right this minute, I believe you."

The hug lasted a few minutes, but it was just what I needed to lift my spirits.

"We'd better get that makeup off of you." Josh said quietly.

"Yeah. Do you think you could help me? I'm not sure if it will come off with soap and water. We might need turpentine or something." I said with a grin.

"Yeah. I'll help." Josh said with a chuckle then guided me to walk with him into the bathroom.

* * * * *

The makeup removal didn't take as long as I thought it might.

Once that was done, changing into the sweats and t shirt was simple enough to do.

I caught Josh looking at my butt as I changed and hoped that meant that things might get interesting later.

When we finally walked downstairs, Judge and Mrs. Harmon were in the living room watching something on TV. As soon as we walked through the doorway, Judge Harmon turned the TV off.

"Is something wrong?" Josh asked hesitantly.

"Let's just say that you shouldn't turn on the TV tonight." Judge Harmon said simply.

"Is there stuff about me on there?" I asked cautiously.

"You could say that." Judge Harmon said with a pained look.

"Why can't they just leave it be?" Josh asked desperately.

"Because there are those who feel that justice wasn't served. Or maybe they just want vengeance. For whatever reason, things didn't

turn out the way they wanted, so they're raising a fuss." Judge Harmon said frankly.

"I'm sorry to be so much trouble." I said sincerely.

Judge Harmon gave a weary chuckle, then said, "My job is to see that the law is applied fairly. That's what these people elected me to do. And that's what I did. What you have to realize is that if any of them were the defendant instead of you, they would be fighting tooth and nail to be given a second chance."

"But they feel like... what ever I did, I got away with it." I said quietly.

"Yes. That's the root of the problem. But what they don't see is that the person who did those things was mentally unbalanced and not responsible for his actions by reason of insanity. You aren't him. You are responsible and sane. I made the right decision." Judge Harman said as he looked into my eyes.

"I'll do whatever I can to prove that you're right." I said as I matched his gaze.

"Well, now that that's settled. Who's ready for dinner?" Mrs. Harmon asked pleasantly.

"These boys both look like they could use a good meal." Judge Harmon said as he stood from his place on the couch.

"Yeah. That hospital food doesn't seem to stick with you." Josh said frankly.

I realized that I actually was very hungry and nodded my agreement to Josh's statement.

* * * * *

As we sat around the table, I felt completely out of place.

It's possible that it was just a consequence of my memory loss, but I had the feeling that this was something that my own family didn't do often, if ever.

Sitting around a table and eating dinner, talking about what happened during the day... it seemed perfectly natural for them,

but completely foreign to me.

"So Jason, are you excited about your trip to Ohio?" Judge Harmon asked me.

I turned my attention to him, my mind had been wandering. I actually had to think about the question for a few seconds before I could answer.

"I'm nervous about it, but I don't know if that's the same as being excited." I said cautiously.

"I suppose that nervousness is a natural reaction when being thrown into a foreign environment." Judge Harmon said with a chuckle. "Just make sure that you stay in touch and let us know how you're doing."

"Josh said that he's going to give me his address so I can write letters and stuff." I said, then glanced at Josh with a smile.

"Good. I think we'll all be interested to hear how you're enjoying your new life in Ohio." Mrs. Harmon said gently.

"I hope I'll have lots of good things to tell you." I said honestly.

* * * * *

When we went back upstairs, I noticed that Josh seemed to be hesitant and a little bit nervous.

I sat down on Josh's bed, then quietly asked, "Is something wrong?"

"No." Josh said quietly, then added in a mumble, "It's nothing."

"It looks like it must be something if it's bothering you this much." I said frankly.

"It's just... while we were having dinner, I realized that I'm starting to feel something for you." Josh said quietly.

"I'm feeling something for you, too." I said slowly, "Is that a bad thing?"

"No." Josh said immediately, then amended, "At least it wouldn't be..."

"...if I weren't leaving." I said, finishing the thought.

Josh reluctantly nodded.

"I know that when you have to leave, it's going to hurt like hell." Josh said as he looked into my eyes, begging for my understanding.

"Yeah." I agreed. I knew what he was saying was true, but I didn't want it to be.

"I think that we should probably step back and think about what we're doing before both of us end up getting hurt." Josh said regretfully.

"Yeah." I said with resignation, then heaved a sigh.

"I'm sorry Jace." Josh said with true remorse sounding in his voice.

"Will you hold me?" I asked quietly, hoping that he wouldn't refuse.

"Yeah. Anytime you want, for as long as you want." Josh responded as he sat on the bed at my side.

Before the hug had really begun, a knock on the frame of the open door interrupted us.

"Do you guys mind if I come in?" Judge Harmon asked quietly.

"Come on in Dad." Josh said, and to my surprise, he didn't make any move to let go of me.

"Is there a problem?" Judge Harmon asked with concern.

"No. Jace was just feeling a little overwhelmed and needed a hug. What's up?" Josh asked, keeping his voice low.

"I just wanted to check and see how you guys are doing. I'll leave you two alone." Judge Harmon said with a smile at us.

"No. It's okay Dad. We really wouldn't mind if you came in for a few minutes." Josh said honestly.

Judge Harmon seemed to consider the words for a moment, then moved to take a seat in the desk chair by the bed.

"You two really seem to have gotten close in the short time you've known each other." Judge Harmon said frankly.

"Yeah." Josh said with a whisper of regret.

"I was just curious... how are you going to handle it when Jason needs to leave?" Judge Harmon asked Josh sympathetically.

"We were just talking about that. It's going to be tough, but I guess if we just hold ourselves back..." Josh trailed off with regret. "Don't worry Dad. We're not going to get in too deep."

Judge Harmon shook his head slowly, either in disagreement or just as a sign of frustration at the impossibility of our situation.

"I wish it were that simple." Judge Harmon said regretfully.

I looked at Josh in time to see him look back at me. It was obvious that neither of us knew what Judge Harmon was trying to say.

"Human emotions don't work that way. You can't just turn them on and off like a faucet." Judge Harmon said to us with regret. "I suppose sometimes our lives might be easier if you could."

"But what should we do? It's going to hurt when Jace has to leave." Josh asked his father desperately.

Judge Harmon nodded slowly.

"Dad?" Josh asked, even more quietly.

"I don't know the depths of your feelings toward each other... I doubt if you do either." Judge Harmon said in prelude as he looked at us.

"But one thing I've learned is that a lost love fades with time and a broken heart will eventually mend. The thing that will cause you the most pain in the long term is regret." Judge Harmon said softly.

"I don't understand." Jason said quietly.

"If you two can spend the limited time you have to it's fullest advantage, then you can part company without wondering 'what might have been'. You'll each carry the memories with you and they'll help you endure the separation."

Josh and I looked at each other again, it was almost as if we were communicating telepathically.

"It may not exactly be the recipe for a happy ending, but I promise that if you can look back on these days without any regrets, it will be much easier on both of you." Judge Harmon said to us seriously.

"I know this is a stupid question but... you're okay with us... you

know... doing stuff?" Josh asked his father cautiously.

Judge Harmon looked at both of us then quietly said, "Those that wrote the laws picked an arbitrary age in an effort to prevent the innocent from being exploited. So from a legal standpoint, no. Certain physical acts between the two of you are illegal."

I looked at the judge with surprise at the statement.

"But before I'm a judge, I'm a person. And as a person, I feel that the two of you are exactly what each other need right now. Jason's memories have been wiped away by his treatment. He's a blank slate. I think that experiencing a special friendship on the first day of his new life will be the foundation for a happy and productive life."

"And, speaking as a father... Josh, if I'm right about you two, this could end up being one of those special friendships that last a lifetime. " Judge Harmon said as he slowly stood from the chair.

"Thanks Dad." Josh whispered as he watched his father walk toward the door.

"Don't be up too late. I'm sure Jason is going to have a long day tomorrow." Judge Harmon said before walking out and closing the door behind him.

* * * * *

"What do you want to do?" Josh asked me tentatively.

"Spend the night with you." I said honestly.

Josh gave a small nod, then said, "I think we can do that."

"Good." I said with a grin.

"What would you like to do right now?" He asked cautiously.

"If you're in the mood, another one of those kisses would be kinda nice." I said as I looked deeply into his eyes.

"Yeah. That sounds perfect." Josh said, then moved in to give me a firm kiss.

The last kiss had been quick, but this one lingered. He seemed to be taking his time and going slowly so he could remember every detail

for later.

I decided that I'd like to do the same thing.

I closed my eyes and tried to feel and memorize every sensation of kissing the beautiful young man in my arms.

There was a little tickle and it took a moment for me to realize that it was Josh's tongue tracing along my closed lips.

I opened my mouth slightly and his tongue ventured in slowly, almost tentatively, as if unsure of it's welcome.

My tongue slid against his, and it was the most erotic feeling that I could have ever imagined.

It seemed that Josh was feeling the same, because the kiss became deeper and more desperate.

As much as I would have liked for that feeling to continue forever, I needed to breathe.

"Wow." Josh gasped as we separated.

"Yeah." I said with a chuckle that I couldn't restrain.

"I think I'm ready for a shower. How about you?" Josh asked in a sultry voice.

"Yeah." I said breathlessly. "But can we do some more of that later?"

"Count on it."

To Be Continued...