

Seeking Comfort

Hurt & Comfort - VIII

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[Prologue]

"What is it Andrew?" Scott asked in worry at Andrew's reaction to the name 'Clark Kent'.

"If he's the same Clark Kent that I'm thinking of... he's a fictional character in my world." Andrew said in thought.

"Mine too." Alan said in disbelief.

"Superman?" Dawn asked with a furrow of worry in her brow.

"What do you mean?" Scott asked, beginning to feel anxiety at their reaction.

"Yeah. If it's him, he's going to need all the support and guidance we can give him." Andrew said seriously.

"But how can he be real? I mean, it's just a comic book story." Xander said in confusion.

"What if the writers of the comic books had an ability to see other dimensions on a subconscious level. What they thought were fantasy stories were actually the stories of a real person's life in an alternate dimension." Andrew said speculatively.

"Spose Dat be possible." Remy said as he tried to remember all that he had ever read about Superman.

"Can you tell us what's going on?" Alex asked in frustration.

"It's probably better if we don't. If the stories we heard were thought to be fantasy, then what we know about him might be overblown and dramatized to make a more interesting story." Andrew said seriously.

"So what should we do?" Dawn asked with concern.

"Dawn, would you go and tell Matt what's going on? I think everyone else who is not from this dimension is here. Let's just agree to never mention Superman around Clark. We'll watch and see what happens." Andrew said in thought.

"Yeah. He's fifteen. He don't need to try and live up to all that." Spike said

seriously.

"Right Spike. So we keep quiet about this, and if it is him, we try and help him the best we can." Andrew said firmly.

"Right." Alan said.

"Is there anything I need to know about him?" Scott asked, not understanding what they were talking about.

"Just that in our worlds, he's one of the greatest fictional heroes ever." Andrew said with a glance at Scott.

"Yeah, that's no pressure for a bloke to live up to." Spike said to the group.

[Chapter 1: Making Due]

"Isn't there some other way?" I said, immediately regretting the whiny tone in my voice.

"We're just going to check this out. We're not committed to anything Clark." Mom said with pain.

"I'm sorry mom. I know I can't go back home..." I said, thinking for the thousandth time about the accidental slip that set this course of events into motion.

[I nearly burnt down the school. The beams just shot out of my eyes and caught the building on fire... If anyone had been hurt it would've been all my fault. What kind of a monster am I if I can hurt people so easily?]

"Things will calm down in time. We need to give people time to get past this. You'll be able to come home... eventually. You just can't come back there *now*." Mom said, trying to be comforting.

"I know mom... but how is dad going to take care of the farm without me there?" I said, seeing yet another person I had hurt without meaning to.

"We'll manage, don't worry about that. Just focus on this new school. From what Mr. Romanov said, it may be just what we're looking for." Mom said bravely.

"I'll give it a try mom. I really will... wait, I think we need to turn here.." I said, when I noticed the number on the heavy gate.

"Remember, it's your decision Clark. I won't make you stay here if you don't want to." Mom said as she pulled the car onto the private road.

"Thanks mom... I'm scared." I said in a whisper.

"Change is always scary. Just remember that your father and I are a phone call away if you need us for anything." Mom said seriously.

"I know." I said as I thought about how much pain I was causing my mother. And how much she had gone through the past two days to find a place where I could go and not be looked at like a freak or a monster.

"Would you look at that? And all this time I thought the Luthor mansion was

the biggest house I would ever see." Mom said in wonder.

I looked at the mansion and was surprised by the size and beauty of the building.

"It's beautiful." I said and pressed my face against the window to completely see the building.

Mom stopped the car and said in a cautious voice, "Remember not to judge a book by its cover dear."

"I'll remember mom." I said and felt a smile come across my face. That was just such a 'mom' thing to say.

"Let's go inside and find out what this is about." Mom said after a deep breath to brace herself.

* * * * *

"May I help you?" A beautiful woman with white hair asked when she opened the door.

"I'm Martha Kent and this is my son Clark. We were told to come here to meet with Mr. Worthington." Mom said to the woman unsurely. I was hoping that I wrote down the directions right and we weren't at the wrong address.

"Oh yes, he called and told me to expect you. Come in and I'll let him know that you're here." The woman said politely.

We followed the woman into the house and we exchanged a look when we saw the style and elegance of the entry hall.

"I'm Orroro Munroe, I'm a teacher at the Xavier Institute." The woman said as she led us into an office.

"It's nice to meet you." Mom said politely. I was so fascinated with everything around me that I couldn't do anything but nod in agreement with mom.

Ms. Munroe nodded as she picked up the phone and pressed three buttons.

"Hello Andrew, may I speak to Warren please?" Ms. Munroe asked kindly.

Ms. Munroe looked at us and gave us a gentle smile. I felt a blush start to rise up from her attention directed at me.

After a moment of silence, Ms. Munroe said, "Warren, Martha and Clark Kent are here to meet with you."

A serious look came across her face and she said, "I don't know, I'll ask them."

Ms. Munroe put her hand over the mouthpiece of the phone and asked, "Have you had lunch yet?"

"No, we drove straight here." Mom said quietly. I still wasn't able to find my voice in the presence of this gorgeous woman.

Ms. Munroe nodded and said into the phone, "No, they haven't."

After another moment of silence she said, "I'll send them right over. Enjoy your lunch."

She hung up the phone and walked from behind the desk.

"Mr. Worthington is at the boathouse on the other side of the property. They'll be sitting down to lunch soon and have invited you to join them."

Ms. Munroe said and led the way out of the office, back the way we came.

"If you continue down the road you came in on, it leads around the property to the boathouse by the lake. They'll be expecting you." Ms. Munroe said as she led us to the door.

"Thank you Ms. Munroe." I was finally able to say in nearly a whisper.

"You're welcome Clark, I hope to see you again soon." Ms. Munroe said with a warm smile at me that turned my knees to rubber.

* * * * *

"Wasn't that an amazing place?" Mom asked as we got back into the car.

"Yes, and wasn't Ms. Munroe beautiful?" I asked, wondering if Mom had even noticed.

"Yes, very pretty." Mom said with a smile and I could tell that she was getting a kick out of this.

* * * * *

There were three other cars parked outside in the slushy remains of last night's snow.

We walked cautiously to the door of the small house by the lake.

I looked at mom, then gently knocked on the door. It was immediately answered by a small boy. The little boy had a metallic piece that seemed to be connected to his face, framing his left eye.

"Hello, you must be Clark. I'm Jimmy. Come in." The boy said with enthusiasm.

"Thanks." I said quietly and followed him into the house with my Mom close at my side.

"Hello Clark and Martha. I'm Andrew Summers, welcome to my home, please come in and make yourselves comfortable." A young man said with a pleasant smile.

"Thank you." Mom said as we walked into the living room, staying near each other.

"The bathroom is right over there if you need to freshen up after your long drive. We'll be sitting down to lunch in a few minutes." Andrew said in a casual voice.

"Thank you." Mom said shyly and went immediately to the bathroom.

"Clark, I'd like for you to meet my sons Icheb and Trey." Andrew said and indicated two boys close to my age. One looked normal and the other had a metal piece framing his eye and a strange rippled crease in his forehead.

"It is a pleasure to meet you Clark. If you are in need of anything, let me know so I may help you." Icheb said honestly.

"You're his sons? He looks the same age as you." I said in confusion. I didn't know what else to say, it just seemed so unlikely.

"Grandfather, would you come and meet Clark?" Trey said with a smile.

A boy, who was close to my age, walked over to us and said, "My name is Lee. I'm pleased to meet you Clark."

"What?" Was all I could think to say to this boy who was supposed to be the grandfather to the other boys.

"Father and Grandfather do not age." Trey said simply.

I looked at Lee and Andrew and noticed the features that they shared. Slowly, I nodded in comprehension, if not acceptance.

Mom finally walked to my side and asked, "What did I miss?"

"I was just introducing Clark to my sons, they're about his age." Andrew said as he led us past a living room filled with chattering people and into a dining room.

"You have children? You're just a child yourself." Mom said in surprise.

"He doesn't age mom." I told her quietly, not wanting her to be as confused about it as I was.

"Yes, and I have eight children... and one more on the way." Andrew said with a glow of pride.

"Eight?!" Mom and I both exclaimed simultaneously.

"Yes... we still have a few minutes before lunch, I'll introduce them to you." Andrew said and led us back to the living room.

"Okay, this is Icheb and Trey." Andrew said and looked around the room.

"Robert is with Bobby." A boy only slightly younger than me said quietly.

"This is William, Robert is his twin brother, you'll meet him later." Andrew said, indicating the boy who had spoken.

"You met Jimmy at the door." Andrew said as we passed Jimmy on the way to a closed door.

Once inside the room, I saw that it was a bedroom. There were two men

and a little girl watching two small babies in one crib and one absolutely tiny baby in a second crib.

"This is my daughter Janine. And these are my sons Chakotay and Thomas." Andrew said with pride.

"And here are my friends Xander and Remy, and this young lady is their daughter Marguerite." Andrew said and motioned to the tiny infant.

"She's so small." Mom said in a voice of both wonder and worry.

"Marguerite be born premature, but she be a strong lil girl." Remy said firmly.

"A pleasure to meet you all." Mom said in a voice that sounded overwhelmed.

"Lunch will be ready soon. I'm not exactly sure what Alex and Spike are making, but it smells good." Andrew said as he led the way out of the bedroom.

I noticed that Mom cast one last look at the little girl before we followed Andrew back out into the living room.

* * * * *

"Martha and Clark, I'd like for you to meet Warren Worthington the third." Andrew said as we walked back into the living room.

"A pleasure." Mr. Worthington said with a friendly smile.

The man had wings... I mean big white fluffy feathered freakin wings! I couldn't help myself, I stood staring and probably let my mouth fall open I was so surprised.

"Since Clark has special abilities I thought you wouldn't mind if I was myself at this meeting." Mr. Worthington said with a warm smile that made me feel a lot more comfortable.

"Oh, I'm sorry for staring Mr. Worthington. I don't get out much." Mom said shyly.

"That's fine Mrs. Kent." Mr. Worthington said with a gentle smile.

"Who wants to help me move the table?" A man called from the kitchen.

I felt like I needed to be doing something and needed to be away from Mr. Worthington for a minute... just to process what I'd just seen. So I went to the man and offered to help him move the table.

* * * * *

After moving the table and some chairs from the kitchen, I went back to Mom who was talking with Mr. Worthington.

"It does sound like just what we're looking for... but Mr. Romanov didn't say anything about how much this was going to cost." Mom said carefully as I was walking up.

"Please don't worry about that. The cost isn't as high as you might think. Let me talk to Scott for a minute, I have an idea of how we might be able to ease your mind about the cost and about the school." Mr. Worthington said in thought.

"Scott?" Mom said with a curious look.

"Yes. I'll be right back." Mr. Worthington said and went to a man with red sunglasses.

"What's wrong mom?" I asked with concern at her worried expression.

"Nothing dear. Just thinking about the practical matters." Mom said in a dark tone.

I thought about the words and realized what she meant. "You're going to have to pay for this, aren't you?"

"Yes. But don't worry, we'll manage somehow." Mom said, obviously trying to force cheer into her voice.

I started feeling that dark feeling... the one that said I was more trouble than I'm worth, that they'd all be better off without me. Then I snapped out of it when Mr. Worthington and another man approached.

"Martha, Clark, I'd like for you to meet Scott Summers. He's currently in charge of the Xavier Institute while Professor Xavier is on vacation." Mr.

Worthington said with a warm smile.

"It's nice to meet you Clark, Mrs. Kent." Mr. Summers said as he shook our hands.

"Yes, nice to meet you." Mom said quietly.

"Warren was telling me that you're concerned about Clark attending the school and about the cost. I understand your basic situation and the need for Clark to be away from his old school. So how about this? This is a short week. Clark can stay here... now. He's welcomed to monitor classes for the next three days to see how we conduct our classes and get to know some of the other students. And that will give me some time to investigate the financial possibilities to get you the best deal on tuition. Thursday is Thanksgiving. You and your husband are welcomed to come and share Thanksgiving dinner with us at the mansion and we can discuss things then." Mr. Summers said in thought.

Mom was quiet for a minute before she turned to me and asked, "Clark, what do you think?"

"I don't know Mom." I said honestly.

"I've got an idea Clark. Why don't I get one of the other students to buddy with you. He can show you around and you won't be completely on your own." Mr. Summers said with a smile.

I was about to tell mom to take me home, I'd put up with the angry people... but then I saw the hopeful look in her eyes. She wanted this for me. She thought it might be something good for me.

I looked her in the eyes and quietly said, "Okay."

"Clark, try it out for three days and let us know what you think on Thanksgiving. If you don't like it here, we'll find something else. I promise." Mom said with assurance.

"I'll do it mom." I said, trying to keep my emotional control in front of all these people.

"If you're done talking business, lunch is ready." The man from the kitchen, Alex, said from the kitchen door.

"Okay Alex." Scott said with a smile, then said, "Let's save the rest of our business till after lunch."

"Good idea, business is bad for digestion." Mr. Worthington said with a teasing voice.

* * * * *

Just as everyone was sitting down, a group of people came into the boathouse. One of them was a huge blue furry monster, but the boys with him didn't seem at all afraid of him.

I looked curiously at the boys. One of them had to be Robert, he was identical to William who we had been introduced to earlier.

"Where is Uncle Kurt?" Robert asked as he walked into the dining room.

"He and Julia had some business to discuss. They said they'd try to be back in time for lunch." Andrew said with a smile.

Mr. Summers stood and said, "Bobby, could you come here for a second?"

"Sure." A boy said quickly and walked to Mr. Summers.

"Bobby, this is Clark Kent. He'll be monitoring classes for a few days and I was wondering if you would introduce him around." Mr. Summers said hopefully.

"Sure Scott. It's nice to meet you Clark, I'm Bobby Drake." Bobby said with a genuine smile.

"Nice to meet you." I said, trying to sound confident.

"This is Robert Summers, John Allerdyce and my brother Ronny Drake." Bobby said quickly.

"Nice to meet you." I said to the boys.

"Clark, why don't you sit down at the other table with Bobby so Hank can sit over here with us?" Mr. Summers asked politely.

I immediately got up and followed Bobby to the other table which was surrounded by people my own age.

I looked back to Mom and heard Mr. Summers say, "Mrs. Kent, this is Dr. Hank McCoy."

"N... Nice to meet you." Mom said nervously.

"Do not worry good lady, my appearance may be that of a beast, but I assure you that beneath all this fur is a normal man." Dr. McCoy said softly.

"Okay." Mom said and tried to conceal her nervousness.

[Remember Mom, you can't judge a book by it's cover.] I thought with an internal chuckle.

"Kids, who wants to help me serve the food?" A young man asked from the kitchen.

Immediately, several children went to the kitchen. I began to get up when Bobby put a hand on my arm and said, "Let them do it. Robert and his brothers don't eat so they don't mind serving the food."

"They don't eat?" I asked in amazement. This place seemed to be getting weirder by the minute.

"No. It's a really long story, but basically, they are part machine, so they hook up to a machine at night that feeds them." Bobby said quietly.

"How did that happen?" I asked, I was so interested that I'd forgotten my nervousness.

The little girl... Janine, walked up and asked, "May I tell Clark?"

"Go ahead." Bobby said with a gentle smile.

"In a time before we can remember we were living on our own planets, with our own families, when the Borg came and captured all of us. They put machines in us and made us not remember who we are or the time before. They thought for us and used us to serve the collective. When Icheb was taken, he made the Borg sick and we were released from their control. Our fathers helped us to become people again and adopted us." Janine said with a smile.

"Other planets?" I asked reflexively. I couldn't help but focus on that one

point.

"Yes, Robert and the others are from other planets. But they don't remember anything about their homes." Bobby said with a sad smile directed at Robert who was carrying plates of food from the kitchen.

"This looks good." I heard myself say in surprise. Some part of me seemed to be running on auto-pilot and saying things like that.

"Hold on a second for the blessing." Bobby said quietly.

"Aunt Vada, would you like to say grace?" Andrew asked tenderly.

An elderly woman at the other table said, "I think Lacie should get that honor, I promise that I'll do it next time."

"Thank you dear." Another elderly woman said, then in a louder voice said, "Dear Lord, bless this food and all those who are here to share it with us. Thank you for providing a home for Marguerite and a family for Vada. Please grant your blessings and mercies upon all those here and travel mercies to those who are far from home. Amen." The woman said in a strong voice.

"Amen." A man said from almost beside me. He must have walked in during the blessing. I couldn't help it, I had to stare. He had pointy ears, a tail, scars of symbols carved into his skin, yellow eyes, pointy teeth, he was talking to me...

"I'm sorry, what?" I heard myself say.

"I said zat I am Kurt Wagner, it is a pleasure to meet you Clark." He said as he extended a two fingered hand for me to shake.

I hesitantly took his hand and shook it. He was so gentle, and the expression on his face was so hopeful that I felt my fear of him melt away.

"It's nice to meet you Mr. Wagner, have you met my mother?" I asked and felt a smile sneak onto my face.

"No, I have not." Mr. Wagner said and seemed relieved at my question.

"Mom, this is Kurt Wagner, Kurt, this is my mom, Martha Kent." I said as I walked with Mr. Wagner to her side.

"A pleasure." Mom said in a nearly catatonic state.

I smiled at Mom and went back to my seat.

[Chapter 2: New Friends]

"So what kinds of things do you like to do Clark?" Bobby asked with interest.

"Football, Astronomy, Archeology, um... I guess I like to read a lot of sci-fi stuff." I said as I considered my interests.

"We don't play much football here. Since most of us have special abilities, it usually turns into an all out battle of powers and we forget about the ball." Bobby said, then took a bite of his salad.

I thought about that before saying, "Everyone here has special abilities?"

"No, not everyone. Some of the people here are just average people... did you meet the guy with the eye patch?" Bobby asked while I was tasting some really good clam chowder.

"Yeah, in the bedroom." I said, barely remembering with all the new people we'd seen in the past half hour.

"That's Xander. He doesn't have any special ability, but he lives here and is as much one of us as anyone." Bobby said, then grabbed a sandwich from the platter in the middle of the table.

I looked at the sandwiches and noticed that there were tuna fish sandwiches, so I grabbed two while I was saying, "So if everyone here doesn't have special abilities, Why are they here?"

"This is a place where people with gifts can be accepted. We can be ourselves. The only thing that we have to do is respect each other. That means respecting people regardless of their gifts or lack of gifts." Bobby said, then took a drink of tea.

"Do you have a gift?" I asked hesitantly. It seemed it might be... wrong to ask, or something you just didn't talk about.

"Yeah, um... but I'd better not show you at the table. Remind me and I'll show you after lunch." Bobby said seriously.

I nodded as I took a bite of my sandwich.

"Nobody introduced us. I'm Chris." A boy said from my other side.

"Hi Chris, I'm Clark." I said, looking at the boy who was about my age.

"I'm new here too. I'll be starting classes tomorrow, so if you want, you can hang around with me." Chris said seriously.

"Thank's Chris, I may do that." I said, impressed by his kind offer.

"Don't worry Chris, we're going to have a lot of new people tomorrow. Robert and all his brothers and his sister start school tomorrow, so do John and Ronny." Bobby said as he leaned to look around me.

"So just about everyone here except you is a new person?" I asked Bobby as I looked around.

"Yeah, I guess so." Bobby said, noticing that I was right.

"That makes me feel better. I won't feel like I'm in the spotlight if there are other new people." I said, thinking that this might not be so bad.

"Yeah, that first day can be tough. But you don't have to worry about a lot of things here that you have to face in regular schools." Bobby said, then took another bite of salad.

"Like what?" I asked. I couldn't think of what could be so different here.

"Well, we don't have any bullies or cliques. I mean, the girls kind of gather to themselves sometimes, but that's as close as we come to separating into little groups. Everyone gets along pretty well. There's no pressure about drugs, drinking, smoking or any of that stuff. I think everyone here has seen enough to know that those things will destroy your life. Um... it's basically a pretty friendly place. If you don't hassle anyone, no one will mess with you." Bobby said in thought.

I thought about his words as I absently ate my soup. No bullies, no drug pressure, no one trying to get me to sneak a drink, no cliques dividing us... "It sounds wonderful." I heard myself say, before I realized that I spoke outloud.

"Well, it's still a school. We have homework, research papers, stuff like that. But compared to my last school... yeah, I guess it is pretty wonderful." Bobby said as he stacked his empty dishes.

Robert came over and picked up the dishes immediately. I noticed a look

pass between Robert and Bobby.

"What's with you two?" I asked curiously. It looked like they had a secret or something.

"He's my boyfriend." Bobby said shyly.

I don't think I said anything, but I'm not sure.

Either way, Bobby looked me in the eyes and said, "Yeah, I'm gay. Is that a problem for you Clark?"

I was stunned to the point that I couldn't answer. I'd never known anyone who was 'that way' before. I'd never really thought about it, I mean, the subject just never came up.

"I can find someone else to show you around if you want." Bobby said in a quieter voice.

That snapped me out of my thoughts. He thought I didn't like him because he was gay.

"No, no Bobby. That's fine. I just got stuck in my thoughts... that happens to me." I said, not knowing how else to explain.

Bobby smiled and said, "It happens to all of us sometimes."

I nodded and finished the last few bites of my lunch.

William came up beside me and took my plates as soon as I was finished.

"Do you want to go to the mansion with us? A friend of ours is sick and we're going to take him some food from lunch." Bobby said as he looked at the other boys.

"Um. I don't know. I should probably stay with mom." I said in thought.

"Clark, I'm going to need your mom to sign a few papers before she leaves... permission slips and stuff like that. If you want to go with Bobby, you can catch up to us in the office at the mansion." Mr. Summers said as he walked to our table.

"Oh, um... Okay, I guess so." I said, a little nervous about leaving mom.

"Go ahead Clark. I'll see you there." Mom said with a comforting smile.

I nodded and got up from my place to follow Bobby, John and Ronny.

"Can I go Dad?" Chris asked from his seat.

"Hank, do you think Chris is up to a walk back to the mansion?" A man, Chris's father, asked the big blue furry man.

"Will the rest of you watch out for Chris? He may need to rest on the way to the mansion." Hank asked all of us.

"Yeah, we'll take care of him." John said seriously.

"May we go too?" Robert asked from the kitchen doorway beside William.

"Go ahead. But be back before dark." Andrew said to the twin boys.

"I'm going to watch the babies so Xander and Remy can have some lunch." A man said from beside Andrew. He looked just like Mr. Summers, but without sunglasses.

"Go ahead love, just call if you need anything." Andrew said, then kissed the man... on the mouth... right in front of everyone.

No one seemed to care. Mom had a surprised look but no one else even seemed to notice.

I felt a touch on my arm as Bobby said, "Let's go. I don't want Matt's soup to get cold before we get there."

I felt myself nod and followed Bobby automatically to the kitchen.

* * * * *

The group of us left the house and I remembered what Chris' father had asked the big blue furry doctor. I asked him, "Are you sick?"

"No, I was stabbed a few days ago. My dad is worried that I'll get too tired walking all the way back to the mansion." He said as we walked.

"Stabbed?" I asked, and looked at Bobby.

"Long story. The woman who stabbed him is gone now." Bobby said, obviously wanting me to drop the subject.

I couldn't think of anything to say to that so I let the subject drop and we walked in silence for a minute.

"We need to get the camping supplies put away." John said to Bobby.

"Yeah, when Scott brings the truck back to the mansion we'll take care of it." Bobby said in thought.

"Camping?" I heard myself say in excitement. I'd only gone camping a few times, but I loved it.

"Yeah. Scott took us camping last night... well, we put up a tent and built a fire. It was cool." Ronny said with a smile.

"I grew up in the city, I've never been camping." Chris said, obviously taken with the idea.

"Next time you can come with us. It was a lot of fun." Bobby said and smiled at Robert.

"Bobby... do you think I could borrow some clothes for tomorrow? I don't really have anything." John asked shyly.

"Sure... but I don't know if my clothes will fit you." Bobby said seriously.

"They will not. John is a size larger than you are." William said as a statement of fact.

"Who's clothes would he be able to wear?" Bobby asked with concern.

"Clark is nearest his size." William said after looking at all of us.

"You don't have any clothes?" I heard myself ask.

"Just what I'm wearing." John said shyly.

"Me too." Ronny said in realization.

"I have clothing that you can wear Ronny." Robert said with assurance.

"Yes, both Robert and I can provide you clothing." William said seriously.

"Thanks guys." Ronny said shyly.

"Perhaps we could get some clothing for you after we have given Matt his food?" Robert suggested.

"Yeah. That'd be good." Ronny said with a smile.

"And when Mom brings the car back to the mansion, we'll look through my things and find something for you John." I said, trying to sound like it was no big deal.

"Um... thanks Clark." John said shyly.

"Has Scott said anything about who's getting what room?" Bobby asked the group.

"No. It hasn't come up. When Logan gets released, we're going to move in with him." John said and looked to Ronny.

"Okay, if Scott says it's okay, we could double up until then... I mean, if you guys want to. Ronny could room with me and share my stuff." Bobby said hopefully.

"Would you want to John? I mean, since we're the same size?" I asked hesitantly. Not sure if I was presuming too much.

"Really? I mean, yeah. Thanks Clark. It won't be for very long, Logan should be out of isolation in a few days, then he's going to find a house for us." John said a little nervously.

"I think it will be good to have some company in this new place." I said honestly, trying to let him know that it was really okay with me if he shared my room.

John seemed to think about that for a second, then said, "When I first came here, I remember how scary it was... especially when I was alone. We'll be fine."

"You were a student here before?" I asked, I thought he was new like me.

"Yeah, for a while. Some stuff happened... anyway, I'm back now. It'll be fine." He said, and I could tell from the look in his eyes that he believed it.

"How are you doing Chris?" Bobby asked.

"I think I need to rest for a minute. I felt fine when we left the house, but now I'm feeling really tired." Chris said with apology in his voice.

"The fieldhouse is right over there. We can sit in the locker room and rest for a few minutes, it's heated." Bobby said in thought.

"Okay." Chris said shyly as we changed direction.

"Bobby, you said that you'd show me your gift when we left the house." I said and noticed the look of gratitude from Chris for changing the subject.

"Oh, yeah. Let's get Chris to the field house, then I'll show you." Bobby said with a smile.

"I want to show you mine too." Ronny said happily.

At my curious look, Bobby said, "He just learned how to use his ability a few days ago."

"Then you're doing better than me... I haven't figured out how to use mine yet. It just happened without warning." I said shyly, feeling like 'one of the guys' since I had an ability too... even if I couldn't use it.

"I haven't learned to use mine either." Chris said with a relieved smile at me.

"I guess we'll both learn together." I said, feeling that it would be easier to learn how to control my ability if there was someone with me who was doing the same.

"You guys can do that tomorrow. I don't know if they told you, but new students aren't supposed to try to use their abilities without supervision. It's just too dangerous. Ronny kind of figured his out on his own, but we're really supposed to have one of the teachers around to help us." Bobby said as we entered the field house.

"What can they do?" Ronny asked seriously as he took a seat on one of the long benches of the locker room.

"It depends on your ability. Ms. Munroe is the one who helps me. Her ability is something like mine, so she can give me advice and help me to focus because she understands what I'm feeling." Bobby said seriously.

"Yeah, she helped me too, but from what I saw yesterday, I think Andrew would be the one to help me now. He does fire really good." John said in thought as he also sat down.

"What's your thing Clark?" Bobby asked curiously.

"I don't know what it's called, but heat... like lasers or something... came out of my eyes and started a fire." I said, not knowing how to describe it.

"Optic blasts... Scott and Alan could help you with that. They both have that." Bobby said casually.

"They do?" I asked, not ever considering that someone else might have the same ability as me.

"Yes. Dad and Uncle Scott both have that ability. My uncle Alex has the same ability but it comes from his hands and my brother Chakotay has it from his mouth." Robert said seriously.

"Chakotay... the baby?" I asked, remembering the unusual name.

"Yes, he and my brother Thomas were born with their abilities active." William said off-handedly.

"Wow, that's going to be tough. I mean, since they're too young to understand control." John said in thought.

"They only seem to manifest their abilities when they are angry, so we try to keep them fed and changed." Robert said simply and moved to pull Bobby into a casual hug.

"Um... if you guys don't mind me asking... I mean... if you're gay... what do you... I mean, you're so young." I heard myself ask. I couldn't help it. It was really eating me up. I wanted to know.

Bobby chuckled at my nervousness and said, "Don't worry Clark. We're all friends here, you can ask stuff like that when it's just us."

I looked around quickly and noticed that everyone seemed to be in agreement.

"And to answer your question. We hug and kiss a little. That's all. We'll do more later, when we're ready for it but until we are... this is all." Bobby said and squeezed Robert with affection.

"Um... so... if you don't mind me asking... who else is... um... gay." I asked nervously.

"Why do you want to know?" Ronny asked curiously.

"Um... I don't know?" I answered, not having a clue about *why* I wanted to know.

"Okay, I guess that's honest." Ronny said with a shrug.

"I am opposite gender oriented." William said without embarrassment.

"Huh?" I heard myself ask.

"Straight." Bobby said to me, obviously translating.

"Gay." John said as he raised his hand.

"Undecided." Ronny said without concern.

"Um... I never even thought about it." Chris said shyly.

"Me either." I said to Chris.

"From what my brother Icheb explained to me, your orientation will make itself known when it is appropriate. If you are in a relationship and your orientation has not made itself known, then you aren't at a point where sexuality should be a component of your interaction." William said seriously.

"I guess that makes sense." I said, thinking that it sounded like a smart way to go.

"In my case, my orientation made itself clearly known when I saw Meghan Delaney in the mess hall wearing her off-duty attire. I felt such attraction and desire that I was unable to process other information properly for days

afterward. Since then I have appreciated the female form and been attracted to the feminine attributes." William said in thought.

"For me, it was different. I am not attracted to males, I am attracted to Bobby. No one else has attracted me before or since." Robert said to the group without shame.

"I guess I'm like William, but with guys. I just like the way guys look and feel. Girls don't do a thing for me." John said in thought.

I guess I had a look of terror or question or something because John looked at me and laughed, not maliciously but with understanding.

"Don't worry Clark. I'm not some horny gay rapist who's going to try to jump you or seduce you. I'm just a guy who likes guys. If I know you're not interested, then I won't make a move on you." John said honestly.

"It's just so new to me... I mean where I come from... I never met anyone who was gay before." I stammered.

"What's more likely is, you just never met anyone who could admit to it publicly before." John said frankly.

"Yeah, even here, it takes a lot of courage to let people know something so personal." Bobby said to the group.

"Not that you had to do that... Marie took care of that for you." John said with a teasing smile.

I guess I had a curious look because Bobby turned to me and explained, "Marie accidentally read my thoughts and announced to everyone that I was gay. I never even admitted it to myself and she announced it to the whole school."

"And outed me in the process." John said with a sympathetic look at Bobby.

"Did Marie tell everyone because she wanted to hurt you?" Chris asked from beside me.

"No, she was just surprised and blurted it out. We're friends now, there are no hard feelings." Bobby said with a tender smile.

"Okay, that's cool. I just wanted to know if there is anyone I should watch

out for." Chris said with a note of worry.

"No. Everyone's pretty nice around here. Some of the younger kids are a little hyper, but they're nice." Bobby said seriously.

"I think I'm rested enough to go again." Chris said timidly.

"Okay. Let's go outside and I'll show you my ability, then we'll go." Bobby said with a smile.

* * * * *

Bobby concentrated for a second and I saw a mist forming before him. Then the mist became solid and ice began to form into a pillar.

"I can control water and ice." Bobby said in explanation, then looked to John.

After a moment of thought, John flicked his lighter and a small flame popped up. The flame began to grow bigger and then started to take form. It finally resolved into a large flaming ball that hovered above us.

"Fire's my thing." John said, then looked to Ronny.

With a look of concentration directed at the ice pillar, Ronny said, "And I think my thing is gravity."

The pillar floated into the air and away from us. It stopped, then exploded, but backward. Instead of blowing out, the pillar collapsed in and became a small dot hanging in the air.

"I can't show you mine, but I make things fall apart." Chris said as we began to walk toward the mansion again.

"Like how?" I asked curiously.

"Things just get old and tired. Wood gets weak, metal becomes brittle, skin..." Chris stopped, obviously not wanting to finish the sentence.

"I guess I'll get to see for myself when we try to learn our abilities." I said, trying to change the focus a little.

"Yeah, I really want to learn to use it. I think it'll be cool when I can make

it do what I want." Chris said hopefully.

Silence fell over our group as we continued to walk. Finally I thought of something to ask.

"What's wrong with the guy that we're taking the food to?"

"He had a virus, a really bad one. We have to make sure that it's gone before he can leave the isolation room." Ronny said seriously.

"Um, how bad?" I asked, it seemed like they were holding something back.

"Logan's ability is healing. He's had the virus for four months and it nearly killed him. He's the only one who ever got it who's still alive." Ronny said quietly.

"Wow. I guess that's a good reason to keep him in isolation." I said in thought as the Mansion came into view.

"Yeah, I think he's better now. But we have to wait to be sure." Ronny said hopefully.

"So you said you're going to live with him... how did that happen?" I asked, just wanting to keep the conversation going.

"Everyone around him died and he was alone for four months. So now he doesn't want to be alone. I'm new here and I'm not ready to be on my own. So I don't want to be alone. It just worked out to be the best thing for both of us." Ronny finished with a shrug.

"And he's your friend." Bobby added.

"Yeah, he's a really good guy." Ronny admitted.

"What about you John?" I asked, wondering how he figured into this.

"I dunno. I didn't really have anyplace to go or anyone who cared. Ronny asked me if I wanted to move in with them and I said okay." John said honestly.

I thought about what he said and could hear the sadness under his words.

"I guess it's good to be wanted somewhere. I mean, if they didn't want you,

they wouldn't have asked." I said in thought.

"Yeah, it's cool." John said with a tiny smile.

* * * * *

We walked into the mansion and to an elevator. The thing saw us coming or something because it opened when we walked up to it.

We got in and Bobby pressed the button to make it go down.

"After we visit Matt, I'll take you to the Professor's office. Your mom will probably be waiting there for us." Bobby said casually.

"Okay." I said, as the door opened.

We walked off the elevator and I was surprised by the hallway.

Everything was shiny and sterile.

It seemed wrong to even talk in such an uninviting place.

Apparently the others felt the same way because we all went down the hallway without comment, with Ronny in the lead.

* * * * *

After going through a couple doors with airtight seals, we ended up in a room with a big window in one wall. There was a man inside the next room who was watching TV.

"That's Logan. We'll have to put on biosuits to go in and see him." Ronny said and walked to a door.

I wasn't sure what I should do until John said, "Come on Clark. I want to introduce you to Matt since I'm going to be your roommate for a few days."

"Um, okay." Was all I could think to say as I followed everyone into the small room that was between the two larger rooms.

"We have to put on the biosuits to go in and visit with Matt. Just put one on and then I'll check to see that it's all sealed up right." Ronny said as he began to put on the plastic suit.

I carefully put on the suit, glancing at the others to be sure that I was fastening everything right.

"Hold still and let me look." Ronny said as everyone was checking each other out.

He checked my gloves, the zipper and the hood before saying, "It looks good, we're ready to go in."

I followed the others into the room and the man in the bed pressed the button on his remote to turn off the TV.

"We brought your lunch Logan." Ronny said and carried the food to the table beside the bed.

"Thanks kid. There's a bunch of you today. What's going on?" The man asked as he got up to sit at the table.

"We brought Clark to meet you. Clark Kent, this is Matt Logan." Ronny said with a smile.

"Good to meet you. You gonna be a student here?" Logan asked before taking a spoon of soup.

"I'm just visiting for a few days to see if I want to come here." I said, feeling a little intimidated by the man. He was nice enough but just seemed to radiate aggression.

"These are some good people. It'd be hard to find any better." He said, then took a bite of his sandwich.

"Everyone's been really nice so far." I said, realizing that it was true.

"Clark invited me to share a room with him until you get out of here and we find a place." John said happily.

"That's good. If you're willing to do that then you'll fit in fine around here." Logan said before taking a bite of his salad.

"Robert and William are going to share their clothes with me... since I don't have anything." Ronny said and looked at the twins with a smile.

"When I get out of here, I'll take you to get the things you need. How are you doing for things John?" Logan asked casually.

"I'm wearing everything I have. Clark said he'd loan me some things till I can get my own." John said shyly.

"Thanks for that Clark. I'll see that he's taken care of when I get out. Between me and Cyke, we'll get him fixed up." Logan said, then took another bite of his sandwich.

"Clark's mother should be up in the office with Scott by now. I'm going to take him up there. Why don't you guys stay here and visit for a while and we'll come back when we're done." Bobby said to everyone.

"Yeah, go on and do what you need to do. When you get back, I want to hear all about your camping trip." Mr. Logan said with a smile.

"You got a deal Logan." Bobby said with a laugh to Mr. Logan, then said, "Come on. Let's go see your mom."

* * * * *

We walked into the office where Mom and Mr. Summers were talking.

"How are you doing?" Mom asked carefully.

"I'm fine Mom." I said with a smile.

"Good. I've just finished signing some paperwork so you can stay a few days. Just permission for Mr. Summers to act as your guardian on my behalf and a medical release in case of trouble." Mom said seriously.

"Don't worry Mom, I'll be fine. Bobby and the guys have been really nice, I even got a roommate for a few days." I said with a smile.

"You did?" Mr. Summers asked with surprise.

"Yes. John said that he's going to move in with Logan in a few days, and since he doesn't have any clothes, and he's the same size as me, and since I don't want to be alone in this new place... he's going to share my room." I said, not realizing till I finished that I was rambling.

"That was very kind of you Clark. I didn't consider that John didn't have

anything when he came here. I'll see if we can't do something about that." Mr. Summers said in a considering voice.

"Ronny doesn't have anything either. Robert and William are going to share their clothes with him." Bobby said quietly.

Mr. Summers smiled and asked, "What do you think Mrs. Kent? Should I take them shopping tonight or let Clark and the twins help them out and take them shopping tomorrow?"

Mom looked at Mr. Summers with a smile and said, "I think you already know the answer. The boys will feel that they were really able to help someone if you wait."

"If you don't mind, Ronny's going to room with me until Logan's released from isolation. It just doesn't make sense to give him a room for one or two days." Bobby said to Mr. Summers seriously.

"You two are brothers, if you want to share a room for a few days or a few years, I have no problem with it." Mr. Summers said with a kind smile.

"Thanks Scott. I just want Ronny to know that I want to have him around." Bobby said shyly.

"From what I saw last night, I think he understands." Mr. Summers said, then looked at me and Mom, and said, "Bobby, will you help Clark bring in his things from their car?"

"Sure." Bobby said and led the way out of the room.

"He makes me proud every day." I heard mom say to Mr. Summers as I left the room.

* * * * *

Bobby and I brought the luggage in and went back to the office when we realized that we didn't know where we were supposed to take it.

"Come on, I know the perfect room." Mr. Summers said with a smile and led the way out of the room.

I automatically fell into step beside Mom as I carried two suitcases. Bobby walked beside Mr. Summers carrying one larger suitcase and my backpack

slung on one shoulder.

Finally Mr. Summers said, "Here it is." And opened the door.

"There are three beds in here." I immediately said in confusion. I don't always state the obvious like that, but... give me a break, it's been a hard week.

"Yes, a group of us were injured at the same time a while ago and we were all housed in this room. I thought that since you and John would be sharing a room, this would be most convenient." Mr. Summers said with a hopeful look.

"Yeah, this is great, I thought I'd just use a sleeping bag on the floor." John said honestly.

"If you guys wouldn't mind, you can carry the other bed to Bobby's room so Ronny will have a place of his own to sleep." Mr. Summers said, knowing that we would do it.

"Sure Scott." Bobby said immediately.

"I guess you're pretty well set up. This is a nice room Clark." Mom said in a hesitant voice.

"Yeah." I said quietly, I knew what was coming next.

"I need to get going. You know I'm no good at driving after dark." Mom said with apology.

"I know. You've nearly scared me to death a few times." I said in a teasing voice.

"It'll just be three days. And remember that you can call us whenever you want." Mom said seriously.

"I think I'll be fine. The guys are really nice." I said, trying to show Mom that I really meant it.

Mom pulled me into a tight hug and said, "I love you. We'll see you on Thanksgiving. Don't worry about a thing."

"I love you too Mom. And tell Dad I love him and that I'm sorry." I said and

felt tears falling down my face.

"I'll tell him, but he knows." Mom said and reluctantly pulled out of the hug.

I tried to wipe my eyes without being obvious about it. Bobby and Mr. Summers were kind of facing away, to give us privacy.

Mom pulled some money out of her purse and said, "Here's a little money in case you need anything."

"Mom, you can't. I don't need it..." I began to say.

"Shhh. Take it." Mom said in a whisper.

I took the money and put it in my pocket without counting it. Then pulled Mom back into another hug.

"Walk with me to the car. I really need to get back." Mom said with regret.

I nodded and let loose of her, but stayed right beside her as we left the room.

"Don't worry Mrs. Kent. You can call to check on Clark whenever you want." Mr. Summers said as he and Bobby followed us down the hallway.

"Thank you Mr. Summers. You've really gone out of your way for us. I appreciate it." Mom said, trying for a cheery tone of voice.

"We're here to help the kids." Mr. Summers said dismissively.

* * * * *

Too soon we were outside the mansion and standing beside Mom's car.

"I'll miss you." I heard myself say in a weak, trembling voice.

"I'll miss you too. Three days. Just remember that. Your father and I will be back here in three days to see you again." Mom said, trying to be comforting.

"I'll remember." I said and pulled her into another hug.

"I love you." She whispered.

"I love you too Mom." I whispered back and let her go.

Mom pulled in a shaking breath and got into the car.

I stood silently as I watched my mother, the most important person in my life, drive away.

I continued standing there long after the car had disappeared from sight. I only vaguely noticed that I was crying.

"Come on Clark, let's get you settled in." Bobby said quietly from beside me.

I nodded and followed Bobby silently back into the mansion.

[Chapter 3: Like Everyone Else]

I noticed that I was in my room, staring at the wall when Bobby spoke.

"We need to get back to Logan soon. Do you need any help unpacking?" Bobby asked with concern in his voice.

I shook my head and continued to stare at the wall.

"I'm going to go downstairs now. Try and relax if you can." Bobby said quietly.

I nodded and continued to stare.

I heard Bobby leave the room and finally the floodgate opened and I began to cry for real.

Great heaving sobs erupted from me. The tears flowed and I couldn't do anything but let them fall.

I wrapped my arms around myself and rocked myself as I continued to cry.

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I felt arms come around me and a voice said, "Shhh. It's okay."

I turned my head and saw that it was John, and he had such a look of concern on his face that I just turned slightly to allow him to pull me into a hug.

"It's always hard the first few days. You're not alone Clark." John said quietly.

"I... I don't even know why I'm crying." I said in confusion.

"I'm guessing a lot of stuff built up and you just need to let it loose. It's okay buddy. Just let it loose and you'll feel better." John said soothingly.

"I feel like such a freak." I said in a gasping voice between sobs.

"I know. But you're just like everyone else here." John said and held me tighter.

"No, I'm not... I'm not like everyone else." I said, really wanting to tell my deep dark secret.

"It doesn't matter. Whatever you are, it doesn't matter here. All we care about is what kind of a person you are." John said seriously.

I pulled back from John and looked into his eyes... wanting to believe. I needed to tell someone. I needed someone to know the real me. One person who I could tell anything... like I could do with Mom and Dad. If John could be that person, maybe I could stay here.

"If I tell you something, would you promise never to tell anyone else?" I asked before I realized that I had decided to trust John.

"Yes. I promise Clark. Whatever secrets you tell me, I'll never tell anyone else, not even Bobby." John said seriously.

"Um, okay... I guess I'll just say it... I'm an alien." I said in a shaky voice.

John thought about that for a second, then said, "Okay. What else?"

"That's it. I'm an alien... Isn't that enough?" I asked in surprise.

"I guess if you were the first non-human I'd met, yeah. But you're the seventh. And Robert is a good friend of mine so... it's just not that big a deal to me." John said with apology in his voice.

I gave a nervous laugh that turned somewhat hysterical.

"What?" John asked with concern.

"I tell you my big secret, afraid that you're going to think I'm a freak or a monster. Instead you just shrug and say 'What Else'. It's just funny." I said and started laughing harder.

"Okay, okay. What do you want me to do? Shrink back in terror? If you want, I can run screaming. Give me another chance to do it right." John said in a teasing voice, trying to hide his laughter.

"Sorry, no do-overs. I'll just have to live with the fact that it doesn't matter to you that I'm an alien." I said, then was struck by the realization that it doesn't matter... to John, I'm just like anyone else.

"Nope. It really doesn't matter Clark. And if you ever think about telling everyone else, it won't matter to them either. Robert and his brothers and sister have never tried to hide the fact that they're not human... I think Trey is proud of it." John said seriously.

"Maybe someday... not yet. I'm not actually going to lie to anyone, but if they think I'm a mutant, I won't correct them." I said carefully.

"Clark, it's your business and you do what you think is best. But as a friend, I need to tell you what I think... If you let people believe what isn't true... it's still a lie. I've lived with a few lies... it's like the lies eat holes in your soul, and the longer they go on, the bigger the holes get... till there's finally nothing left of you but the lie." He said with honest worry in his eyes.

"I'll think about it." I said seriously. He really laid it on the line... even though I might have been angry or hurt, he was honest with me... and that's what he wanted from me... honesty.

"Thanks for doing this... I hardly know you." I said shyly.

"Do you wanna know why I'm your friend so fast?" He asked quietly.

I nodded enthusiastically, I really wanted to know.

"When it was time to serve the food, you wanted to help. When you found out I didn't have clothes, you offered your own. I'm a stranger to you and you offered to share your clothes and your room with me. Clark, you impressed the hell out of me, you're a good guy. Anyone who's that good a person is someone I want to be friends with because I know you'll always watch out for me and be there for me." John said as he looked in my eyes to show the truth of his words.

"And because of that I trust you enough to watch your back and be there for you when you need me." He continued.

"Like now." I said in a whisper.

"If I was the one who was hurting and needing someone to care... would you?" John asked frankly.

"Of course." I said immediately.

"What about before our talk, before your mom left, would you have cared then?" He asked with wide eyes.

"Yeah, I would." I said, understanding what he was trying to say. I would have cared for anyone who was in need.

"That's why you're my friend, and why I'm trying to be yours." John finished with a note of triumph at my understanding.

"It worked John. Thanks for being a friend." I said, a bit shyly now that the crying, confessing, emotional revelation part of the conversation was over.

"Yeah, so what do you say friend? Want to come downstairs with me and visit with Logan for a while before we unpack the truck?" John asked, trying to divert attention from the awkwardness of our current situation.

"Didn't you want to look at my clothes?" I asked in confusion.

"I can do that later, before we go to sleep." John said and got up from beside me.

"Then why did you come up here?" I asked as I stood.

"Because Bobby said you were up here breaking down. I remember that I did the same thing when I was left alone on my first day... no one helped me. I felt alone for a very long time. I didn't want that for you." John said with a sad smile of distant remembrance.

"Thanks John." I said quietly as we walked into the hall.

"Yeah, sure." John said and led the way to the nearest elevator.

* * * * *

I walked into my room and went directly to my bed.

We had been busy for most of the day, running as a group from one place to another. First we visited with Mr. Logan for a while. Bobby, Robert, John and Ronny took turns telling about the things they had done while camping. I can't remember the last time I laughed so hard.

Then we went outside and carried the camping supplies to the store room. With all of us, we only had to make one trip.

While we were in the store room we found three boxes marked with John's name. Apparently when he left, he didn't take his stuff with him, so it was put into storage until he asked for it back. John and Bobby are going through the stuff now, to see what he's going to keep and what gets thrown away. The clothes don't fit him anymore, so he'll still need to borrow mine. But that's no problem.

John and Bobby will be up in a few minutes and then we're going to have dinner. I guess I should be putting my clothes and stuff away but... It feels good doing nothing for a minute, just sitting.

"Spacing out?" John asked from the door.

"Yeah. Wanna join me?" I asked with a smile.

"Maybe later. We just walked by the kitchen and dinner is smelling good. I'm ready to get to it." John said as he hauled a box to the second bed.

"Do you guys want to move the bed now?" Bobby asked from the doorway.

"Sure." I said and got up from my bed.

Ronny walked in and said, "I'll get the mattress."

"Do you want some help?" I asked. Even though it was a single, the thing was heavy and awkward enough that two people should carry it.

"No. I got it." Ronny said with a smile. Then the mattress floated off the bed and moved toward him.

"I guess you do." Bobby said with an impressed tone in his voice.

John and I grabbed the box springs and carried them easily into the hallway and followed Ronny into a bedroom three doors down and across the hall.

Bobby followed behind us with the bed frame.

"How'd you get it off the headboard so quick?" I asked.

"William had the thing off in a few seconds. He's really good at it." Bobby said with a smile as Robert and William came out of my room carrying the headboard.

"Let's get this thing set up so we can get to dinner." Bobby said with enthusiasm.

"Sure." I said and went to help.

* * * * *

After the bed had been assembled, we all walked out of Bobby's bedroom as a group.

"William and I must return home. It will be dark soon." Robert said with regret.

"Are you going running with us in the morning?" Bobby asked hopefully.

"Yes, I will meet you at the track at seven-thirty." Robert said seriously.

"I'll see you then." Bobby said with a smile and pulled Robert close for a hug.

"I love you." Robert said, barely loud enough for me to hear.

"I love you too." Bobby said in an equally quiet tone.

Then they kissed. Somehow, the kiss was less shocking than the one I'd seen earlier. I guess after spending the day with these two, I understood more about what it means.

"I want to find that someday." John said in a wistful voice.

"Me too." William said, with need showing in his expression.

I turned my attention to Robert and Bobby again and saw what they were seeing. It was more than a kiss. It was a connection, a relationship on a different level... a level beyond anything I'd experienced before.

The kiss finally broke and Bobby said, "Have a good night and a satisfying regeneration."

Robert smiled and said, "Sweet dreams."

William and Robert walked away and the rest of us grouped to walk to the

dining room.

"Are you going to dinner?" A large man asked with an accent.

"Yes Pete, would you like to join us?" Bobby asked with a smile.

"Yes, I would like that." The large man said happily.

"Pete, I'd like for you to meet Clark Kent. Clark, this is my friend Peter Rasputin." Bobby said formally.

"Nice to meet you." I said and shook his hand.

When I looked in his face I could see that he wasn't a large man, but a large boy. His youthful features made me suspect him to be about sixteen.

"A pleasure to meet you Clark. Are you a new student?" Peter asked carefully.

"I haven't decided yet. I'm going to visit for a few days and decide on Thanksgiving." I said, having difficulty reading Peter's expressions.

John started walking toward the stairs and the rest of us automatically followed.

* * * * *

As we entered the dining room, a beautiful girl walked up to us and said, "John?"

John turned in time to identify the girl before she pulled him into a tight hug.

"How are you?" She asked seriously.

"About a hundred percent better than the last time I saw you." John said honestly.

"Who's this?" She asked and looked at me.

"Marie, this is my friend Clark. He's visiting the school to see if he wants to come here." John said while keeping an arm around her.

"It's nice to meet you Clark. John's a good guy, make sure you treat him right." She said with a knowing smile.

"He's not *that* kind of a friend Marie." John said with a laugh that held no offense. "He's the other kind of friend... like you and me."

"Oh, okay. But Clark, you still need to treat him right." Marie said as she held John close to her side.

"I will, I promise." I said, not able to shake the feeling that I was blushing.

"Marie, will you sit with us?" John asked hopefully.

"Actually, I've been invited to supper at the boathouse." Marie said with a shy smile.

John turned and looked Marie in the face.

After a minute of concentration, he said, "I know that look, who is he?"

"Icheb. He really likes me. He's trying to get to know me as a person before we do anything." She said with a tender smile.

"So do you think this one's a keeper?" John asked carefully.

"I think he may be. John... I can touch him." She finished in a whisper.

"Really?" John said in surprise.

"My touch doesn't hurt him at all. But best of all, I think that even if I couldn't, that I'd want to spend time with him. He's fascinating." She said with a little dreamy expression in her eyes.

"That's great Marie. I hope it works out. You deserve to find someone who'll treat you right." John said tenderly.

"So do you. Don't give up hope, if I could find someone, then nothing's impossible." Marie said, then gave John a ghost of a kiss on the cheek before she left.

I guess I had a look of question or something because John said, "We both got screwed over by the same guy."

I don't know if I was supposed to say something or still had a confused look because John continued, "Her figuratively, me literally."

"Um, okay... What did he do to you... I mean... not the sex stuff, but did he hurt you?" I asked nervously with concern as we walked through the line to fill our plates.

"Yeah. But he only did what I let him do... it wasn't all his fault." John said quietly as he made his dinner selections.

I thought about his words as we made our way to a table that was already surrounded by our friends. [Our friends. In one day I have a group of friends.] I thought in wonder.

"What's wrong Clark?" Ronny asked with concern from beside me.

"Oh, nothing. I guess it's just hitting me. How much my life has changed in just a few days." I said absently, noticing Ronny's honest concern.

Ronny gave a sympathetic smile and said, "I know that feeling, in fact, I still have it sometimes."

"Me too. Usually something triggers it, what did it for you?" John asked from my other side.

"You guys, sitting around the table. Knowing that I was welcomed to sit with you. It's just different from what I'm used to." I said in thought.

"How so?" Peter asked curiously.

"Where I'm from, I have a few friends, but... I don't know. We never talked about stuff like you guys do. It was always about school work, who's dating who, what's on TV. And at lunch time, Lana would sit with the girls and Lex... he never actually *said* I wasn't welcomed to sit with him, I just always kind of knew it." I said as I looked into my past. Then I noticed all eyes fixed on me.

"Well it's not like that with us Clark. You're one of us and we like having you around." Bobby said seriously.

"Thanks Bobby." I said and felt a shy smile, maybe a hint of a blush creeping up my face.

Mr. Summers stood and said from the front of the room. "Students, we have some new people with us. You may have met them already. If not, please introduce yourselves and make them feel welcomed. Clark Kent, Chris O'Rourke, Trini Nguyen and Ronny Drake."

"Trini?" Bobby said in question and looked around the room. His gaze focused on a slender Asian girl with smiling eyes and long black hair. She was dressed in yellow and surrounded by a group of girls.

"And I thought I was on top of everything that went on around here. I wonder how she sneaked in?" Bobby said with a smile.

"She's pretty." I heard myself say.

"Yeah. She seems really happy." John said, half turned in his seat to see her.

"I think we're making her self-conscious." Ronny said when he noticed the table of girls looking back at them.

"Are we supposed to pretend we're not interested?" Peter asked curiously as he turned his attention to Bobby.

"Yeah, I think that's part of the whole high school guy/girl dynamic. We're supposed to be interested, but we're supposed to pretend we're not." Bobby said in thought.

"Um, Bobby. You're gay. You don't have to pretend." John said seriously.

An exaggerated surprised look came over Bobby's face, then he said in a mock whisper, "Thanks for telling me John, I keep forgetting."

I couldn't help it. I laughed. Not a little chuckle, but a real, honest, *loud*, laugh. I reigned it in quickly and ducked my head.

I could feel the stares of all the people in the room as I felt a scarlet blush creeping up from my toes to my hairline.

"Clark?" Bobby asked quietly.

"Yeah?" I mumbled.

"You're allowed to laugh. It's okay." Bobby said with assurance.

I looked around and noticed that no one was looking at me except the guys at my table.

"What?" I asked in confusion.

"It's okay to laugh. You looked like you were expecting to get yelled at or something." Bobby said with concern.

"Teased." I mumbled.

"What?" John asked from beside me.

"I was expecting to get teased... If I did something to draw attention to myself at my old school, like laugh outloud, there would be a feeding frenzy of people teasing me about it." I said shyly.

"Oh, okay, I get it. The outloud teasing or the whispering kind?" Ronny asked darkly.

"Outloud." I said, and saw the look of understanding in Ronny's eyes... he'd been through it.

"That's the worst. At least when they whisper, you can pretend not to notice." Ronny said, then turned his attention back to his food.

"So was this school you came from a living hell or what?" Bobby asked with emotion in his voice. I'm not sure which emotion, but he seemed wound up.

"I never thought about it... I mean, it's always been that way. I've never been to another school so I figured that's just the way it is." I said, looking Bobby in the eyes.

"It doesn't have to be. We may tease a little here... very little. But never about the important stuff. It's too easy to hurt someone without meaning to then just stuff it off by saying, 'I was only teasing'. Words have power and meaning. You say hurtful stuff to the people around you... even in fun... you are causing them harm and it will come back to you." Bobby said seriously.

"Ease up Bro. We're not there anymore. You can let it go." Ronny said quietly to Bobby.

"Yeah, thanks. Just hearing that Clark went through that... it brought it all

back." Bobby said, then turned his attention to his food.

I looked at Ronny curiously and he said, "Our old school was like yours. If you drew attention to yourself, you were a target for teasing and bullies... Bobby became so bland and normal that he faded into the background... I became a bully."

I saw the regret and shame in Ronny's eyes at the words.

There weren't any words to tell Ronny what I felt so I pulled him into a small hug to let him know that it was okay.

"Thank's Clark." Ronny said after a moment, then pulled out of the hug.

"Yeah." I said quietly. Something seemed to release inside me, like a knot just came undone.

"Gentlemen, what do you have planned for the evening?" Mr. Summers asked as he walked up to our table.

"Um... nothing?" Bobby said in thought.

"I must read." Peter said seriously.

Ronny, John and I shook our heads.

"Well Andrew and Alan have been wanting to start having 'family time' every night for a few hours. We'll just sit around, talk, maybe watch movies or cartoons... just spending time together. I was told to invite you that you are welcomed." Mr. Summers said to us as a group.

"Who?" Ronny asked curiously.

"Who was I told to invite?" Mr. Summers asked in confirmation.

Ronny nodded.

"Andrew said that I was to be sure to invite Bobby, Ronny, John and Clark. And since I know that Peter has a standing invitation, he's welcomed too." Mr. Summers said seriously.

"Why?" Ronny asked, he seemed unable to believe the invitation.

"I guess they feel like you'd enjoy it or fit in or something. I'm going to drive over at seven and you are welcomed to ride over with me. Or if you want, you can walk over." Mr. Summers finished with a shrug.

"Where should we meet you?" Bobby asked carefully.

"In the garage." Mr. Summers said with a smile, obviously happy that we were going to go.

"I can't promise that I'm going, but if I am, I'll be in the garage at seven." Bobby said in thought.

"Good, anyone who's there can ride over with me. I'll see you then." Mr. Summers said, then walked back to the front of the room.

"What's up bro?" Ronny asked with concern.

"We still need to get our blood tests." Bobby said darkly.

I looked around and could tell that everyone but Peter knew what they were talking about.

John looked at Peter and I. Then he looked at Bobby and Ronny and received nods of agreement.

"Bottom line guys. Bobby, Ronny and I have been sexually active, we weren't safe, Dr. McCoy is checking to see that we didn't get anything." John said grimly.

I was shocked... all three of them, sexually active, testing for... he meant HIV, he just didn't say it. I had a thousand questions but no voice to ask them with.

"May I accompany you to get the results?" Peter asked with concern.

"You sure Pete?" Bobby asked seriously.

Peter nodded with certainty.

"Me too." I forced out and turned to look at John.

"Yeah, sure buddy." John said with a smile of relief. He had been hoping that I would come... he needed a friend.

"Let's go then. This waiting is tearing me up." Ronny said gruffly.

I looked down to my plate and noticed that all my food had been eaten. I had no memory of even taking a bite of it... I wonder if it was good...

I followed the group and we fell into a natural order. Ronny was in the lead, which seemed to be the case more often than not. Bobby and Peter followed Ronny, side by side. John and I followed them. It just seemed strange to me how I fell into this group dynamic and became one of them so quickly.

As we got on the elevator, John said, "Clark, you're doing it again."

I raised my eyebrows in question.

"The I can't believe it, is it a dream thing... don't make me pinch you." John said with a smile.

We walked into the hallway and silence fell over the group. It was like a subliminal message radiated from the walls saying that sound was not welcomed here, respect the silence.

We went through the, now familiar, airtight doors and into the BioLab where Dr. McCoy was working on a computer.

"Gentlemen..." He began, as he noticed us in the room.

"I would like to give each of you your results separately." Dr. McCoy said gravely.

"Fuck." John whispered and his eyes began to fill with tears.

"What?" Ronny asked with concern.

"He'd just say it if we were all clean." John said, trying to pull himself under control.

"Hank, if you want to do it privately, then let's do it." Bobby said firmly and walked into Hank's office.

I walked to John and pulled him into a hug.

"Clark, don't... what if I've got it... don't touch me." John said with fear in his voice.

I continued to hold John and said, "I'll make you a deal, if you'll keep your body fluids to yourself, I'll be here to hold you as long as you want."

John nodded and stopped resisting the hug.

"Next." Bobby said irritably as he walked out of the office and directly to Peter.

Ronny sucked in a breath and walked to Hank's office as John and I looked at Bobby.

"I ain't got it." Bobby said, not looking the least bit relieved.

"Aren't you happy?" I asked carefully.

"No. Not if it means Ronny or John has it." Bobby said as he began to pace the room, looking expectantly at the office door.

"Clark, could you?..." John began to ask when Ronny walked out of the office with a devastated expression.

"Yeah." I said, and led John into the doctor's office.

"Clark, you should wait outside." Dr. McCoy said seriously.

"Clark's here to help me Doc. Please don't make me face this alone." John asked in a pleading voice.

"Very well. The fact of the matter is that the results of your blood test were inconclusive. That doesn't mean that you have any disease at all, it only means that you can't be excluded from the possibility. That's the way this initial screening test works. If you absolutely do not have any of the seven diseases being tested for, then you'll receive a negative response. A positive result only means that more testing is necessary. Several factors can trigger a false positive so it is important that you not automatically assume the worst." Dr. McCoy said carefully.

"When will I know? I mean, HIV, when will I know if it's that?" John asked bravely as he held onto my hand with a crushing grip.

"I will draw a fresh blood sample and have the results tomorrow." Dr. McCoy said seriously as he walked to a cabinet and pulled out a syringe.

"Doctor, can you give us a minute or two before you do that?" I asked, noticing that John was on the verge of losing it.

"Yes, I'll be back in two minutes." Dr. McCoy said and left the room.

I pulled John to a standing position with our joined hands and into a full hug of support and comfort.

"Fuck Clark, it ain't supposed to be like this. I just got everything I wanted, and now I'm going to die." John said and began to cry.

I thought about all the logical things I could say, to tell him that the test was inconclusive, that even if he had it, sometimes people went for a decade without symptoms, a dozen other logical things that wouldn't serve to comfort him right now. This wasn't about logic, it was about feeling. So I held him tighter and whispered, "It's okay, you're not alone."

We stood like that for the rest of the two minutes, until we heard Dr. McCoy open the door.

John sniffed and straightened, then said, "Go ahead Doc, take what you need."

As Dr. McCoy carefully drew blood from one of John's arms, I held onto his other hand, knowing that he needed to feel connected to someone right now.

"I will contact you as soon as I have any result. It will take about twenty four hours." Dr. McCoy said seriously.

"Thank you Dr. McCoy." John said in a whisper.

"Please try not to worry." Dr. McCoy said as he carefully labeled the vial of blood and disposed of the needle.

John went from fearful to angry in a heartbeat. In a furious voice he said, "Why don't you inject yourself with a few drops of the blood you just took from me, then tell me if you're able not to worry for the next twenty four hours."

"Shhh. Come on. Bobby and Ronny are waiting." I said in my most soothing voice.

"I'm sorry John. What would you have me say?" Dr. McCoy asked, letting his professionalism fall away and his honest concern show in his eyes.

"I don't know Doc. I don't think there's anything you could say that would make me feel better. Sorry for that..." John trailed off.

"Quite alright. Go on, I believe your friends are waiting. By the process of elimination they will assume the worst and be quite worried about you." Dr. McCoy said sadly.

"Yeah, I'll go tell them it's inconclusive." John said, then pulled me into a quick hug that I took to mean his thanks to me.

* * * * *

We walked into the BioLab to the concerned faces of Bobby, Peter and Ronny.

"How bad?" Ronny asked with a tremble of fear in his voice.

"Inconclusive." I said, John seemed to be lost in his thoughts.

Bobby immediately pulled John into a hug and said, "Don't worry John, we're here for you."

"When will you know for sure?" Ronny asked quietly.

"Tomorrow about this time." I said darkly.

"Then lets go to the boathouse. Maybe being around the others will take our minds off this." Bobby said. It seemed he was trying to convince himself as much as any of us.

"Do you want to John? I can stay here with you if you'd rather not be around people." I said quietly, wanting him to know that I wouldn't leave him alone.

John slowly looked up at me and seemed to be searching for something in my eyes. I guess he found it because he said, "It's okay Clark. I've spent enough time alone the last few months, I think being around people would

be good..."

"You know we aren't going to tell anyone but... I think we should tell Scott. He knows that we're being tested. He'll be worried." Bobby said seriously.

"Yeah, we'll tell him on the way over. Thanks guys. I don't think I could've handled this on my own." John said to all of us.

"You don't have to worry about that John. We're here for you. No matter what the test says, we're here for you." Bobby said with assurance.

* * * * *

Two hours passed... I don't know where they went. We moved as a group, went to the common room. I think we pretended to watch the television until it was time to go. None of us spoke during the entire time until Ronny said, "It's time to go to the garage."

All of us got up and followed Ronny. I guess Peter decided that his reading could wait because he automatically came with the group to the garage.

"You're early." Mr. Summers said with surprise from under the hood of an extended cab truck.

"The early bird gets the worm." Bobby mumbled absently.

"But the second mouse gets the cheese." Ronny said, obviously in reflex.

I felt a small smile flit across my face. Apparently sarcasm was the right defense mechanism to use in this circumstance.

Mr. Summers' mood changed from happy to deeply concerned. "Was there bad news?" He asked in an anxious voice.

"My blood test was inconclusive." John said from beside me. I could hear a tremble in his voice.

Mr. Summers immediately walked over and pulled John into a hug.

"It'll be okay John. If you need me, I'm here for you." He said seriously.

"Thanks Scott, I never doubted it." John said from the embrace.

"I'll be finished in just a minute, you guys can get in the truck and we'll leave." Mr. Summers said and carefully pulled out of the hug.

We all got into the truck. I don't know how we managed it, but somehow we were all able to fit. Ronny had to sit on Bobby's lap, which he didn't seem particularly happy about.

[Chapter 4: Family Time]

We walked to the boathouse and Mr. Summers opened the door without knocking.

"He lives here." Bobby said at my curious look.

I nodded as we all made our way into the living room.

"Hey guys, I'm glad you could all make it!" The guy who looks like Mr. Summers said happily.

Robert immediately went to Bobby and pulled him into a gentle hug.

Bobby enjoyed the hug for a minute, then looked up and waved at Marie.

"You two look good together." Marie said with a tender smile.

Bobby gave her a smile of thanks and renewed his hug.

"Everyone sit down. There are chairs in the dining room if you need them, or you can sit in the floor if you like." The Mr. Summers looking guy said to everyone.

I looked at John, and noticed that he was looking at me with the same expression.

I wasn't really comfortable taking the lead, but I chose a spot in the floor, off to the side of one of the couches and John followed and sat beside me.

Bobby and Robert found a spot on one of the couches. Peter and Ronny pulled chairs in from the dining room and sat to the side of the other couch.

I heard a small cry and looked over to see a man wearing an eyepatch holding the little baby I had seen earlier in the day.

"Remy, could you get Marguerite's bottle? She's getting fussy, I think she's hungry." He said quietly.

The red haired man got up and started toward the kitchen when Andrew said, "Would you go ahead and get three bottles ready? The boys are due for a feeding and will probably wake up any minute."

"Oui, trois bottles." The man... Remy said as he walked into the kitchen.

"Clark, I'm glad you could come." Andrew said with a warm smile.

I felt a look of confusion or curiosity fall over my face.

"This is your first day away from your family and our first 'official' family time, it seemed right for you to be here." Andrew said warmly.

"Thank you for inviting me." I said shyly.

Andrew nodded, then turned his attention toward the bedroom where a baby had started crying.

A moment later William came out of the bedroom carrying a baby.

"I believe Chakotay is hungry." William said quietly.

"Who wants to feed him?" Andrew asked the group.

"Can I?" Bobby asked hopefully.

"Sure." Andrew said with a tender smile directed at Robert and Bobby sitting together.

William brought the baby to Bobby and Robert, and laid him in Bobby's arms.

Janine walked up next and put a towel on Bobby's shoulder.

"You will need this, Chakotay ejects some of his food while trying to expel excess air from his stomach." Janine said seriously.

"Thank you Janine." Bobby said warmly as William came out of the bedroom carrying the other baby.

"Who would like to feed Thomas?" Andrew asked, and seemed to be looking at me.

I nodded and William brought Thomas for me to hold.

Janine immediately brought me a towel.

I looked carefully at the baby who was more asleep than awake. He was so small and delicate that I was afraid of hurting him if I moved a muscle.

A minute later, Remy came out of the kitchen carrying three bottles. One was smaller than the other two and was obviously meant for Marguerite.

He handed me a bottle, then took a seat beside... Xander, the guy with the eyepatch.

I looked at Andrew who nodded with a gentle smile.

I put the bottle to the baby's mouth. Thomas gave one little suck, then his eyes opened wide and he began to suck with a vengeance.

"He's gulping Clark, you need to burp him, then feed him some more." Andrew said informatively.

I took the bottle from the baby's mouth and he gave a lusty cry.

I turned the baby to my shoulder and began to gently pat his back as his crying got louder.

I was afraid I was doing it wrong and looked around in panic, that's when I noticed it. Everyone and everything had stopped moving around me. The only sound that could be heard was Thomas' crying. I carefully got up and continued to pat his back as I walked to Andrew.

As I was standing there, looking at Andrew's staring, unblinking eyes, I heard a small burp from Thomas on my shoulder.

I automatically moved Thomas back to his cradled position and moved back to get his bottle from beside John.

As soon as I put the bottle to Thomas' mouth, he stopped crying and began to suckle again.

"He did it again." The guy who looks like Mr. Summers said.

"Yeah, how long was time frozen Clark?" Andrew asked curiously.

"About a minute, maybe less." I said uncertainly.

Andrew nodded and said, "Thomas freezes time when he's cranky. We haven't found any way to control it yet... except to keep him from being cranky."

I nodded and settled into my spot beside John on the floor again.

"Can I?" John asked in nearly a whisper.

I saw John's hopeful expression and shifted the baby into his arms... and the towel to his shoulder.

"Trey, would you get one of the baby blankets from my room? When they're done eating, we'll let them play in the floor on a blanket." Andrew said with a smile.

"Um Love? They're less than a day old. They can't play yet." The Mr. Summers looking guy said with a tone of apology.

"Just humor me." Andrew said as Trey spread a blanket in the floor in front of me.

I looked up in time to see a curious expression in Trey's eyes. He quickly looked away and went back to his seat, but the glimpse of that expression was frozen in my mind.

* * * * *

"So Clark, how is your first day going?" Andrew asked as he snuggled against the Mr. Summers looking guy. [I really need to learn his name.] I thought to myself.

I thought about the question and looked over at Bobby and Robert, then to Ronny, William and Peter, then finally at Mr. Summers and John.

"It's great. I've made a bunch of friends..." I trailed off when I noticed the expression of pain cross Trey's face, just for an instant.

"Good, I was worried that you might feel alone here on your first day... It's an awful feeling." Andrew said sadly.

"Is that why you invited me? So I wouldn't feel alone?" I heard myself ask. I guess the autopilot kicked in and asked what was uppermost on my mind.

"Not exactly. I mean, that's part of it, but it's more like... I dunno, it just seems right for you to be here. It's hard to explain." Andrew said with a shrug.

I nodded and my attention went to John. He had finished feeding the baby and was burping him gently.

I turned my attention back to Andrew and nodded in acceptance of his statement.

Thomas finally burped and John moved him carefully to the blanket that was in the floor in front of us.

"They're so beautiful." John whispered as his eyes began to sparkle with unformed tears.

I could see how easily this could become a big emotional scene, and knew that John didn't want that.

"If you'll all excuse me, I think I need to get some fresh air." I said quickly as I stood, drawing the attention of those who might notice John's misty state.

"Would you like some company?" John asked, his expression unreadable.

"Sure, if you want." I said quietly.

"What is it Clark?" Ronny asked, concerned by my sudden change in mood.

"A lot of changes in a short time. It's a little overwhelming. I keep spacing out. I just need a few minutes." I said as I walked around the babies.

As I walked toward the door, I glanced at Trey who was watching me intently.

I felt myself give a slight nod, even though I wasn't sure what I was agreeing to.

Trey looked at me with surprise, then hurriedly got up and followed me to the front door.

* * * * *

"John, are you okay? You looked on the edge of losing it." I said as soon as the door closed behind us.

"I think this was a mistake Clark. I want... I don't know what I want, but it sure isn't to sit around and pretend that everything is normal when it isn't." John said darkly.

"How about we say our good-byes and go back to the mansion?" I asked quietly.

"You don't have to Clark. Stay and enjoy the family." John said seriously.

"I wouldn't be able to enjoy it much more than you. I need to talk to Trey for a second, why don't you ask Mr. Summers to cover our escape. He knows what's going on and will keep people from asking too many questions." I said in thought.

"Yeah, good idea. I'll go ask him." John said quietly as I turned my attention to Trey.

"Will you tell me what's wrong?" I asked Trey as soon as the door was closed.

"Why do you believe something is wrong? Are you an empath?" Trey asked with concern.

I smiled at that and said, "No, I just noticed from your expressions that something is wrong... and it has something to do with me. What is it?" I asked seriously.

"I am not sure..." Trey trailed off in an emotionally pained or embarrassed tone.

"How about if I promise not to tell anyone else? Then could you tell me?" I asked, really wanting to help this suffering boy.

Trey nodded and said in a whisper, "I have no friends."

I thought about that and was sure that there was more to the story. I just needed to be patient. So I said, "Tell me about it."

He started off by saying, "My brothers and sister have made friends since we've been here. Icheb and Robert have found possible mates... and I have yet to make a friend."

I remained silent and nodded, prompting him to continue.

"I believed that it would happen, that such things take time, but... you arrived this morning and have already made friends with a number of people." He said with anguish.

"I'm not disagreeing, but how can you tell?" I asked curiously.

"The bond of friendship and respect is easy to see in your interactions with the others. You have become friends with Bobby, Ronny, John and Peter." Trey said sadly.

"Yeah, I have. Why are you so upset that I've made friends?" I asked, wanting to hear the words to confirm my suspicions.

"I thought when you arrived that we could be friends. You are new here, I am new, perhaps *that* would be enough common interest between us to form a foundation for friendship." He said sadly.

I nodded in thought.

"I am an alien. Different from all those around me and... perhaps destined to be alone." Trey finished in a whisper.

"But your brothers and sister are aliens too..." I began to say.

"They are non-human, I am an alien. There is a difference. Non-humans are just people of another species. Aliens are... different, outsiders, not of the norm... outcasts." Trey said as his eyes became damp with unformed tears.

"So what makes you different from Icheb or the others?" I asked, thinking about how Trey's definition of alien applied to me.

"I do not know. If I could distinguish the difference, I would endeavor to change myself to be acceptable." He said with helplessness.

John walked out of the house and said, "Scott said he'd cover for us. Are you ready to go?"

"Just a minute." I said in thought and turned back to Trey.

"Would you be able to come to the mansion for a while with us? I don't

know if I can solve your problem for you but maybe we could try?" I asked, hoping John wouldn't mind too much.

"I must ask my fathers, will you wait for a moment?" Trey asked hopefully.

"Sure, we'll be right here." I said with assurance.

As soon as Trey went in the house, John asked, "What was that all about?"

"He doesn't have any friends." I said with a sad smile.

"Oh... I guess we're going to change that, huh?" John asked in a helpless voice of resignation.

"I don't know. Let's try and get to know him. If he's a good guy, then yeah." I said in thought.

Trey walked out the door and said, "My fathers said I could stay until ten o'clock, then I must return home and regenerate in preparation for school."

"Let's go then... I hope we can find our way in the dark." I said with the beginnings of worry.

"That's why it's good to have a Pyro along with you." John said with a forced smile, then lit his lighter.

* * * * *

"John, if we don't tell him, we'll be dancing around the subject all night." I said quietly as we walked toward the mansion.

"Would you mind telling him? I'd really like a few minutes to think." John said seriously.

"Yeah, we'll hang back for a while." I said quietly then slowed my pace for a few steps to fall in beside Trey.

"I've got something serious to talk to you about." I said quietly to Trey.

"Before you begin, I should tell you that I have enhanced hearing. I could clearly hear what you were saying to each other." He said shyly.

I thought about what we had said, then asked, "Did you hear anything bad?"

"No, I just thought you should know... not telling would be what my fathers call a 'lie of omission' and I don't want to start by lying to you." Trey said seriously.

"Truth huh?" I said, thinking about my own secrets and how keeping them was the same as lying.

"How can I be a friend if I cannot be trusted to tell the truth?" Trey asked with a genuine look of question.

"You're right Trey. And I've got a few truths to tell you, but the problem is, not every truth is meant for the general public to know. Some things are personal." I said, needing to know that what I told him would stay with him.

"I understand. The fact that I have enhanced hearing is not a secret, nor do I wish it to be. But by telling you now we may be able to avoid an uncomfortable situation if I overhear something." Trey said seriously.

"Okay, I get that." I said with a nod. Then a moment of silence fell between us.

"I'm an alien... non-human... whatever you call it, I'm not from this planet." I said quietly.

"I had assumed so." Trey said without expression.

I turned to look at Trey and he pointed to the device on his face.

"This is an ocular implant. It gives me enhanced vision and scanning abilities. Your physiology is not consistent with human physiology. You are quite different from humans on a cellular level." Trey said honestly.

I couldn't help it, I started to laugh.

"What is funny?" Trey asked with concern.

John slowed his pace and joined us, then asked, "What's funny now?"

"I just told Trey that I'm an alien... and he... he said... 'I had assumed so'." I tried to say through my chuckles.

John smiled and Trey looked confused.

"When I told John, he said, 'What else' and shrugged. I keep this big whopper of a secret all my life, then when I tell a few people, they aren't even a little shocked." I said to Trey and fell into fresh laughter.

"That is amusing." Trey said with a straight face that broke me up into even bigger fits of laughter.

"Did he tell you my news yet?" John asked while I was still laughing my head off.

"No, but it sounds quite serious." Trey said with concern which pulled me out of my laughing fit.

"It might be. I'm being tested for AIDS and the test came back inconclusive." John said somberly.

"That is not necessarily bad." Trey said with a note of confusion.

"It's the first step on the road to bad." I said and drew their attention.

"If you look at it like a road, with forks for every yes/no decision, then we've just passed the first fork and are that much closer to the destination." I said, hoping that didn't sound too stupid.

"Thank you, I am a very visually oriented person and that description made sense to me." Trey said to me, then turned to John, and said, "It may not be possible to avoid worry, but perhaps we can help to distract you." Trey said seriously.

"That's the plan. Are you sorry you joined us tonight?" I asked in a light-hearted tone.

"Not at all, as I understand the process, friendship involves the sharing of the good and the bad in ones life. If you only share the bad, it is not friendship, it is therapy. If you only share the good, it is not friendship, it is socializing." Trey said seriously.

"You got a cool way of looking at things Trey." John said with a smile.

"Yeah." I said, thinking that Trey would be an interesting friend to have.

We reached the mansion and I was trying to figure out how we got here so fast. I guess all the talking distracted me, but it only seemed like a couple minutes.

"Um, John, do you remember where the room is? All the doors look alike to me." I said shyly.

"Yeah, I'll show you how to tell the difference when we get there." John said and led the way up the back stairs.

A minute later we were standing outside a door and John pointed to a small decorative metal plate. I looked at it and it said 'Jean Grey'.

"Who's that?" I asked as John led the way into the room.

"She was a teacher here... I really don't know what happened to her but she isn't living here anymore." John said as he walked to his bed and opened a box.

I followed his lead and began to unpack my suitcases.

"Wait... what's that?" John asked from behind me as I was taking my folded clothes from the suitcase.

"What's what?" I asked in confusion.

"Let me guess, your mom picks out your clothes." John asked as he walked to my side.

"She goes shopping with me, but I pick out what I want." I said, not sure what was bothering him.

John looked at me, then at Trey and asked, "Trey, are you about the same size as Clark and I?"

"Yes, very close." Trey said hesitantly.

"Good. Clark, would you mind if we tried on some of your clothes?" John asked seriously.

"Why?" I asked suspiciously.

"It's hard to explain. I just want you to see your style on Trey and I. I think you might consider changing your wardrobe a little." John said. I looked in his eyes to see that he wasn't pulling a prank, but really wanted to help me understand something.

"Okay." I said with resignation.

"Great. Trey, you change into those while I change into these." John said and began to change his clothes.

I watched as John and Trey began to undress. Neither was shy or the least bit concerned... like I would be. I've always been shy about undressing in front of anyone else.

Soon they were both changed and John stood looking at me expectantly.

"What am I supposed to be seeing?" I asked in confusion.

John walked across the room, facing me, then walked away... that's when I noticed. In those pants, he looked like he didn't have a butt.

"I think he got it." John said to Trey.

I looked at Trey and the difference was even more noticeable. Trey's pants had looked good on him... I had noticed that before, and I *don't* check out guys butts. Now Trey looked like he had no butt at all. They were baggy, but not in a good, stylish way.

"Do I look like that?" I asked, with the beginning of mortification. Had I been walking around looking like that?

"Trey, can Clark try on your clothes? I think he'll look good in them." John asked seriously.

Trey nodded and looked at himself dressed in my clothes in the mirror on the back of the closet door.

I took off my pants, feeling a little embarrassed when John said, "Stop."

"What?" I asked, standing in my underwear.

"Look in the mirror." John commanded.

I took a few steps to the mirror and looked, then asked again, "What?"

"You have droopy drawers. Those white briefs are fine for a ten year old boy, but they look awful on you." John said seriously.

I looked at John in question, then turned to look at myself again.

He was right, my underwear looked droopy and really bad.

"Here." John said and handed me a pair of boxer briefs from his box.

I hesitantly took them from John and looked at him in question.

"Clark, you're a teenage guy. You need to start dressing like it. Put those on and see the difference."

I shyly turned away from the guys and changed out of my underwear and into the boxer briefs that John had given me.

I walked to the mirror and was stunned at the difference.

"Much better... congratulations Clark, you have an ass." John said with a smile.

I looked at the reflection and admired how the boxer briefs made my butt look... normal... good.

Then I turned and felt a blush creep up my face as I could clearly see my... privates... outlined in the form fitting fabric.

"How did you know?" Was all I was able to say.

"Clark, I'm a gay guy. It's my job to check out guys' asses. I'd suspected that you might have one hidden under there. I'm glad I was right. Now try on Trey's clothes, I think you'll be surprised." John said with a smile of pride.

I hurried to try on Trey's clothes, not in embarrassment, but in anticipation.

As I finished fastening the pants, I hurried to look in the mirror and was astonished to find that I looked... hot. I looked as if I'd aged about three years by changing my clothes.

"We're getting there." John said in a considering voice, then began to look through his box to find something.

"You look much better Clark. I believe my clothing looks better on you than on me." Trey said honestly as he looked me up and down.

I blushed... it seems all I'm able to do today.

"Sit down and let me do something with your hair Clark. If you don't like it you can wash it right out." John said, carrying a tube that looked like deodorant.

I took a seat on the edge of the bed and John began to glide the stuff onto my hair.

"This shirt would look good with Clark's coloring." Trey said as he looked through my suitcase.

"Yeah, let's see if it looks good on him. It looks like most of his clothes are too big and that would ruin the look." John said from beside me as he continued to fuss and tug at my hair.

"Done." John said with a triumphant note in his voice.

I got up to move to the mirror when Trey handed me the shirt.

I gave Trey a gentle smile and changed from Trey's shirt into my own.

I pulled it on and John said, "It looks good, tuck it in and have a look."

I did so and walked to the mirror.

John had styled my hair into... something. It wasn't weird or anything, but just a little wild. I'd never used anything on my hair before and didn't know it would make this much of a difference. My hair seemed... brighter? Shiny? I don't know, it was just different and looked really good.

"Wow." I said as I looked at myself from one angle, then another.

"Yeah." John laughed.

"You look quite attractive." Trey said honestly.

"Thanks Trey." I said shyly, then looked at him wearing my clothes and continued, "You look a little droopy."

He smiled. I don't think I'd seen him do that before. It was like his smile was so radiant that I could feel the warmth of it.

"Clark, I would be honored if you would keep these clothes. I have others. You should wear this to school tomorrow." Trey said, a bit of shyness and indecision creeping into his expression.

I thought about objecting, I have clothes, I don't want to take his, but at the hopeful look on his face I couldn't do anything but nod in agreement.

"Good, now lets see if we can get anything for me to wear." John said and moved to my suitcase.

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After many long fruitless minutes of searching John finally said, "I can't do it. I just can't wear your clothes Clark."

"Sorry." I said shyly.

"Not your fault. But we're both going to need to buy some new clothes as soon as possible." John said as he began to change back into the clothes he had been wearing.

"If you would like, you could borrow some of my clothes for tomorrow." Trey said shyly.

John considered for a moment, and looked like he was going to refuse. Then he looked in my suitcase again and said, "Yeah, I guess I should. Thanks Trey."

"It is my pleasure. Part of friendship is sharing." Trey said hesitantly, obviously asking if we considered him a friend.

"That's right Trey." I said immediately, not knowing if John understood how fragile Trey really was right now.

"Yeah. Friends." John said with a smile.

"So what do we do now?" I asked, not wanting the emotional moment to

drag on too long and become uncomfortable.

"I guess we go back to the boathouse and get some clothes for me to wear tomorrow." John said with a note of resignation.

"Yeah, let's go." I said, thinking about how we had been distracted from more serious topics while we'd been looking at clothes.

* * * * *

"What will you do if you have the disease." Trey asked hesitantly.

John stopped his walking and looked as if he'd been slapped in the face.

I stopped too, and wanted to say something, to do something, to take that hurt expression out of John's eyes.

"I guess I'll go on doing like I am now... until... if I get sick, I mean if it makes me so I can't enjoy my life, I guess I'll end it." John said, then forced himself to start walking toward the boathouse again.

"I don't understand." Trey said to me.

"The disease we are talking about is called AIDS and it is fatal. It destroys the immune system of the person infected until they can't fight off even the most common and benign diseases. It causes some people to waste away, becoming little more than skin and bones, others get major infections that they aren't capable of fighting off, some get pneumonia and die. There is a lot of suffering involved, and sometimes the treatment can be worse than the disease." I said, remembering all that I had learned about the disease in health class.

"I understand." Trey said and walked faster to catch up to John.

I speeded up too so I could help John if Trey said something wrong.

"John, if you have the disease, I will be available to you if you should need me for anything." Trey said honestly.

John seemed distant in his response but said, "Thanks Trey. If it happens, I'll need all my friends to get me through."

"We'll be here." I said firmly.

John seemed to snap out of his thoughts and gave me a friendly smile.

We continued our walk in silence.

* * * * *

"Welcome back." Andrew said with delight as we walked into the boathouse.

"Um... what have you three been doing?" Ronny asked as he noticed that we were wearing each other's clothes.

"I was trying to figure out what I was going to wear tomorrow and found out that all Clark's clothes are..." John trailed off, trying not to insult me more than necessary, then he turned to look at Trey and said, "Like that."

Several people looked at Trey, dressed in my clothes, then at me dressed in his. A general aire of acceptance ran through the room as Trey said, "Please follow me and we can find some other clothes for you."

I followed Trey up the stairs, relieved to be away from the stares of the people in the living room.

* * * * *

"These are my clothes, please feel free to choose what you like." Trey said seriously. There were two bicycle hooks screwed into the rafters of the attic ceiling with a pole suspended between them. Several shirts and pants were hanging on hangers from the pole.

I looked around the room and found the same thing on the other side of the room with another selection of clothes.

"Thanks." John said and began looking, then said, "And you'll probably want to change into something more comfortable."

Trey nodded and pulled a shirt and pants from the rack.

"What's that?" I asked, pointing to a large device that looked like it came from the movie 'Aliens'.

"My regeneration alcove. It nourishes me and recharges my systems." Trey

said as he changed into black Jeans and a red T shirt.

"Wow. That's something." I said as I took a step closer to the device.

"It is part of being Borg." Trey said dismissively.

"Frenegah, noeveish, legk-oomah, kloktsh." I said, translating the symbols on the front of the alcove.

"You speak Borg?" Trey said with surprise.

"I guess I do." I said with equal surprise.

"How?" Trey asked and walked to my side.

"I don't know. There are things I just know, I don't know if it's like 'race memory' or if there's a storehouse of knowledge inside me that I haven't discovered yet, but sometimes I just know things. Like my true name, my home planet, my real parents... there's no way I should know that stuff, but I do." I said in confusion.

"Then your people must have encountered the Borg for you to understand the language." Trey speculated.

"Yeah, I guess so. Weird huh?" I said as I continued to look at the alcove.

"Quite weird." Trey confirmed.

"How does this look?" John asked from behind us.

I turned to see John dressed in a pair of blue jeans and a black pocket T-shirt. It was kind of plain, but seemed to suit him somehow.

"It looks good." I said in a considering voice.

"I'll get you a belt, it looks incomplete without it." Trey said and moved to a small chest of drawers.

"Thanks Trey. I'll get these back to you as soon as I can get some clothes of my own." John said as he accepted a belt.

"I think Mr. Summers is planning on taking you and Ronny to the store tomorrow." I said, remembering the conversation with mom in the office.

"Good, I don't like having to borrow things off everyone." John said as he finished threading his belt through the loops.

Trey had been right. The belt made the look complete and I nodded in approval.

There was a knock on the door and a voice asked, "May I come in?"

"Enter." Trey said quietly.

Icheb entered the room and said, "Uncle Scott said that he will be leaving soon if you want to ride back with him."

"Thanks Icheb, we'll do that." John said with an appreciative smile.

"Thank you for loaning us your clothes Trey. We'll get them back to you as soon as we can." I said quietly.

"It is my pleasure to help you." Trey said with a gentle smile.

I felt it again. That twinge of... something. His smile was so pure and honest that I could barely make myself look away to leave.

[Chapter 5: The Race]

We piled into the truck and began the ride back to the mansion in silence.

"Are you guys okay?" Mr. Summers asked with concern.

"Just deep in thought." John mumbled.

I nodded, realizing that I was thinking about Trey's smile.

"Did everyone get clothes for tomorrow?" Mr. Summers asked quietly.

"Yeah, William let me borrow a few things. He has some really cool clothes." Ronny said happily.

"Trey took care of us. He's a good guy." John said from beside me.

"I thought you were going to wear Clark's clothes." Mr. Summers said as he pulled the truck into the garage.

"I did too, until I saw them." John said with humor in his voice.

Mr. Summers gave a questioning look at us and I said, "My mommy dresses me funny."

Everyone laughed as we got out of the truck.

"Clark, we're going shopping after classes tomorrow, you're welcomed to come with us if you want." Mr. Summers said with a smile.

"Yeah, I think I need to." I said quietly.

"You look good wearing that." Ronny said as we walked as a group into the mansion.

"Thanks." I said shyly as I followed the group into the main entry hall.

I was surprised to find that Mr. Summers was walking upstairs with us.

"You guys have a good night, it's going to be a big day tomorrow... just meet me in the dining room after breakfast and I'll take you to your first classes." Mr. Summers said and stopped at a door across the hall and down one from mine.

"This is my room if any of you need me for anything." Mr. Summers said and looked at all of us before stepping inside.

"I'm ready to turn in. You guys have a good sleep." Bobby said and walked on to his room, followed by Ronny. Peter continued on to the next room and waited.

"Goodnight." I said as I went to my room and walked in, followed by John.

* * * * *

"Clark... I uh... don't usually wear anything to bed... but if it makes you uncomfortable... I could borrow something." John said shyly.

I looked at John's embarrassment and felt a smile come onto my face.

"Since we're sharing a room, I guess we'd better lay out the ground rules." I said and automatically began to unpack my clothes into the dresser.

"Yeah." John said as he moved his box off his bed and took a seat.

"How about this? Be comfortable. If you want to be naked, then be naked. If you do something that bothers me, I'll tell you... and you do the same for me." I said, feeling nervous and a little surprised by my suggestion.

"Yeah... you sure?" John asked with a wide-eyed expression.

I nodded and said, "Just understand if I'm a little awkward. I've never shared a room with anyone before."

"Never?" John asked seriously.

"Never... I grew up on a farm and I'm an only child. My friends from school weren't the type that would come over and visit me at the house..." I trailed off.

"Okay, but just remember, you gotta speak up if I do something that makes you uncomfortable." John said, then waited for my nod.

"Good, then I'm going to go get a shower while you finish unpacking. I still smell like smoke from camping last night." John said and began to take off his clothes.

I forced myself not to watch and went back to putting my clothes away... even though I probably wouldn't be wearing most of them again.

I turned in time to see John's bare butt walk into the bathroom as he closed the door.

[Well, what does this mean? Am I gay? I sure have been checking out John... and that thing with Trey was just weird. Something about Trey's smile just makes me feel... lighter.] I thought to myself as I started unpacking the second suitcase.

[But I thought Ms. Munroe was beautiful... I don't know. How can I find out?] I thought as I put things away.

"Clark?" I heard from the bathroom.

"Yeah?" I responded as I walked to the bathroom door.

"Do you have any shampoo with you? There's none in here." John asked.

"Yeah, just a minute." I said and pulled some from the plastic bag in my backpack.

I hesitantly opened the bathroom door and walked to the shower stall.

"Here it is." I said.

John opened the door and took it from my nerveless hand as I looked at his wet naked form.

"Thanks Clark." He said and closed the door.

"Yeah." I said and walked back into the bedroom.

[I'm so confused... I want to look at him, but I shouldn't want to look at him. I like him as a friend, but I don't know if I like him as something more.] I thought in frustration as I went back to unpacking my clothes.

An undetermined amount of time later John walked out of the bathroom and said, "Shower's free."

I turned to see him walking out, naked as a babe. I watched as he walked

to the dresser to comb his hair.

"Um yeah." I said and walked to the bathroom as quickly as I could and hopefully maintain a calm facade.

* * * * *

The shower felt good. I kept thinking about my feelings toward John and Trey. I had showered completely on autopilot while I was deep in thought. I was drying myself when I realized that I didn't bring my pajamas with me to change into... not even a robe.

I looked at the clothes that I'd worn into the bathroom and thought briefly about putting them back on, then realized how silly that would be.

There's no way I could walk out in front of John completely naked so I wrapped the towel around my waste and walked out of the bathroom.

* * * * *

I walked into the bedroom at a deliberate, slow pace, trying not to look as completely nervous as I felt.

"Clark?" John asked quietly from his bed.

"Hmmm?" I responded as casually as I could manage with rampaging fear-monsters trying to chew through my stomach.

"Will you tell me why you're so afraid? Do you think I'm going to try to force you to do something?" John asked timidly.

I turned to look at him, lying on his bed, turned on his side, looking at me with apprehension on his face.

A large chunk of my fear left as I realized that he thought I was afraid of him.

"No... It's not you. I've never... been around anyone who was naked. I really don't know why I'm scared... I just am." I said shyly as I tried to look him in the eyes.

"What about gym class? Shower rooms?" John asked quietly.

"We never got completely naked in our gym classes, not past the underwear, and didn't take showers. I don't know why, we just never did." I said as I sat on my bed.

"Clark, I don't know if this will help, but if you want, you can look at me. I mean, take a real, upclose look. That way you don't have to be shy about me being naked because you've seen it all." John said with a look of concern, then continued, "Or if you want, I can put on some shorts or something. I just don't want you to feel so uncomfortable."

"Okay." I whispered and got up off my bed to look at John's naked body.

John also stood and hesitantly said, "If you wouldn't mind, I'd like to look at you too."

I looked into John's eyes and saw the genuine curiosity there.

I nodded and stood before John, maybe a foot away.

John reached out hesitantly and put his hand on the twist that held my towel in place. He stopped and look me in the eyes, silently asking for permission.

I nodded and tried to convey my trust through my look.

John gently tugged on the towel and let it fall to the floor.

I felt his eyes on me and could feel my arousal increasing. Slowly, I became erect as he silently watched. I looked down to see that he was also becoming excited.

"Can I touch it?" He asked in a whisper.

I'm sure that there were a thousand possible answers to that question, but the most I could manage at that moment was a nod.

John gently and reverently took hold of my erection and pulled the foreskin back to reveal the head, I was already leaking precum. I can't recall ever being this aroused before and the excitement made me feel as if I would hyperventilate or just pass out.

"It's a beauty Clark." John said and rubbed the precum around the head with his thumb.

A shiver of excitement went through me and I reached down to touch his raging hard-on.

"Clark, it's best if you don't until the test comes back." John said with regret.

"I won't do anything dangerous." I said with assurance and waited for him to tell me it was okay.

John nodded and I took his erection into my hand. For the first time I felt another man's erect penis and realized how different the sensation was.

Then I realized... John and I were standing there, in the middle of the room, naked, holding each other's erect cocks... and it was... okay.

"May I kiss you?" I heard myself ask, the autopilot was getting a little more adventuresome.

John's response was to release my cock and put both arms around me and pull me close. Then he put a hand on the back of my head and guided me into a kiss.

As I felt his tongue trying to work its way into my mouth, I opened and received a shy but determined intruder.

As I was overwhelmed by the sensations in my mouth, I felt John's erect cock collide with my own as we simultaneously thrust against each other.

My hand drifted to John's butt to try and guide him, to coordinate him with my own thrusts.

Suddenly John broke the kiss and said, "Wait, wait Clark. We need to hold off on this until after the test... if we... went any further... then I came back positive... I couldn't stand it..." John said with extreme effort.

My body was vibrating with tension, feeling the need for more, for release. With great effort I was able to pull away from John and say, "Okay, but what about?... " And I stroked his erect cock.

"We'll need to take care of those... I got an idea." John said and walked over and sat on his bed, then patted the spot next to him.

I hesitantly sat beside him and waited for his idea.

"Race ya." John said and began stroking himself quickly.

I had the urge to laugh at the sheer silliness of the suggestion, then decided, 'what the hell' and began to stroke myself as quickly as I could to try and bring my self to orgasm before him.

The race was fast and furious and only lasted about two minutes. John was the winner, but only by about a second.

We both laid back on his bed, panting from the exertion, with semen cooling on our bellies and began to laugh.

"We'll have to do that again sometime." John said through his chuckles.

"Yeah, it was fun." I said, realizing that what we just did was... I don't know what it was. It was two guys getting off, but not like if we had been kissing or rubbing each other. This was more... fun. It wasn't serious sex, it was fun sex.

"Let's get cleaned up and get some sleep, we've got school in the morning." John said and forced himself up from his laying position.

"Okay... and thanks." I said seriously.

"For what?" John asked, genuinely puzzled.

I thought about it for a second before saying, "I don't know, for making me not afraid, I guess." I said and got up off the bed to follow him.

"You don't feel weird about us being naked now?" John asked curiously.

"No, but if I do start feeling weird again, I'll just ask for a rematch." I said with a smile.

"Anytime bud, anytime." John said with a smile.

* * * * *

After a quick encounter with a washcloth and a few minutes to put away my empty suitcases, I was ready for bed.

I turned out the light and lay in my bed, feeling for the first time the sensation of my entirely naked body between cool sheets.

"Clark?" John called from his bed.

"Yeah?"

"Do you think you'll stay with us?"

I thought about the question seriously and finally answered, "I don't know."

There was a long minute of silence, then he said, "I hope you decide to stay."

"Part of me wants to stay, but another part is scared of all the changes... so much has happened since Friday... it's like my whole world fell apart." I said desperately.

There was another long minute of silence, then I could see John walking toward me in the moonlight from the window.

He sat on the edge of my bed and said, "Tell me what happened."

I scooted back and said, "You'll get cold, get under the covers and I'll tell you."

John seemed hesitant, but got under the covers without comment.

"It was Friday. The last class just let out and we were all leaving school, about to head our own ways for the weekend. I was standing there, talking to Lana and Terry when someone hit me from behind... I mean really hit me, in the back, just below my ribcage." I said and noticed that John had kind of snuggled against my side.

I shifted to put my arm around him and continued, "Then this blast of power shot out of my eyes. Thankfully, I wasn't looking at anyone when it did. It shot out of my eyes and hit the brick wall of the auditorium and made the bricks burn and start to explode. When I realized that I was doing it, I had to fight to reign in the power and get it under control."

I felt John put his head on my chest as he said, "Go on."

"So I was able to make it stop, but half the people in the school saw me do

it. That's when I had to leave. I went home and told my parents and my mom and dad had us on the road to my aunt Lucie's house in less than a half an hour. Yesterday mom called some people she knows and they told her about a new school for mutants. She got in touch with a Mr. Romanov who told us to come here today." I said, then noticed John's even breathing against my chest.

I lay there quietly for a long time with John sleeping on my chest, thinking about my life to date until I drifted off to sleep.

* * * * *

"Clark?" I heard a voice say.

"Huh?" I asked, without opening my eyes.

"It's time to get up. " The voice said quietly.

"Bobby?" I asked in confusion.

"Close, it's Ronny." The voice said.

"Oh, why are you waking me up?" I asked and snuggled closer to John.

"Because you need to get ready for breakfast, it'll start in about twenty minutes." Ronny said seriously.

I cracked one bleary eye open and looked into Ronny's concerned face.

His serious look made me come fully awake. "What's the matter?"

"You two... If John has AIDS... you shouldn't have." Ronny rambled.

"We just slept. No body fluids were exchanged." I said honestly.

"Oh, okay. It just looked..." Ronny said helplessly.

"I know." I whispered, not wanting to wake John.

"I'll let you two get ready... twenty minutes." He said and walked toward the door.

"Have you got Bobby up yet?" I asked quickly.

"He's been up and gone for a while now. He went to run the track with Peter and Robert." Ronny said from the doorway.

"Oh, okay. Should I meet you in the dining room?" I asked as John snuffled against my chest.

"I'll come back by here in twenty minutes and walk down with you." Ronny said in thought.

"Sounds good, see you then." I said as Ronny walked away.

"Breakfast?" John mumbled into my side.

"Yeah, in twenty minutes." I said and snuggled against John again.

"I was afraid you were going to go all freaky and regretful on me this morning." John said as he looked into my face with worried eyes.

"No. Not regretful, but not ready to put a down payment on a vine covered cottage either. I'm still not sure about some things." I said in thought.

"You think you might be straight?" John asked as he laid his head against my chest again.

"Maybe a little, definitely not completely. What we did last night was fun, and I wouldn't mind if we raced again sometime soon." I said with a smile.

John chuckled and said, "Yeah, I've become a big racing fan."

"I've got all these choices weighing down on me and I don't want to make a mistake. I've got to decide what I'm going to do about where I'm going to live, go to school, who are my friends, my orientation... my wardrobe." I finished with a smile.

"You've definitely got some serious choices to make on that last one." John said with a teasing smile.

"We need to get ready for school." I said with regret.

"Can I have a kiss?" John asked shyly.

I moved down and pulled John close to share a deep tender kiss.

Just as it was getting hot, there was a knock on the door.

"Breakfast will be served in fifteen minutes." Mr. Summers said from the doorway, then stopped with an expression of shock.

"We're coming." John mumbled.

"I can see that." Mr. Summers said in a stunned voice.

"Let's get ready." I said and nudged John.

"Yeah." John said and slid out from under the covers.

Mr. Summers was frozen in place as John walked naked from the bed to the bathroom.

"Clark. You know about the blood test..." Mr. Summers asked with worry.

"Yes Mr. Summers. We were talking and fell asleep in the same bed." I said as I got out of bed and pulled on the boxer briefs that John had lent me.

"Clark, your mother is trusting me to keep you safe..." Mr. Summers began with concern.

"Please Mr. Summers, John and I aren't getting in too deep and we haven't done anything unsafe. I don't know where this thing between us is going, but I know that what we have so far feels right... John needs this, and so do I." I said in a pleading voice.

"Okay Clark. I'll trust you to know what you're doing, go ahead and get ready for breakfast." Mr. Summers said gravely.

"Thanks Mr. Summers. I'll see you downstairs." I said and began to pull on the clothes that Trey loaned me last night.

Mr. Summers nodded and walked out the door.

"You handled that good Clark." John said from the bathroom door.

"Now you'll just have to help me not be a liar." I said sincerely.

"I'll do my best." John said as he began dressing.

* * * * *

We had had a delicious breakfast of French toast and sausages and were told by Mr. Summers to wait in the dining room to be assigned to our classes. It was a few minutes before nine when Icheb, Trey, Robert, William, Jimmy and Janine walked into the room through what I thought was a solid wall.

"Good. Now that everyone is here we can begin." Mr. Summers said to the group.

"Janine, here is your class schedule. If you'll follow Rachel, she'll take you to Ms. Munroe's science class. Your class schedule will be the same as hers the rest of the day.

"Jimmy, William and Chris, if you'll follow Artie, he'll take you to Andrew's computer class. You'll be on the same schedule as Artie so you can continue to follow him." Mr. Summers said and handed each of them a schedule.

"Robert, Trini, and Ronny, you'll be following Bobby to Ms. Summers home sciences class, then through the rest of his day." He said, handing each of them a paper.

"Clark, John and Trey, you'll be following Marie to Mr. O'Rourke's Legends and Lore class and continue to follow her." Mr. Summers said and handed us our schedules.

I followed Marie and heard Mr. Summers saying behind me, "Icheb, you'll be starting in my class this morning and following Peter through his day."

Marie led us down the hallway to a room next to the dining room.

* * * * *

"Good morning, please take a seat. We're about to begin. Those of you who are new, you can relax, so am I. This is our first class." The man said with formality.

We took our seats and turned our attention to the front.

"My name is Liam O'Rourke, but I'm also known as Angel. During class time, I expect you to address me as Mr. O'Rourke but anytime outside class, you

may call me Angel if you like." He said seriously. I recognized him as Chris' father.

"I will give you a written syllabus before the end of the class, but for now I'd prefer to explain what this class is about and what we hope to achieve." He said, then moved to sit on the edge of his desk.

"The class is called Legends and Lore. I'm here to tell you the truth about demons, witches, ghosts, ghouls and vampires." He said seriously.

There were a few laughs from behind me. I couldn't find it funny because he sounded a little too serious.

"You, what's your name?" Mr. O'Rourke asked a guy two seats behind me.

"Evan." He said in a clear, confident voice.

"And what do you find so funny Evan?" Mr. O'Rourke asked seriously.

"All those things, they're just stories you tell kids to scare them. None of that stuff is real." Evan said with a chuckle.

"What would it take for you to believe that it was real?" Mr. O'Rourke asked simply.

"I guess I'd have to see it for myself." Evan said plainly.

"And that's the problem with what I'm about to teach you." Mr. O'Rourke said and walked to the white board at the front of the room.

"If you end up facing one of these things without knowing the truth about them, you'll be dead moments after you've become a true believer." He said and started writing on the board.

He wrote the word 'Vampire' in big letters.

"Tell me what you know about vampires. Strengths, weaknesses and so on." He said as he turned to face the class.

"Crosses." Marie said quickly.

He wrote it down on the board.

"Garlic." John said from beside me.

"Holy Water." Trey said, obviously knowing something.

"Wooden Stake." I said, getting into the game.

"Mirrors." Marie said quickly.

"Bats." Evan said, getting into it too.

"Bug Eaters." A boy I didn't know said from the back of the room.

"You're missing a big one." Mr. O'Rourke said to all of us.

Silence fell over the room, then Marie said, "Sunlight."

"Right." Mr. O'Rourke said and wrote it quickly on the board.

"Now the problem with this list is that it's about half right." Mr. O'Rourke said as he took a seat on the edge of the desk again.

"Mr. O'Rourke, I still can't get past the part where there are no such things as vampires." Evan said seriously.

"Okay." Mr. O'Rourke said, then his face morphed into a hideous bumpy, demonic face with fangs and yellow eyes.

"How about now? You are sitting in the presence of Angelus, Master of the House of Aurelius, the Scourge of Europe." He said with a demonic growl in his voice.

My heart was racing and I turned to see how John was doing when I noticed that Trey was sitting calmly, not even slightly afraid. I forced myself to calm down and looked to see what was going to happen next.

Evan produced a small spear... apparently from his body and threw it toward Mr. O'Rourke. I wasn't fast enough to see Mr. O'Rourke catch the spear, but he was holding it in his hand as he said, "You'll have to do better than that to defeat a master."

Marie lept forward and took hold of his hand.

"I'm dead little girl, you can't drain me." Mr. O'Rourke said with a dark

chuckle.

I stood up and walked calmly to Mr. O'Rourke. I stood a yard away from him and seriously said, "Stop this or I'll burn you."

He looked at me with inhuman eyes, then winked at me.

"Enough. Clark is right, I've made my point."

I nodded and sat down.

When I looked back to Mr. O'Rourke, he looked human again.

"Now you can see that Vampires do exist. And that without knowing what their vulnerabilities are, you could be killed trying to fight one with methods that are completely ineffective." Mr. O'Rourke said and walked back to the white board.

He took the marker and crossed out bats, garlic, and bug eaters.

"The garlic is a myth that is perpetuated because vampires have an enhanced sense of smell. The smell of garlic can be offensive, but isn't necessarily harmful." He said as he looked around the room.

"The myth about bats and bug eaters is spread because some vampires choose to augment their vampiric abilities with gypsy magic. They are rare and seldom see their first century because they show off too much and take too many unnecessary risks." He said seriously.

"So you're really a vampire?" Evan asked from behind me.

"Yes, I really am. But I'm no threat to you. I've been hired to teach history and to tell you the truth about the supernatural." Mr. O'Rourke said frankly.

"How old are you?" John asked from beside me.

"I turned two hundred and fifty in May." He said calmly.

"I guess your view of history is going to be different from the textbook." John said with a smile.

"Slightly. History books tend to tell you in very general terms what it was like, and they omit some of the less pleasant facts. What I tell you may not

always be pretty, but it will be the truth." He said with sincerity.

I felt that I was going to enjoy this class. I really wanted to learn about all this stuff, and now I had the chance to learn from one of the things that I didn't believe in before today.

* * * * *

We walked to our next class chattering with excitement about how cool it was to have a vampire as a teacher.

"What's our next class about?" I asked Marie carefully.

"Um, oh... another new one. Creative Writing." She said with a queasy look.

"Maybe it won't be so bad." I said with little hope as we entered the next classroom.

"You lot take your seats, we've got us a load of things to get done and you wagging your tongues ain't gonna get it." The bleached blonde man said from the front of the room. I remembered him from the day before. He was helping Alex make lunch at the boathouse.

We took our seats at the long tables in the room and watched as this very casual looking teacher began to hand out stacks of papers to each table.

"Pass those around. You... Marie, read this aloud to us." He said, then sat down in a chair at our table.

>I watched as she walked in,
>She walked with grace and beauty,
>A goddess of gothic elegance,
>The personification of human perfection.

>I listened when she spoke,
>Her voice was decadent and knowing,
>Her accent suggested rebellion,
>Her tone was silky, each word an invitation.

>She touched me,
>Her kiss was tender and electric,
>Her skin was ivory and steel,
>My body trembled under her touch.

>She is beauty to my eyes,
>She speaks to my heart,
>She touches my soul,
>My Rogue.

>Icheb

My eyes went wide when I understood who wrote that poem. I looked around to see everyone else in varying states of surprise.

"For those of you what ain't noticed. That was written for Marie by a bloke who's smitten with her." the man said.

"Here's another stack for you lot. Trey, will you hand these out?" He said and handed a stack of papers to Trey.

I received a paper and began reading. It was long and flowery, and very difficult, almost painful to read.

"What you have in front of you is the work of an inexperienced writer who fancied himself a poet. People would line up to insult him, but no one helped him improve. That's what I'm here to do for you lot. You need to be able to express yourselves in writing. In a business setting you'll use a particular style of writing which Alan Summers will be teaching you. I'm going to teach you about creative writing which is generally more casual... and more expressive." He said seriously.

"In this class you may call me Mr. Burroughs, outside of class I am known as Spike." He said to all of us.

"You sound a lot like Professor Vampire." Evan said in a joking voice.

Mr. Burroughs looked at Evan with such an icy glare that I expected the furnace to kick on. Finally he said, "You will speak of the teachers and other students properly with the same level of respect that you expect others to give you."

Evan looked down, with the proper penitent expression.

"Besides that," Mr. Burroughs said as he walked back to Evan's table and stood right before him. His face melted and became demonic and bumpy, just like Mr. O'Rourke had done.

"He ain't the only vampire in the building."

I don't know if Evan peed his pants but from the look on his face, it was a very near thing.

"Right then. You lot, get out some paper and tell me about yourselves. Nothing you write will be read to the class without your permission so feel free to let 'er rip." Mr. Burroughs said as he walked back to the front of the room, looking fully human.

"Mr. Burroughs?" Marie asked hesitantly.

"Yes?" He responded.

"Was this written by you?" She asked, holding up the second paper.

"That was nearly a hundred and twenty years ago. I've changed some since then, but yes." He said with a smile.

Trey handed John and I each a piece of paper and a pencil and I began to write.

>I'm Clark Kent but before that I was known as Kal-El. I'm originally from the planet Krypton but was sent to Earth in a spaceship when my planet's sun wen nova. I was discovered by a farmer and his wife and adopted by them. I've been raised as their son until now, and have always been pretty happy. Now I'm here and making new friends. It's like a new beginning for me.<

I looked up from my writing and Mr. Burroughs walked over to me and began to read what I'd written. I think I'm getting past the expectation for people to be surprised that I'm not human.

"That's good Clark, but what I'm asking is who are *you*. Tell me about Clark the person, what you love, what you hate. Tell me about right and wrong and what is beauty. Do you get what I'm saying?" He asked hopefully.

"I think so." I whispered and started writing again.

>You want to know about my love? I love my parents, my Mom and Dad. They've always loved and cherished me. I had the happiest childhood that anyone could have asked for and it was thanks to them. They aren't rich

and didn't spoil me with endless attention, but they provided everything I needed, always listened when I wanted to ask a question and told me honestly what they thought. My other love is my friend Lana. She's smart, pretty and has always been there to be my anchor. I don't know if I love her romantically, but I love her.

>You want to know about hate? I'm not so good with that one. I feel some hatred, but I know I shouldn't. I hate my real parents for not keeping me with them, even though I would have died. I hate my adoptive parents for not being my real, birth parents. I hate myself for not being able to let go of my hatred toward my four parents who loved me so much.

>Right and Wrong? Last week I could have told you in great detail what was right and what was wrong... now? I don't know anymore. I guess there are more than two colors in the rainbow. There are places in between where right and wrong aren't absolute. What's right? Having John hold me through the night when I was feeling lost, that was very right. What's wrong? Knowing that it's temporary and might be taken away at any time. That's very wrong.

>What is beauty? That's simple, I only just found out. Trey's smile. Look for yourself, you'll see.

I looked up and felt content with my writing. It was like unburdening my soul.

Mr. Burroughs walked over and read my writing. When he finished, he whispered to me, "I've seen his smile. I'm with you mate, it's like sunrise in the springtime." Then he patted me on the shoulder and walked to another student.

* * * * *

Marie led us out of the room and John asked, "What's next?"

"Computer Science with Andrew Summers." Marie said and led the way down the hall.

We entered the room and Marie stopped abruptly in front of us. Icheb was in the room, talking to Peter.

"Icheb." She said, drawing his attention.

"Did you like the poem?" Icheb asked hopefully.

Marie walked up to him and pulled him into a full, deep kiss.

"Okay you two. Break it up." Andrew said as he walked into the room.

Marie and Icheb separated, but they were still lost in each other's eyes.

"Take your seats. This class is computer science and is a two semester class. I'm Andrew Summers. Since we have so many Mr. Summers running around here, you can call me Andrew. Before we start the class, does anyone have any questions?" He asked us.

"Are you a vampire?" Evan asked from the back of the room.

I couldn't help it. I laughed. When I looked up I saw an amused look in Andrew's eyes.

"No, I'm just a plain old mutant. I take it your last class was with Angel or Spike." He said with a smile.

"They were our last two classes." I said with a chuckle.

"I suggest you be thankful for what you've got. How many people get to learn history from those who lived it or get to learn the real truth about supernatural things? Angel and Spike are dedicated to teaching you the things necessary for your success and survival." Andrew said passionately.

"Now down to business, computer science. We're going to do a brief overview then start right into our first program... 'Hello World'.

[Chapter 6: Realization]

When Andrew's class was finally over it was time for lunch.

"Guys, I'm going to have lunch with Icheb, I'll meet you at the field house after lunch, that's where our next class is." Marie said happily.

"We'll see you there." I said to her retreating form.

Trey looked a little lost as he followed along behind John and I.

"How are you doing Trey?" I asked with concern.

"I am well." He said automatically.

"You're lost. You look like you're unsure how to behave and feel like you don't fit in." I said as I looked closely at him.

"Are you sure you aren't an empath?" Trey asked with a gentle smile that tugged at my heart.

"Yeah. I'm feeling a little of it myself. Let's grab some sandwiches and have a seat." I said and started moving toward the serving line.

"I do not eat. I will get a table for us." Trey said hesitantly.

I nodded and he walked away.

"You got the hots for him?" John asked quietly.

I looked at Trey who was sitting alone at a table, looking back at us.

"Yeah, I think I do. Is that a problem?" I asked and looked into John's eyes.

"No. I'm feeling a little of it myself. I don't know if it's because he's so lost or just because he seems to be such a great guy who is so alone, but I really just want to hold him and let him know it's all going to be okay." John said thoughtfully.

"Yeah. Did you notice his smile?" I asked as we each took a plate.

"I noticed last night. I felt like I'd do just about anything to keep that smile on his face." John said quietly.

"You think he'd enjoy racing with us?" I asked with a teasing smile.

"No. I think that if Trey is willing to be the focus of our attentions, we should take it nice and slow. He doesn't need racing, he needs romance." John said seriously.

I thought about his answer and absently made my lunch selections from the table before us.

* * * * *

We made our way to the table and I immediately asked Trey, "So what are

you planning on doing after school today?"

"I have made no plans. I have completed the homework that Father assigned but need to work on my assignment for Uncle Spike." Trey said hesitantly.

"We're going to talk with Dr. McCoy after classes... then, we could do our homework together and just hang out. You want to join us?" I asked hopefully.

"Yes, I would like that very much." Trey said and gifted me with one of his genuine smiles.

I glanced at John who was basking in the pleasure of Trey's smile and then said, "Good, when the last class is over, we'll go to the MedLab."

"How are you guys doing?" Bobby asked as he walked up to our table followed by Robert, Trini and Ronny.

"We're great. The classes have been really interesting so far." John said happily.

"Are you feeling more comfortable in your interactions?" Robert asked Trey with concern.

"I am well." Trey said and gave a brief glimpse of his smile.

"That is good, I was concerned." Robert said, then turned his attention back to Bobby.

"Trini, these are my friends Clark, John and Trey. This is Trini." Ronny said to all of us.

"Nice to meet you. How do you like it so far?" I asked as I ate a sloppy joe.

"Everyone's been so nice, it's a little overwhelming. At my last school I only ever hung out with the other Vietnamese kids. This is way cool." She said cheerily.

"I know what you mean. Everyone's been real nice to me too." I said with a smile.

"Are you all new too?" Trini asked.

"Clark and Trey are, I've been a student here before and now I'm back." John said pleasantly.

"We need to get to the food before all the good stuff is gone. I'll see you guys later." Ronny said happily.

"Yeah, have fun." I said with a wave.

"She's pretty." John said absently.

"Yeah. Really nice hair." I said as I continued to eat.

"I thought you were same gender oriented?" Trey asked John in confusion.

"Yeah, so?" John responded casually.

"I would not expect you to comment on the beauty of a female, it seems inconsistent." Trey said hesitantly.

"Beauty is beauty. I'm not sexually attracted to her, but I can appreciate that she is a very pretty girl." John said, then munched a few potato chips.

Trey nodded in understanding.

I noticed that John and I were finished so I said, "Let's go to the Field house a little early. I feel like a walk."

"Yeah." John said and picked up his plate.

Trey nodded and followed.

* * * * *

"Trey?" I asked as we walked down the, now familiar, path.

"Yes?" Trey responded.

"I've noticed something that might be a problem between us." I said with difficulty.

"What is that?" Trey asked immediately with concern... verging on panic.

"You seem so desperate for our approval, I'm afraid that you're going to follow along with what we do, even if you don't want to." I said slowly.

Trey didn't respond, so I looked to John with desperation for a better explanation.

"Clark says he feels like going for a walk, you nod and follow. You've never told us what you feel like doing. If this is going to work, you have to have your own opinions and know that you're free to say what you think and feel." John said with concern.

Trey nodded and said, "I am worried that if my own desires are different from yours, that you will not wish to join me."

"It's possible. But it's the same for us too. If John feels like doing something that I don't, then I may decide to join him anyway, just to share his company, or I may decide not to join him. We're friends, but we don't have to spend every minute of the day together." I said seriously.

We arrived at the field house and I took a seat on the grass beside the running track.

"It is all new to me. The only person I've made any sort of connection with is Uncle Spike, and that is in combat training. I am unsure how to behave as a friend and do not want to do something inappropriate." Trey said emotionally.

"Okay Trey. Here it is. From what I know of you, I like you. But if you won't be yourself around me, I won't be able to get to know you better." I said, looking him in the eyes.

Trey shyly nodded.

"How about this? When the three of us are together, we can be completely honest. The three of us can promise that what we tell each other will stay between us. That way you can be yourself. If you say something we don't like or don't understand, we'll just tell you." John suggested hopefully.

Trey nodded but said nothing.

"I feel an empathic moment coming on." I said with a smile to Trey who looked at me apprehensively.

"You've got something to say, but you're afraid to say it." I said speculatively.

Trey nodded again.

"Go ahead. This is how friendship works. You say yours and we'll say ours." I said, trying to get him to unburden himself.

"I feel attraction toward you." Trey said in a whisper as he looked at the ground.

"Are you speaking to me, John, or the patch of grass at your feet?" I asked, trying to lighten the mood with humor.

"You Clark. I felt attraction to you the first time I saw you." Trey said with pain and I noticed his eyes starting to form tears.

"I'm attracted to you too Trey." I said in nearly a whisper.

"Really?" Trey asked with hope.

"Really. But I'm also attracted to John." I said immediately, not wanting him to get the wrong idea.

"Oh." Trey said despondently.

I noticed his immediate reaction of despair and asked, "Do you assume that I'm going to choose John over you?"

Trey nodded silently.

"Trey, we need to keep it like this for a little while. Even though we're feeling some attraction, I don't want to take the chance of hurting you by jumping into this." I said seriously.

Trey had a look like I had just told him, 'No. Never.'

I looked around and saw that we were alone. I moved close to Trey and asked, "May I kiss you to try and prove that I'm not just saying the words?"

"Yes, Please." Trey asked desperately.

I pulled him close and gave him a gentle kiss. Tongues didn't come into

play, but the kiss was real and definite.

After we released the kiss, I looked deep in his eyes and said, "This is all new to me too. I don't have all the answers and I'm not completely sure of my own feelings. After classes I'd like for the three of us to talk about this, if that's okay with you."

"Yes Clark, I'll look forward to our talk." Trey said bravely.

"Remember, this isn't just about what John or I want. You need to consider your own feelings and well being. When we talk, I'd like to know what next step you'd like for us to take." I said seriously.

Trey nodded.

John walked to Trey's other side and asked, "May I kiss you too?"

Trey gave John a glorious smile and said, "I would like that."

John held Trey close and I noticed that they looked very right together. [I hope that there is some way we can get through this with all our friendships intact.] I thought with caution.

I noticed a small group of people coming over the rise and said, "It must be time for class."

* * * * *

As we waited, more and more people arrived at the field house. At least two classes of people were here.

Mr. Summers walked up to our small group and said, "Clark and John, Dr. McCoy wants to meet with you in the MedLab, I think he has your results. After that, he's going to give you both a physical."

I nodded and looked to see fear in John's eyes and concern in Trey's.

"Uncle Scott, would it be possible for me to accompany John?" Trey asked in a small voice.

"Why?" Mr. Summers asked curiously.

"I am concerned for him." Trey said succinctly.

"Go ahead Trey. The next two periods are for physical education, you three can start tomorrow." Mr. Summers said with a warm smile.

"Thank you Uncle Scott." Trey said happily.

The three of us moved as a unit toward the mansion and the uncertain future.

* * * * *

"Gentlemen, I'm glad to see you all here. You're a little early, I only received the results of the blood test a few minutes ago." Dr. McCoy said pleasantly as he busied himself with his files.

Dr. McCoy looked up and noticed the impatient look in John's eyes. "Would you like to discuss this privately?" He asked in a less professional voice.

"No, just tell me Doc." John said with strength. I moved forward and took his hand to offer support. To my surprise, Trey moved to his other side and did the same.

"I'm happy to tell you that you do *not* have HIV or in fact, any of the diseases that the test was designed to detect." Dr. McCoy said with a great smile.

I couldn't help it. I pulled John into a great hug of relief. He reached out and pulled Trey in to make it a three-way hug.

"However your high level of white blood cells is an indication of a serious infection. If you have no objection, I'm going to ask Andrew to scan you since he has advanced medical scanning equipment." Dr. McCoy said professionally.

"Go ahead. Do whatever you want." John said with relief from the hug.

Dr. McCoy left the room and I could see him through the window, talking on the phone. I noticed a sparkle of something out of the corner of my eye and turned in time to see Andrew step out of thin air.

He talked with Dr. McCoy for a second then walked to us.

"I need to borrow John for a few seconds, then you can go back to hugging

him." Andrew said with a tender smile.

We both reluctantly let go of John and stood back. Andrew pressed a few buttons on a thing that looked like a big flip phone, then moved it up and down in front of John, stopping and rotating it slightly in front of his lower belly.

Then he pressed a few more buttons and said, "Okay, I'm done."

Trey and I immediately grabbed on to John again, wanting to express our relief the only way we could. By holding on to John.

Andrew and Dr. McCoy talked for a minute, then Dr. McCoy walked up to us followed closely by Andrew.

"Mr. Allerdyce. It appears that in your travels you've picked up a guest, an intestinal parasite. The good news is that it will be a small matter to be rid of it, the bad news is that the treatment can be somewhat uncomfortable. You may feel weak and nauseated for a few days. Although I would like to administer treatment as soon as possible, we can wait until after Thanksgiving if you would like." Dr. McCoy said seriously.

"What?" John asked.

"I think you lost him right after 'not HIV'." I said with a chuckle as I continued to hold him close.

"Very well, would you explain his options when he is more... coherent?" Dr. McCoy asked with a smile.

"Of course. Set it up for after Thanksgiving. I can't imagine he'd want to be nauseated for the biggest food holiday of the year." I said with a smile.

"Very well. I suppose we can begin the exam now. Andrew, if you'll do the scan, I'll draw the blood." Dr. McCoy said professionally.

"Clark, have you ever had any diseases other than the normal childhood ones?" Dr. McCoy asked as he readied his needle.

"No. I've never been sick." I said, as I thought back.

"Never?" Dr. McCoy asked in surprise.

"No. I guess human diseases don't effect me. Maybe I've got a mega immune system or something." I said with a shrug.

"Human diseases?" Dr. McCoy asked cautiously.

"Hank, Clark is a non-human." Andrew said quietly.

Dr. McCoy's eyes opened wide in surprise.

I felt a flash of satisfaction as finally... finally, someone was surprised by my being an alien.

Dr. McCoy picked up a needle and moved in front of me.

"I'd like to draw some blood if I may." Dr. McCoy asked quietly.

I extended my arm to him and he swabbed it with alcohol or something then tried to stick me with the needle.

He made three jabs before the needle broke off.

"I'm sorry, did I hurt you?" Dr. McCoy asked with concern as he examined my arm.

"I didn't feel a thing. No one has ever been able to get a needle through my skin." I said, remembering when the doctor back home had tried.

"How did you get enrolled in school without inoculations?" Dr. McCoy asked with interest.

"I don't know... I guess my dad knows a lot of people and made it happen." I said with a shrug.

"Clark, do you mind if I try?" Andrew asked quietly.

"As long as it doesn't hurt too much." I said without concern.

"I promise, you won't feel a thing." Andrew said and pulled a box out of thin air.

He pulled a small medical instrument from the box and sat the box aside.

"Just hold still for a minute and I'll get this done." Andrew said as he

adjusted something on the bottom of the instrument.

I nodded and waited for him to do whatever he was going to do.

He pressed the device to the inside of my elbow and it made a hissy sound.

I could see the little vial on the back of the device fill with blood.

"That's cool." John said from beside me.

"Yeah, and it didn't hurt at all." I said as I looked at my undamaged arm.

"Okay, hold still one more minute and we'll be done." Andrew said and opened the flippy phone thing again.

He moved the thing up and down in front of me and pushed a few buttons.

"All done. Now if anything happens, we have a base reading of what is normal for you." Andrew said as he looked at the readings.

"So are we done?" John asked hopefully.

"Not exactly. You three were early. I have a few other patients to examine, then we're all going to go outside and gauge your abilities." Dr. McCoy said as he looked at the device Andrew was still holding.

A noise from behind us drew my attention. I turned to see Ronny, Trini and Chris.

"Did you get the results?" Ronny asked desperately.

"Yeah, I ain't got it." John said with a glorious smile.

Ronny ran to John and pulled him into a hug.

"I'm glad, I was so worried." Ronny said from the hug.

"So was I." John said honestly as he held Ronny close.

"What's going on?" Chris asked hesitantly.

"We were afraid John was sick, but it turned out to be a false alarm." I said with a smile at John and Ronny's hug.

"Oh. Um, I'm glad he's okay. Do you know what we're doing here?" Chris asked as he looked around.

"Yeah, the doctor is giving physicals before we get our abilities checked out." I said as I noticed John and Ronny separate.

Chris nodded as Andrew said, "Ronny and Chris, I'm going to do a quick scan of each of you, then Dr. McCoy will see you in the examining room."

I looked to John with curiosity.

Trey was the one who explained. "I believe he wants to examine Chris' injury."

I nodded and watched as Andrew quickly scanned each person in turn.

"Are we all ready?" Andrew asked with a pleasant smile.

We all nodded or mumbled 'Yes'.

"I'm surprised to see you here Trey. I thought you'd be in your Phys Ed class." Andrew said as he leaned against a counter.

"I came to offer support when John received his blood test results." Trey said honestly.

Andrew got a warm smile on his face and said, "That's great Trey."

I could tell from that small action that Andrew had been worried for Trey... and that he approved of Trey's choice in friends.

Chris came back into the room and said, "Dr. McCoy says he'll be ready in one minute."

"Okay everyone. We're going to take a shortcut." Andrew said and a swirling vortex formed in front of us.

"What's that?" Trini asked in wonder.

"That is my mutant ability. I can create doorways from one place to another. This one leads to a clearing by the lake. We need to test your abilities away from the mansion in case we lose control." Andrew said and

gestured for us to enter.

I followed John through the passage and emerged by the lake. I could hear rumbling in the distance and looked to see heavy equipment at the side of the boathouse.

"What's happening to your house?" I asked Trey carefully.

"A new structure is being attached to the house." Trey said with a small smile.

"That's great. You guys seem to be really packed in there." Ronny said seriously.

"A little. Dad's the only one who's having to do without a room at the moment but we definitely need the room." Andrew said and looked around the group.

"Okay. It looks like everyone's here." He said and I looked around to see who all was here.

Mr. Summers, Alan, Alex, Andrew, Ms. Munroe and Dr. McCoy were there along with all the students who were in MedLab earlier.

"John, do you want to be first since you're an old hand at this?" Mr. Summers asked hopefully.

"Sure. What do you want me to do?" John asked with a smile.

"How about a fireball? As big as you can make it." Mr. Summers asked seriously.

John nodded and lit his Zippo.

A fireball formed in front of him and he raised it up to hover about twenty feet above our heads.

"Can you put it over the lake? Just in case." Mr. Summers asked hopefully.

"Sure." John said easily and the fireball hovered out over the water.

"Ready?" John asked, keeping his gaze fixed on the fire.

"Amaze me." Mr. Summers said with a warm smile.

The fireball increased in size and seemed to become... fluid, like a too big soap bubble fighting to keep its shape.

I watched in amazement as it kept increasing until it was bigger than a bus.

"That's about it." John said with effort in his voice.

I looked at John and saw sweat beading on his face.

"Hold it there for a minute." Mr. Summers said firmly.

John kept his attention focused on the fireball and the sweat began to flow in rivulets down his face.

"Just a little bit longer." Mr. Summers said in an encouraging voice.

John began to breathe heavily; I looked with question at Mr. Summers, silently asking how much longer he was going to let this go on.

"Okay John, start to pull it back now." Mr. Summers said slowly.

The fireball began to waver and John said in a gasping voice, "I'm losing it."

"No you're not. You can do this, pull it back, you've done this a thousand times, this one's just a little bigger." Mr. Summers said firmly.

John wiped the sweat from his eyes with a quick swipe of his hand, then raised his arms.

"You've got it. Pull it back." Mr. Summers said in nearly a whisper.

I don't think any of us breathed for fear of distracting John.

Finally the fireball withdrew and became nothing.

I couldn't help it, I had to clap. John had obviously achieved something, even though I can't exactly say what it was.

Everyone followed my lead and John received a full ovation.

John shyly looked around and said, "Thanks."

"Who's next?" Mr. Summers asked, looking around the group.

I was trying to make myself step forward when Chris said, "I guess I am."

"Okay Chris, since you haven't learned how to direct your ability I'm going to ask you to stand over there, by that tree. You'll be focusing on directing your power on the tree and trying to make it collapse." Mr. Summers said with authority.

Chris nodded shyly and walked over to the tree.

We all watched as Chris stood silently and looked at it.

"Do you know how to make it start?" Mr. Summers asked carefully.

"I think so, I'm just getting myself ready to do it... it's kind of scary." Chris said while continuing to watch the tree.

"Whenever you're ready." Mr. Summers said in a tone that said he meant it.

A minute later something started happening to the tree. It was... I don't know. It's like the tree began to wither. What was a living tree became darker, gnarled, twisted. The bark began falling off the trunk and all the branches, then the tree just started falling apart.

"Okay Chris, you can stop now." Mr. Summers said seriously.

Chris turned to face us and there were tears in his eyes.

Ronny walked up to Chris and whispered to him for a minute, then I saw Chris nod and wipe his eyes.

"Who's next?" Mr. Summers asked, obviously trying to draw our attention from Chris.

I took a step forward and waited.

* * * * *

"Ronny, can you help me with Clark's test?" Mr. Summers asked hopefully.

"Sure, what can I do?" Ronny asked with a note of surprise.

"How about that large rock over there, move it over the water of the lake. I want Clark to blast it, but I'd feel better about him doing it over water." Mr. Summers said seriously.

Ronny looked at the rock and squinted his eyes a little, then relaxed when the rock came off the ground and floated past us.

"How's that?" Ronny asked as the rock hovered about three feet above the surface of the lake.

"Perfect. Just hold it there. Clark, Alex is going to talk you through the next part. Just listen to what he tells you." Mr. Summers said seriously.

"Okay Clark, I'm going to put my hand on your shoulder. If you're anything like me you'll become so focused on your ability that you won't be able to understand the voices around you. When you feel a squeeze on your shoulder, it means you need to back off the power." Alex said and laid a hand on my shoulder.

I nodded and watched the rock floating about ten feet from me.

"Okay Clark, just remember what it felt like to let loose of the power and try to make that feeling happen again. Keep your focus on the rock." Alex said with encouragement.

I started reliving that moment when someone knocked me in the back.

I remembered that feeling of, like a... not a burn, a force, kind of like when someone turns up the pressure on a garden hose. I felt the pressure work its way from above the back of my throat to my eyes.

I realized that I could see something happening. The rock was beginning to burn.

"Clark, can you narrow the beam, make it like a pin point?" Alex asked, close to my ear.

I focused and directed the power tighter and tighter.

Alex was saying something to me but I could only see the beam getting finer and finer.

Suddenly I was jolted by the sensation of a squeeze on my shoulder.

I remembered what Alex had said earlier and began to pull the power back.

"Oh good. I thought I'd lost you there for a second." Alex said with relief.

I closed my eyes and shook my head before looking at Alex.

"Did I do it?" I asked in confusion, then looked at the rock... which was gone.

"Yeah, I guess you could say that. The rock is history. When you focused your beam, it became more intense. You blew that sucker out of the air." Alex said with excitement.

I heard a clap and turned to see John start the ovation, followed immediately by Trey, then everyone else. I said 'thanks' and went to stand between John and Trey.

"Clark, if you decide to stay, I'll be your instructor at fifth period every day for your ability training." Alex said seriously.

I smiled and nodded.

"Okay Ronny, I guess we've seen what you can do, now let's see how much. Can you crush that rock?" Mr. Summers asked in a challenging voice.

"Watch me." Ronny said with pride and focused on the large rock that Mr. Summers indicated.

There was a little tremor, then the thing imploded. He made it smaller than a marble.

"That's good. Now, can you make yourself weightless?" Mr. Summers asked with a smile.

Ronny got wide eyes. I'm guessing he hadn't thought of that before.

After a minute of concentration, Ronny began to rise off the ground.

"Can you lift me too?" Mr. Summers asked in a steady voice.

"Sure, come on up." Ronny said with a smile as Mr. Summers began to float.

"How many can you do safely?" Mr. Summers asked carefully.

"Let's find out." Ronny said with a smile as Chris, John, Trey, and Trini rose from the ground.

I felt myself lift off the ground and an electrical jolt of panic ran through me.

As I lifted higher off the ground, it became difficult to breathe and I felt cold as sweat instantly covered me.

"Get me down." I said in a shaky voice.

Nothing happened, so I screamed, "GET ME DOWN NOW!"

The next thing I knew I felt arms around me and looked up to see John and Trey both holding me and looking concerned.

"You back?" John asked.

"What?" I asked in return.

"You kinda went away for a minute. Are you okay now?" John asked quietly.

I nodded and looked around to see everyone watching me.

"I'm sorry Clark, I didn't know you was afraid of heights." Ronny said shyly.

I saw his apologetic expression and tried to give him a smile to let him know it was okay.

"Are you going to be alright Clark?" Mr. Summers asked with concern.

"Yeah, I've never liked heights much, but that... it just freaked me out. It was like that feeling when you wobble on the top of a ladder, but a hundred times worse." I said and clutched John and Trey closer at the thought.

"I think most people have something they're afraid of, I'll be talking about that in one of my classes next week." Alex said casually.

I smiled at Alex. His 'business as usual' attitude was just what I needed to

let go of my grip on my friends.

Mr. Summers looked around at the people in the clearing and said, "Okay, Trini, I guess you're next."

[Chapter 7: Tests]

"Everyone, come over here and sit down." Mr. Summers said and led the way to a grassy spot in the sun.

All of us followed him and sat around in a circle.

"Trini, I've read about your ability. I think I'll be able to help you. Even though I'm not a telepath, my last girlfriend was and I worked with her quite a bit." Mr. Summers said calmly.

Trini nodded.

"Before I ask you to do anything specific, I need to know how much control you have over your ability. Decide what you'd like to try to do." Mr. Summers said in a soft voice.

"My ability is more like grabbing memories than actual telepathy. So what I'm going to try to do is find a good memory and pull it up for you." Trini said with a note of question in her voice.

Mr. Summers nodded and Trini focused on his face.

I looked between Trini and Mr. Summers for about half a minute, then Trini got an expression of accomplishment.

"That's a good one." Mr. Summers said with a smile.

"Can I share it with everyone?" Trini asked hopefully.

Mr. Summers seemed to be thinking about it and looked at each of us sitting around in the circle. Finally his gaze stopped on Andrew.

A shy smile came over his face and he said, "Yes Trini, that will be fine."

"Do you guys want to share one of Mr. Summers' memories?" Trini asked with excitement.

All of us nodded immediately. After all, how often do you get the chance to see inside the mind of another person, much less a teacher?

"It may take me a few seconds to link to all of you, but then it will start. Don't do anything; it will just be a few minutes of Mr. Summers' life playing

out. Just watch and enjoy." Trini said before falling silent and concentrating.

I waited for a few seconds before her gaze turned to me and all of a sudden everything was red.

I looked around me and could see that I was in the MedLab.

"Is something wrong?" I heard Mr. Summers' voice coming from my mouth.

"Nothing new. You need to resolve things with Andrew. You've let this go on too long. He deserves better from you." A bald man in a wheelchair said with disapproval in his voice.

"Don't you understand? I can't." I heard Mr. Summers say in a whine. I could feel his horrible despair. Something had happened; he made a mistake, a big one, an unforgivable one. Mr. Summers was feeling despair and some disbelief at the choice he had made and humiliation at the thought of facing Andrew.

"Go up there and take it like a man. It would have been far easier if you had talked with him this morning. You delayed talking to him, now deal with it. Putting it off longer will not do anything but make it more difficult for both of you." the bald man said with disapproval, anger and disappointment in his voice.

"I know you're right. I just had to give a token protest before I did it anyway. Can someone give me a ride up? I don't think I can make it up there on my own." Mr. Summers said in a quiet voice.

"Someone will be here in a moment... And Scott? Be honest." The bald man said before he left the room.

There was a wrinkle or jump in the scene playing in my mind. The next thing I knew, Mr. Summers was being pushed into a bedroom... my bedroom.

Andrew and another Mr. Summers, sunglasses and all, were sitting in a bed.

"Hi." Mr. Summers said shyly, not knowing what else to say.

"Hi." Andrew said, with a sound of caution in his voice.

"I'm sorry I did that to you Andrew." Mr. Summers said as he felt a blush of humiliation flood across his flesh in a prickly heat.

"Did what? I need to know what you're sorry for." Andrew said calmly... too calmly.

"I left you. I broke up with you and went back to Jean." Mr. Summers said, nearly choking on the bitter words as they came out of his mouth.

Regret and misery flooded through him. One second, one instant brought this consequence. One choice and what might have been the best thing in his life was gone forever.

"Why did you do it?" Andrew asked without expression.

"I don't know." Mr. Summers said, barely able to keep himself from running away from Andrew, from the mansion, from his entire life and hiding from this humiliation.

"Wrong answer. Try again." Andrew said and a hint of the betrayal he felt came into his voice.

Mr. Summer's heart broke when he heard Andrew's tone.

"I guess I did it because she was the center of my life for so long, and I hurt for so long, that I thought that all the pain would go away if I went back to her." Mr. Summers said, barely able to speak as he was fighting the urge to cry.

"Did it work?" Andrew asked, and behind his words was caring... he still cared.

I could feel myself shake my head... or his head as he looked down at his folded hands.

"Scott, I'm going to tell you this, and I hope it makes it easier for you." Andrew said in prelude. "Alan and I are going to become life-partners. It hurt me when you left me to go back to Jean, but I'm okay. I know that things can't go back to the way they were between us, I think you know that too, but if there is any way to salvage something of our friendship, I'm willing to try."

Mr. Summers looked at Andrew and could see the sincerity in his

expression. He had moved on... and was willing to forgive me... him.

A huge weight of despair evaporated in the realization that Andrew was willing to forgive. A trickle of happiness could be felt that maybe he hadn't lost his best friend.

Then the realization came that Andrew was waiting for something... for him to make the next step, to show that he was serious about wanting their friendship to survive.

"I... I don't know how." Mr. Summers said in a low voice, not knowing where to begin to make things right between them.

"Come here." Andrew said in a soft whisper. His voice conveyed his caring. Mr. Summers felt the realization again that he was being forgiven... that Andrew, who had every reason in the world to hate him forever, was willing to forgive him.

Mr. Summers got out of his wheelchair and, with some help, made it to the bed.

Andrew pulled me... Mr. Summers close in a hug of comfort and held him tight.

Paradise. Safety. Love. Peace. Forgiveness. Now he knew the feeling of something he had only ever understood intellectually before. Unconditional love. If he could be forgiven for this, then there was nothing he could ever do that would cause Andrew to turn away from him. They would always be friends... forever.

* * * * *

The red haze broke and I was sitting in the circle once again.

I looked around and could see that most everyone was still in a trance.

Mr. Summers was looking at Andrew apprehensively.

Trey looked up from his trance suddenly and walked immediately to Mr. Summers and pulled him into a hug.

Andrew looked up next with a surprised expression.

"Wow, that wasn't the one I thought you'd pick." Andrew said shyly.

"To tell the truth, Trini is the one who picked it. And I'm glad she did. There's no way I could find the words to explain how much your forgiveness and friendship means to me." Mr. Summers said with a weak smile.

"You don't have to say anything, I could feel everything you felt, and I'm glad things worked out the way they did... so many things could have pulled us apart." Andrew said with a look of honest concern.

"But we're here... and we have things to do!" Mr. Summers said, directing the last comment to all of us.

"Trini, well done. I'll be helping you as much as I can with your ability. When the Professor comes back, he'll take over; he's a telepath. John, Andrew has volunteered to be your instructor. Clark, you'll be with Alex. Ronny, you'll be with Ms. Munroe. Chris, you'll be with Alan. Dr. McCoy will move from group to group to observe and offer suggestions." Mr. Summers said to us all.

Alex motioned for me to follow him and I asked, "Can Trey come with us?"

"Sure, come on Trey. We're going to work over here, away from the others." Alex said agreeably.

Trey flashed me a smile. It was brief, but turned up full blast. I felt that one in my knees.

* * * * *

Power training sounds exciting... it isn't. I mean, I know I have to practice but... it was soooooooooo boring. I bet Trey is sorry that he can't fall asleep.

For an hour and a half I kept blasting the dirt. Fine beams. Wide beams. Strong beams. Weak beams. Pinpoint beams... I am so sick of the stinking beams that I could scream!!!

Finally it's about time for us to go to the next class, so everyone is finishing up. Alex went to talk to Mr. Summers and Dr. McCoy about something.

"Clark?" Trey asked hesitantly, breaking me out of my thoughts.

"Yes?" I answered.

"I would like for you to kiss me again." Trey said nervously.

I looked around at everyone in different parts of the clearing, getting ready to go back to the mansion for the next class.

"Okay, but just for a second." I said and stepped behind a large tree.

Trey hurried behind the tree with me and waited impatiently.

"Trey, why don't you kiss me this time?" I asked carefully.

"As you like." Trey said and pulled me into a whopper of a kiss.

I could feel one of his hands cradling the back of my head as the other was on my back. He opened his mouth and his tongue traced the outline of my lips.

When I realized that my eyes were closed, I opened them to find the look of Trey, lost in his passion. It was beauty. It was truth. It was all things good.

One of his hands drifted down to my butt and gave a firm squeeze.

I gasped and that was the opening he was looking for.

Trey moved his tongue into my mouth and began to map the terrain by feel.

"Clark? Trey? Come on or you're going to miss the vortex back to the mansion." Alex called.

Trey relaxed his hold on me and stopped the kiss.

At that moment I couldn't have cared less about going back to the mansion. I'd be just as happy to stay here, behind the tree, and see what other hidden talents Trey has.

"Guys?" John's voice came from very close by.

"Over here." I said in a hoarse whisper.

"What are you guys..." John began to say as he walked around the tree and

froze in his tracks.

"Trey wanted a kiss." I said weakly, feeling that I had betrayed John.

John rolled his eyes, walked to Trey and pulled him into a quick, firm kiss.

"There, we ready to go now?" John asked impatiently.

"Sure." I said as Trey nodded in agreement. Then I continued, "What's got you so impatient?"

"I'm just ready to be done with the power training. Andrew's a slave driver... but he says that when I've got enough control, he'll show me how to make fire without a lighter." John finished with excitement as the three of us walked to join the others.

One by one we walked through the vortex and found ourselves in the main hall of the mansion.

* * * * *

"Guys, come with me." Alex said to John, Trey and I.

We followed without question and entered an otherwise empty classroom.

"It'll still be a few minutes before the next class. Would you guys help me?" Alex asked as he pulled some papers out of his desk.

We lined up and were all handed a small stack of papers.

"Lay those out, one at each seat." Alex said as he sat in his chair and opened a folder.

"We're having a test?" John asked as he started laying out papers.

"Yeah. Sounds like fun, huh?" Alex said with a smile.

"Not really." I said as I put the last of my papers out.

"Guys... while we've got a minute, I need to ask you about something." Alex said and walked over to lean against one of the tables.

"Sure, what?" John asked and assumed a position, mirroring Alex.

"I just wondered if you guys are going to have any problem with me being your teacher... because I'm so young." Alex said nervously.

"Not really." I said automatically.

"Age doesn't seem to mean much around here." John said seriously.

Alex gave John an inquiring look, so he continued.

"Mr. O'Rourke is two hundred and fifty years old and he looks about twenty five. Andrew looks like he's my age but he has eight kids. Robert is about two years younger than me and he's got the relationship I always wanted. I don't think age has anything to do with anything." John said, looking Alex in the eyes.

"Thanks John, I was just worried that you wouldn't take me seriously because I'm about two years older than you." Alex said shyly.

"Just a hint... a test on the first day of classes isn't the way to endear yourself to us." John said with a teasing smile.

"Don't worry about the test. It's just an exercise, it's not for a grade." Alex said casually.

"Then why are we doing it?" Trey asked seriously.

"I hope you'll understand at the end of it... in fact... Trey, when the test is done, maybe you could help me tabulate the results." Alex asked speculatively.

"Of course Uncle Alex. Anything I can do to be of assistance." Trey said immediately.

"Good. That'll save me some time." Alex said happily.

"There you are. I thought I'd lost you." Marie said from the doorway of the classroom.

"We got called away for 'new kid' stuff." John said with a fond smile.

"It's our last class, I thought this day was never going to end." Marie said, then noticed the papers.

"Test?" Marie asked with surprise.

"Yes, didn't you study?" Trey asked with a completely serious expression that was 100% believable.

Marie looked at him in shock as John; Alex and I broke into laughter.

"Good one Trey. You almost had me believing you." John said through his laughter.

Trey smiled at the praise. It was luminous. I wanted to kiss him so bad that it was all I could do to keep my place.

John didn't have that problem and gave Trey a kiss on the cheek.

Marie's eyes got wide and she asked, "You... and Trey?"

"Maybe. We haven't got that far." John said with a serene smile.

"You and me, dating brothers. How perfect is that?" Marie asked with a laugh.

"Hold on Marie. We're not there yet... we're going to talk about it tonight. Us and Clark." John said seriously.

"And Clark?" Marie asked and looked at me with even wider eyes.

I blushed and nodded... I don't know if I've stopped blushing since I arrived here.

I noticed Bobby, Robert, Trini and Ronny walk into the room along with a bunch of other kids. Chris was there too.

"John, Ronny told me." Bobby said quickly and pulled John into a hug.

"Thanks Bobby." John said and enjoyed the hug.

"Everyone, take your seats. We're about to begin." Alex said from his position, now back at the front of the room.

Dr. McCoy walked in and went to the back of the classroom to take a seat by the wall.

"Dr. McCoy is going to sit in on our classes occasionally since I'm a student teacher. Don't worry about him, he's not here to judge you, he's here to judge me." Alex said with a nervous quiver in his voice, which was hopefully put on for Dr. McCoy's benefit.

"Everyone, spread yourselves out as much as you can so no one can see your answers. Don't put your names on the papers or make any identifying marks." Alex said seriously.

There was some shifting around; I looked around to see that there was no one close enough to see my paper.

"This idea came from a game called 'I Never'. All the statements will start I never and you'll either mark 'true' that you've never done whatever it is either or mark 'false' meaning you have. Don't rationalize or justify anything, just answer the question as honestly as you can. Take the common usage of the word in the context it's being used. For example: If I say 'I never kissed a woman', I mean a romantic kiss, not kissing your grandmother on the cheek." Alex said in prelude.

"Question One: I never stole anything." Alex said with a smile.

I quickly marked true. This was going to be easy.

"Question Two: I never had sex." Alex said as he glanced over the classroom.

I marked true again. But last night... if John hadn't been thinking rationally... I was just barely able to answer true.

"Question Three: I've never been in love."

"I was about to mark True... but couldn't. I'm not exactly sure about all my feelings, but I can't deny that I love John and Trey. And I'm pretty sure that I'm 'in love' with at least one of them. I marked false.

"Question Four: I never thought about suicide."

I marked false and tried to put that out of my mind.

"Question Five: I never killed anyone." Alex said seriously.

I immediately marked true. Then I thought, [If I had been looking at anyone

at school on Friday when my ability awakened...]

"Question Six: I never kissed anyone of my own gender."

I marked a quick false down on that one. But I didn't feel even a little bad about it.

"Question Seven: I never tried a drink of alcohol."

I wanted to mark true; I wanted to so bad. But I had tried some of dad's scotch. I just wanted to know what it was like. It was like stinky dirty feet. I choked and gagged and never tried it again. So I marked false.

"Question Eight: I never tried drugs."

Thankfully I was able to mark True on that one. I had been approached a few times, but was too nervous to consider trying it.

"Question Nine: I never intentionally looked at pornography."

I marked down true. I never was really interested in that stuff... but now... I think I might enjoy it.

"Question Ten: I never kissed anyone of the opposite gender."

I hesitantly marked true. I had always thought I would end up kissing Lana... but never did. It was never the right time.

"Turn over your papers and hand them to Trey as he walks by." Alex said pleasantly.

Trey got up and began collecting papers, face down. When he came to me I handed him mine and met his eyes. I just wanted to touch him.

"Does anyone know why we just did this exercise?" Alex asked us all.

"Cus you said to." Evan said from the back of the room.

"Fair enough, but can you guess why I wanted you to do this?" Alex asked seriously.

"Not really." Evan answered honestly.

"Trey. Begin tabulating the results. I need to know how many answered true for each question." Alex said quietly.

"You want to know how many of us answered true?" Marie asked with worry.

"Yes, just wait a minute. I think Trey's about done." Alex said as he saw Trey look at each page briefly then continue to the next.

Trey quickly wrote down the totals and handed them to Alex.

"Thank you Trey, that would have taken me at least five minutes." Alex said as he looked over the paper.

"We have a double class, that's sixteen students. The first statement was 'I never stole anything.' Nine of you agreed with that statement... remember that when you leave things laying around." Alex said with a smile as he looked over the class.

"The second statement was 'I never had sex'. There was whopping eleven true responses to that one.

I was surprised at that, not that eleven of us were virgins, but that five of us weren't... even though I knew who three of those five were.

"The third statement was 'I've never been in love'. Eight of you answered true... split right down the middle on that one." Alex said off-handedly.

"The fourth statement was 'I never thought about suicide'... there were three true answers on that one..." Alex said and drifted off, obviously concerned.

Finally he snapped back to himself and said, "The fifth statement was 'I never killed anyone'. Eleven of you answered true to that one."

I was completely stunned. Five people in this room had killed someone.

"The sixth statement was 'I never kissed anyone of my own gender'. And five of you answered true." Alex said with a look of surprise.

"I never tried a drink of alcohol... there were three who answered true to that one." Alex said with concern.

"Eight. Drugs. Ten of you said true, that you never tried anything." Alex said

with worry.

"Nine. Pornography. There were three of you who answered true to that one." Alex said with an impressed tone.

"And the last one, 'I never kissed anyone of the opposite sex'. A surprising eight." Alex said and put down his paper and walked to sit on the front of his desk.

"We did this so you'll know that you're not alone in whatever you're going through. These people, right here in this room are going through the same thing as you. I'm not here to preach to you about right and wrong, I'm going to try to help you understand what drives people and make them decide which choices in life are best for them." Alex said as he looked over the class.

"One small note, if anyone ever wants to talk to get advice or just unburden yourself, Dr. McCoy and I are always available to you." Alex said sincerely, then handed a stack of papers to Trey.

"This is a syllabus of the coming semester. On it you have a complete list of your assigned reading, quiz and test dates as well as an overview of the objectives of the class."

* * * * *

"Where do you guys want to study?" I asked as we left Alex's class.

"How about your room?" John asked casually.

"It's *our* room, and that's fine with me." I said as we walked toward the main hall.

"I must tell my father where I will be. I will join you momentarily." Trey said quickly.

"Okay, I'll meet you upstairs... in fact, I need to talk to Mr. Summers for a minute so I'll be there in a few minutes too." I said, hoping I wasn't making a mistake.

"Well, I need to make a phone call, so I'll see you two when you get to the room." John said as we went our separate ways.

[Chapter 8: Ready]

I hesitantly walked into the open door of Mr. Summers' office and knocked on the door.

Mr. Summers and Alan looked up simultaneously.

"Um, Mr. Summers, you said that if I had a problem I could come talk to you... do you have a few minutes?" I asked nervously.

"Clark, we're both Mr. Summers. Did you want to speak to Scott privately?" Alan asked gently.

"Yes please." I said in nearly a whisper.

"I'm just here to grab these files anyway." Alan said and picked up a stack of folders.

"Thank you." I said, feeling that I was chasing him out of the room.

"No problem Clark." Alan said with a reassuring smile as he left.

"This job would be twice as hard without him." Scott said with a fond smile directed at the door.

I just stood there, not knowing what to do next.

"Come over here and have a seat. Tell me what's got you worried enough to come visit me." He said with a gentle smile.

"I... um... I think I've got a problem, and I'm not sure what to do." I said in a disjointed tone.

"Does this have anything to do with you and John sleeping together last night?" He asked, and somehow he managed to make it sound like an honest question instead of an accusation.

"Not exactly. I was telling the truth, all we did in my bed was sleep." [And he doesn't need to know what we did in John's bed.]

"Then what's bothering you?" He asked as he shifted in his chair to be more comfortable.

"I like John, I mean a whole lot. I even thought about us, maybe becoming, like, a couple... but then I started talking to Trey... and he's such a great guy... I don't want to hurt either of them and I don't want to choose between them." I said in anguish.

"Clark, I regard John somewhere between a son and a brother. I care about all the kids here, but John has found a special place in my heart. Trey is my nephew and I love and respect him. I'm telling you this so you'll know the motivations that are driving my advice." Mr. Summers said seriously.

I nodded carefully.

"You said you don't want to choose. Tell me about the choice you don't want to make." Mr. Summers said with a look of concern.

"It looks like I'm going to have to choose between Trey and John. I like them both and don't want to hurt either of them or lose either of them." I said, looking at the floor.

"Clark, you need to step back and look at your situation. You have a lot more options than you're seeing." Mr. Summers said seriously.

"Like what?" I asked in surprise.

"You can be friends with both. Just ignore the sex stuff and save the boyfriend thing for later." Mr. Summers said plainly.

"John and I are a little past that. We're not boyfriends yet. But trying to step back and be nothing but friends now would be... difficult." I said uneasily.

"Clark, as a teacher and administrator at the school, I can't support any type of physical relationship between people under the age of consent." Scott said firmly, then he dropped the professional persona and said in a voice of honest concern, "As a friend, I want you to be careful. I don't know if you realize how fragile all three of you are. I don't know what more I can say but to offer whatever help I can to make this easier for you."

"Um, can you help me see my options? I'm meeting with the guys in a few minutes and I'd really like some help." I said in thought.

"Sure, Let's look at this logically... You can choose neither, one, the other, or both." Mr. Summers said in prelude.

"Both?" I asked hesitantly.

"Well, it's not common for threesomes to work out because the relationship dynamic usually ends up being a couple and an extra. But it is a possibility. There is one other option." He said without enthusiasm.

"What's that?" I asked carefully.

"Choosing not to decide is also a valid choice." Mr. Summers said weakly.

"Why would I do that?" I asked in confusion.

"I'm just trying to give you all the options I can think of." Mr. Summers said with a shrug.

"Thanks Mr. Summers. You've really helped me." I said as I stood.

"Clark, you can call me Scott when we're not taking care of school business." Mr. Summers, Scott, said with a gentle smile.

"Thank you Scott. I'll do my best to see that no one gets hurt." I said seriously.

"Just be sure to include yourself in that Clark. Don't make your decision just because it will make the others happy... I've fallen into that trap myself. I was so focused on making everyone else happy that I didn't consider my own happiness. I ended up forgetting how to be happy." Scott said sadly.

"How did you get past it." I asked cautiously.

"I didn't, not completely. I still have times when I forget about my own needs and it takes Alan or Alex to remind me that I'm a person who has needs, just like anyone else." Scott said honestly.

"I'll keep that in mind. But if it comes down to their happiness or mine, theirs will come first." I said with certainty.

"I understand, all I'm asking is before you commit to that choice, be sure that you're aware of all the options." He said and rose to walk me to the door.

"Thanks again Scott. I'm glad you were here to help me." I said as we reached the door.

"If you need me anytime, day or night, please just ask. All three of you are important to me and I'll do whatever I can to help you out." Scott said warmly.

"I promise, if I need you, I'll let you know." I said seriously.

"Oh, and Clark, we're going shopping for clothes tonight. I'm going to leave from the boathouse about 7:30 or so. Would you tell John?" Scott asked casually.

"Sure, he's up in our room. Is it okay if I go along with you? I need to get some things too." I asked hopefully.

"Yes, I had planned on you going, even if you didn't buy anything." Scott said with a small smile.

I nodded and said, "Thanks again Scott, for everything." And left the office.

* * * * *

I walked into the room to find John talking on the phone.

"Yeah. Tomorrow at five-thirty, I'll meet you there." John said with a look of concentration.

"No. I've got a ride. I'll meet you there and we'll see what happens." John said firmly.

There was a long minute of silence, then John said more quietly, "I'll be there, that's all I'm promising. I'll see you tomorrow Dad."

John hung up the phone and looked at me with pain in his eyes.

I immediately walked to him and pulled him into a hug of comfort.

"Thanks Clark. If it wasn't for you, I probably wouldn't be able to do this." John said in a whisper.

"Do what?" I asked quietly.

"See my dad. It's been a year..." John said into my shoulder.

I just held on to him, not having any words to offer since I didn't understand his situation.

There was a knock on the door and I said in a voice that was too quiet for a normal human to hear at that distance, "Come in Trey."

Trey shyly walked in, as if unsure of his welcome.

"Is there a problem?" Trey asked with immediate concern.

John pulled out of our hug and said, "No, not really a problem. I was just feeling unsteady and Clark was supporting me."

Trey gave a look of inquiry at both of us and I turned my own look of inquiry to John.

"Sit down guys. I'm going to give you the short version of the story." John said and took a seat on my bed.

Trey and I followed John's example and sat on either side of him.

"Me and my dad don't get along. We never really did. If the two of us get into a room, we fight. He's started going to counseling and decided that he wants to try and make things better between us..." John trailed off.

"How do you feel about that?" Trey asked hesitantly.

"I'm not sure. I mean, I've been away from him for over a year... I'm used to not having that tension inside me all the time. I don't know if I'm ready for that again." John said quietly.

"John, when I was living on Voyager, I asked my Father if I could live independently. He arranged for that to happen and treated me as an adult. Our relationship had been good before, but this added a dimension of... equality... between us. We were both adults, we were coworkers. We respected each other's feelings and opinions. Perhaps something like that could work for you. Later I chose to be adopted and resumed my role as the child, but Father has continued to treat me with respect." Trey said seriously.

John looked off into the distance, apparently thinking about what Trey had

said.

"My dad has always been my friend." I said quietly.

John turned his attention to me, so I continued, "He likes me. I don't know how else to put it. He enjoys spending time with me the same way I enjoy spending time with him. I don't know how other kids get along with their fathers, but mine is like a father, a big brother and a friend all rolled into one. We can sit out in the back yard behind the house and stare up at the sky and talk about nothing for hours. You're a really great person John, I bet your dad would like to have a friend as good as you." I said and looked into his eyes.

"Maybe." John mumbled.

"You're going to meet him tomorrow?" I asked to be sure.

"Yeah, after school. Scott already said he'd take me there. I just need to let him know when." John said with distraction.

"Can I go?" I asked in nearly a whisper.

"Why?" John asked with genuine puzzlement.

"For support, to be your cheering section, whatever I'm needed for, maybe run interference if things don't go well." I finished with a shrug.

"I would like to go as well." Trey said quietly.

John looked at Trey with question.

"If Clark is going to be your shield, I will be your sword." Trey said firmly.

John got a big smile and put his arms around us both.

"With you guys to support me, the old man won't stand a chance." John said happily as he hugged us.

"That's the plan." I said, enjoying the hug to the depths of my soul.

"Now, let's get this homework started so we can have our talk, then buy some clothes." John said and abruptly got up from the bed.

"Scott said he'll be leaving from the boathouse at around seven thirty." I said quickly as I went to the table to start my homework.

"Good, you both coming with me?" John asked and looked at us both.

We both nodded and went to work.

* * * * *

"Trey, would you look over my program? I think I wrote it right but everything has to be perfect for the thing to work." I asked hopefully.

"Of course." Trey said and looked over my program.

I waited as he looked it over, then he got an apologetic look.

"What did I miss?" I asked in a pained voice.

"The closing quotation mark on the literal phrase. Without it, the operating system will believe everything that follows is part of your quotation." Trey said hesitantly.

"Oh, that's not so bad. Is that all?" I asked hopefully.

"Yes. The program will produce the desired result once the quotation mark is added." Trey said with certainty.

"Thanks Trey." I said and made the correction.

"Would you look at my writing for Uncle Spike? I am not as expressive as my siblings and am unsure if I convey my meaning adequately." Trey said apprehensively.

"Sure." I said and accepted the paper from him.

>Those who are gone. The Marisch-Ka.

>

>I did not know these people. No one I

>know has met them.

>

>They committed the most horrible crime

>that one group of sentients can commit

>against another. They were different.

>
>They tried to conceal their difference by
>keeping away from the mainstream. But
>in time, they were found out.
>
>The mainstream spied on them and saw
>their nonstandard behavior... and felt
>threatened.
>
>The Marisch-Ka became feared, then
>hated.
>
>The mainstream decided to poison the
>Marisch-Ka with the remnants of their filth.
>
>The Marisch-Ka were contaminated,
>infected and imbued with the filth of
>their neighbors and consequently died.
>
>Centuries later, the mainstream celebrates
>the triumph over the evil 'free thinkers' of
>the past with animated stories to entertain
>and warn their children.
>
>The Marisch-Ka are gone. The mainstream
>was diminished. By losing the Marisch-ka,
>they lost the driving force for growth and
>change in their society. The mainstream
>never grew out of its adolescence. All their
>potential died with the Marisch-Ka...
>
>And no one mourned it's passing...
>
>or theirs.
>
>Trey

"Wow. John, you gotta read this. It's great." I said in stunned disbelief.

"Really?" Trey asked hopefully.

"Really Trey. It's... I don't know what to say. It made me feel... so much. Where did you come up with it?" I asked with excitement.

"I will show you the vid sometime. It is a true story." Trey said shyly.

"Really? Wow... you use the term 'mainstream' instead of a more identifying term... who were the mainstream?" I asked curiously.

"The Lowelltie clan of the Bruhnalli people... Icheb's people." Trey said quietly.

"Oh... so you didn't name them so Icheb wouldn't know you were talking about his people?" I asked unsurely.

"No. Icheb will recognize the story, but I do not want others to associate the people who killed the Marisch-Ka with Icheb." Trey said firmly.

"Good thinking." I said, then looked over to John who was consumed in his work.

"What are you working on John?" I asked curiously.

"The program. I'm having trouble remembering all the commands Andrew told us in class." He said with frustration.

"I can help if you would like." Trey offered.

"Well, when I finish, I'd appreciate it if you'd look it over like you did for Clark. But I really need to do this part for myself." John said as he kept his gaze fixed on his paper.

"As you like. Would you like the listing of the commands from the chapter summary of the textbook?" Trey asked hopefully.

"Yeah, that'd be a big help. Thanks Trey." John said with a smile.

I went back to work on my own writing. After reading Trey's, I felt like I needed to take mine to the next level. Make it more... real.

* * * * *

"This program will function properly." Trey said after looking over John's program.

"Great. Thanks Trey, that means I'm done." John said happily.

"Me too." I said and looked at Trey expectantly.

Trey nodded and looked at me with apprehension in his eyes.

"Well, we all know what we're here to talk about... anyone want to start?" John asked hopefully.

I nodded and began, "I've been thinking about my feelings toward both of you. I want you both."

John looked at me with a tender smile as Trey gaped with surprise.

"John, how do you feel?" I asked hopefully.

"Bout the same as you. I tried imagining what I want my future to be like and it includes you both." John said frankly.

"Trey?" I asked hesitantly at his shocked expression.

"I... I had not considered this possibility. I had assumed that I would have to choose between you. May I have a moment to consider?" Trey asked hopefully.

"Yeah, be sure of what you want. We're not going to pressure you or rush you into anything." John said assuringly.

"Thank you." Trey whispered, then got a distant look.

"What are you doing?" I asked curiously.

"I am attempting to do what John just said. I am creating a scenario where I am in a relationship with either of you, then both of you." Trey said in thought.

"How's it going?" John asked hopefully.

"I believe I have come to the same conclusion as both of you. I anticipate maximum happiness and fulfillment with both of you." Trey said with a smile.

"Good. I still want us to go slow. It would be real easy for one of us to get hurt if we rush into anything." I said with caution.

"How do we begin?" Trey asked nervously.

"Tell me what you'd like to do." I said gently.

"I am... embarrassed." Trey said shyly.

"You tell me yours and I'll tell you mine." I said teasingly.

John laughed at that and pulled me over for a quick kiss.

"I would like to touch you... both of you." Trey said with a scarlet blush.

"I have absolutely no problem with that." I said and looked at John who was nodding with wholehearted agreement.

"I'd like for you to kiss me again like you did in the clearing. It was great." I said, looking Trey in the eyes.

"Hey, I want one too!" John said quickly.

"Yeah, you'd better give John one first, since I already had one." I said in a considering tone.

"Anything else before we start?" I asked and looked at both my friends... lovers?

"Naked. Now." John said firmly.

"Trey, are you okay with that?" I asked to be sure.

Trey blushed and nodded uncertainly.

"Why don't we work up to complete nudity...?" I said as I walked to the door and locked it.

"How so?" Trey asked hesitantly.

"Would you like to take off my shirt?" I asked with a smile.

"Yes, very much." Trey said and walked to begin to undress me.

"What about me?" John asked in mock frustration.

"Enjoy the show. And when Trey is done taking off my shirt, I'm going to take off yours... then, if you want, you could take off Trey's." I said as Trey began to slowly and reverently undo each of my buttons.

"Okay. You talked me into it." John said with a grand smile and relaxed back in his chair to watch Trey slowly remove my shirt.

* * * * *

As John finally tossed Trey's shirt to the side, I stood and walked to my two lovers-to-be.

"Are you ready for a kiss?" Trey asked John hopefully.

"Fuck yeah." John said and draped his arms loosely around Trey.

Trey pulled John into a deep, passionate kiss as I watched. It was hot, it was awesome.

I watched as the kiss became deeper and John's hands began to roam up and down Trey's bare back. When he touched a metallic device at the base of Trey's spine, he stopped and felt it curiously.

Trey broke the kiss and whispered, "It is called a spinal clamp. Does it bother you?"

"I don't know." John said with uncertainty in his voice.

Something occurred to me and I said, "Maybe I can help."

John and Trey both looked at me curiously.

"Trey, would you mind if I touched your spinal clamp?" I asked quietly.

Trey shook his head and I went to my knees behind him.

John pulled away from Trey a little to watch me trace the skin around his implant with my tongue.

"Clark..." Trey gasped in pleasure.

"Good call Clark." John said as he watched the look of pleasure on Trey's

face.

"If you think so, he has another one on his neck." I said before licking some more.

"The device on my neck is an occipital implant." Trey said in a breathy whisper.

John guided Trey to bend forward slightly and began to tongue the skin around his neck implant.

After a few minutes of exploring Trey's implant with my tongue, I asked, "Do you feel weird about Trey's implants now?"

"No, I feel a lot better about them now." John said with a smile.

"Good, could someone give me a kiss now?" I asked plaintively.

"Don't worry Trey, I got this one." John said happily and moved in to give me a deep kiss.

I felt John's tongue work its way into my mouth and began to suck on it.

The action seemed to surprise John, then he thrust his pelvis against me to let me feel his rampant erection.

After a long minute of kissing, John broke away and asked, "Fuck, how are we going to do this Clark? It seems like someone is being left out."

"How about this? Trey, would you come here and hold me?" I asked in thought.

Trey moved in front of me and hugged me gently.

"Okay John, now you get behind Trey and hug him from behind." I said as I enjoyed Trey's hug.

John did so and began to nuzzle Trey's neck.

I kissed Trey as John licked Trey's ear.

A moment later I broke the kiss with Trey and moved to kiss John.

While I was kissing John, I let my hands drift down to Trey's firm butt.

John was pressed against Trey's butt, so I moved my hand slightly and groped his erection.

John jerked a little at that and I pulled out of the kiss to laugh.

John grinned at me, then nuzzled Trey's neck.

Trey tilted his head back and turned his head so he could kiss John.

A large expanse of Trey's neck was exposed and I just couldn't resist.

I began to suck and nibble Trey's neck, working my way down to his collarbone.

"Guys, I don't know about you two, but I'm ready to lose the pants." John said between deep breaths.

"But we haven't even explored all the skin that's already been exposed." I said in a playful, whiny tone.

"Oh, well then I guess we'd better do that now." John said with a smile and took gentle hold of one of Trey's nipples.

I kissed down Trey's neck and began to trace around the device embedded in his chest.

"I... I feel I should... reciprocate." Trey said brokenly.

"Go ahead." I said and pulled away.

Trey bent down slightly and began to lick John's left nipple.

"Ooof." John said in surprise.

I laughed and stretched over Trey to give John a gentle kiss.

There was a knock on the door and we all stopped.

"John?" Ronny asked through the door.

"Ronny's cool, invite him in." I said and took hold of Trey.

John ran to the door and let Ronny in, then locked the door behind him.

"What are you guys up to?" Ronny asked hesitantly, noticing that we were all shirtless.

"Second base." John said frankly.

I laughed as Trey looked confused.

"Oh... Sorry I interrupted. I just wanted to know if you were going to the boathouse tonight." Ronny said shyly.

"Um, yeah. We'll be leaving to go shopping from there around seven thirty." John said with distraction.

"Oh, okay. I wanted to invite you down to visit with Logan for a while." Ronny said nervously, obviously not knowing where to look.

"I guess I should. Guys, would you mind if I leave for a while?" John asked carefully.

"It just won't be the same without you. Why don't we all go and visit, then we can get back to this later?" I asked and watched Trey carefully.

Trey nodded in acceptance.

"Is Bobby going with us?" I asked as I pulled on my shirt.

"No. He's doing some stuff with Peter." Ronny said, trying not to look at us.

"You going down now?" John asked as he pulled on his shirt.

"Yeah." Ronny said a little too quickly.

"Then we'll go down there with you." John said as he buttoned his shirt.

"Just a second." I said and looked at Ronny.

"Ronny, are you okay with the three of us... being a couple?" I asked, not knowing how else to put it.

"Um, yeah. It's cool. I just... It seems a little fast guys." Ronny said

carefully.

"How long did Bobby court Robert?" John asked seriously.

"About four hours." Ronny said with a smile.

"And they're okay. Are we ready to go?" John said as he straightened his shirt.

Trey nodded and I couldn't resist. I pulled Trey into a kiss and really put all my feeling into it. I probed deep into his mouth and pulled him tight against me so I could grind my erection against him.

That went on for about a minute, then I let loose of Trey and took a deep breath.

"Now I'm ready." I said and straightened.

"Wow!" Ronny said with wide eyes.

"Yeah, and yesterday he couldn't say the word gay without choking on it." John said with a laugh.

I shrugged and began walking with the group out the door.

[Chapter 9: Freedom]

We entered the MedLab and got into our biosuits.

"Hey guys. How are you doing?" Logan asked in a friendly tone.

"Great. How are you?" John asked Logan with concern.

"Doc's been good about keeping me busy. So I'm okay. You wanna look at this?" Logan said and held out a piece of paper.

John took the paper and held it so Trey, Ronny and I could see.

"It looks nice." I said, looking at a picture of a cozy little house in the woods.

"Yeah, it's about two miles from here. When I get sprung, we can go check it out." Logan said happily.

"Really? We could live here?" John asked in disbelief as he looked at the picture again.

"Yeah, if it's really as good as the picture says." Logan said as he enjoyed John's happiness.

"What do you think Ronny?" I asked curiously.

"This says that it's away from the road so we don't have to worry about people wandering by all the time. It's got four bedrooms, so we can even have a place for company to sleep over." Ronny said with excitement.

"Gentlemen." A voice came over the suit speaker.

I looked around and finally saw Dr. McCoy standing outside the window of the containment room.

"I need for everyone to leave the containment room immediately." Dr. McCoy said in a grave voice.

"What? What's wrong?" Ronny asked in panic.

"Nothing... it's just hard to talk to all of you with microphones and speakers. Come out here and we can talk face to face." Dr. McCoy said

seriously.

"Don't do that Dr. McCoy. You scared me half to death." John said with a hint of anger in his voice.

"But what about Logan? We came down to visit with him." Ronny said with concern.

"He can come too. I just got the last test results. He is 100% virus free." Dr. McCoy said with a joyous smile.

Ronny let out a whooping cheer and ran to hug Logan.

All of us smiled at the unfettered joy being expressed by the usually somber boy.

"Come on Logan, let's get out of here." John said with a great smile.

"You don't have to tell me twice." Logan said and walked to the foyer.

"Well come on. You don't want to wear those garbage bags if you don't have to, do you?" Logan asked impatiently from the foyer.

We hurried to follow Logan and he was out of the foyer before we were completely out of our suits.

Logan looked around the BioLab in wonder, as if it were unreal.

"Welcome to the outside world Matt." Dr. McCoy said, obviously enjoying Mr. Logan's happiness.

"Thanks Doc. But don't think this is gonna get you out of watching 'Rooster Cogburn' with me tonight." Logan said with a slight growl.

"If I must." Dr. McCoy said in a voice of long suffering.

"Right now, I'd like to go see the house. Who's with me?" Mr. Logan asked all of us.

"Yeah." John said with a smile as Ronny nodded enthusiastically.

Trey and I exchanged a look and nodded in unison.

"Let's go find Cyke, then we'll go." Logan said as he moved to leave the room.

"Would you mind if I accompany you?" Dr. McCoy asked shyly.

"C'mon Doc. It's thanks to you that I can leave the fish tank." Logan said, not slowing his pace as we walked into the hall.

* * * * *

"You got a few minutes Cyke?" Logan asked from Scott's opened office door.

"Matt?" Mr. Summers asked with surprise.

"Doc said I'm cured." Mr. Logan said with a big smile.

Mr. Summers smiled and said, "That's great Matt. How does it feel to be out?"

Mr. Logan just looked at Mr. Summers until Scott finally said, "Why can't you just go along with it when I ask you stupid questions?"

Logan smiled and said, "Cause I expect better from you Cyke. You usually don't disappoint me, but every now and then..."

"Fine, then how about this one? What are you planning to do first?" Scott asked without offense.

"Better. I wanna go look at the house. I came to see if you wanted to join us." Matt asked with an almost hidden note of tenderness in his voice.

Mr. Summers looked surprised by the invitation, but hid it quickly. "Sure... should we call before we go? Maybe someone could meet us there with a key."

Mr. Logan laughed and said, "I can always count on you to be practical. Here's the number."

Scott accepted the paper from Mr. Logan and quickly dialed the number.

"Logan? I called my dad today... I'm supposed to meet with him and his therapist tomorrow at five thirty. Could you or Scott give me a ride?" John asked shyly.

"Yeah, between us, we'll get you there." Logan said simply.

John nodded and seemed to be in thought.

I met John's eyes and motioned to the door with a tilt of my head, then touched Trey's arm and motioned for him to follow.

* * * * *

"What is it John? You're worried about something else." I said as we stood in the hall outside Mr. Summer's office.

"Even though he denies it, I am sure he is empathic." Trey said to John.

John smiled and nodded at Trey, then said, "I never told my dad that I'm gay."

"Oh... that's tough." I said in thought.

"You believe he will be displeased?" Trey asked in confusion.

"Yeah. You could say that." John said with a chuckle at the understatement.

"Trey, not everyone is accepting of same-sex couples. You're just lucky that your parents are a same-sex couple, so you don't have to face this... I've got to tell my parents too." I said darkly.

"So you're ready to pick sides?" John asked curiously.

"Yeah, I'm playing on the boys team." I said weakly.

"Tell you what. You stand by me when I tell my dad, I'll stand by you when you tell yours." John said firmly.

"Yeah. Thanks, that will help." I said in nearly a mumble.

"I will stand with you both." Trey said in a clear voice.

"You guys ready to go?" Logan asked from the door behind us.

"Yeah. Just waiting on you." John said with a forced smile.

"Well then, let's go... you're driving." Matt said as he led the way down the hall.

"Me? I don't even have a permit." John said in shock.

"Bout time for you to get one, ain't it?" Matt asked as we headed for the garage.

"Yeah... I just... I haven't really thought about it." John said, seeming overwhelmed.

"Think about it now. Tha kid ain't gonna be ready to drive for a couple years and I ain't planning on toting you around all tha time." Matt said as we entered the garage.

"Van?" Matt asked, looking at our large group.

"It's at the boathouse. I think we can all fit in the Bronco if someone will volunteer to sit in the back." Mr. Summers said, also looking at the group.

"Gonna be tight, but it's only two miles." Logan said and took the Bronco keys from the rack by the door.

We piled into the truck and tried to find places to sit.

"Mind if I join you?" I asked Ronny in the back.

"Plenty of room back here." Ronny said with a smile.

I climbed over the back seat and got into the cargo space with Ronny to sit cross-legged.

"Um. I'm not sure what to do." John asked nervously from the driver's seat.

Matt began telling John what to do so I leaned over the seat and tapped Trey on the shoulder.

Trey was packed tightly between Dr. McCoy and Mr. Summers. He had to shift himself quite a bit to look back at me.

I leaned forward and gave him a quick but firm kiss.

Trey gave me a smile in return that felt like sunrise in my soul, then he

turned back to face the front as John started the engine.

"Okay, I guess I can see it now." Ronny said from beside me.

"See what?" I asked and turned my full attention to Ronny.

"I could see how you and John fit together, you're a pair. But I couldn't see how Trey fit in with you. Now I see it." Ronny said honestly.

"What did you see?" I asked curiously.

Before he could answer, we leached forward, then jerked to a stop.

"Ease out on the clutch. It just takes some practice." Logan was saying to John.

"I saw you, away from your family for the first time. You were alone and afraid. I saw John who came here to make peace with my brother and stayed. He felt like he was alone and didn't belong anywhere." Ronny said in thought.

"And what did you see in Trey?" I asked, really interested in Ronny's point-of-view.

"On the surface, I saw someone who had a family who loved him. I saw a guy who was trusted, respected and loved. But now I can see that he's just as alone as you and John... maybe more. No matter how much his family loves him... there's still a part that's empty. You two are filling that empty place in his life." Ronny said with difficulty.

"I never thought about it that way. I just went with my feelings." I said as we began to move out of the garage and into the driveway... at about 2 mph.

"You can give it a little more gas now. I'll tell you when to shift." Mr. Logan said in a casual voice.

"What happens if we get stopped by the cops?" John asked with worry.

"We get a ticket... and we pay it... then it's done." Logan said without concern.

"Oh." John said weakly and we started moving faster.

"What's it like?" Ronny asked in a quiet voice.

"What's what like?" I asked, turning my full attention back to Ronny.

"Being in love." Ronny said in a whisper.

"It feels wonderful sometimes. It hurts sometimes. It's confusing and crazy and makes me a little dizzy." I said in thought.

"It hurts?" Ronny asked with worry.

"Yeah. When I think about not being with them... it hurts. When I think about 'what if', it hurts bad." I said quietly.

"What do you mean 'what if'?" Ronny asked with concern.

"What if one of them, or both of them finds someone else? What if they decide they want to become a couple? What if I can't stay at this school?" I said and felt pain pierce through my soul as I put my fears into words.

"I never felt that. Wanting to be around someone so much that it hurts to be apart." Ronny said in thought.

"I hope you do someday soon. As much as it hurts, the good times make it worth it." I said as I looked in the rear-view mirror at the expression of panic in John's eyes as we left the school property and went onto the main road.

"Clark?" Ronny said hesitantly.

I turned my attention back to Ronny.

"Thanks for not treating me like a kid." Ronny said in a whisper.

"You're one of the guys. I don't think about your age at all." I said honestly.

"Yeah. Thanks. It's just... Everyone around me is growing up... finding partners... And I'm not." Ronny said quietly.

"You'll find someone." I said with assurance.

"You're not understanding me Clark. You're attracted to John and Trey.

Bobby's attracted to Robert. Logan's attracted to Ms. Munroe. It's not that I can't find anyone, it's that I'm not even interested in anyone like that... I'm just a kid." Ronny said in a voice of defeat.

"Ronny, you're not just a kid. If you focus on what you're not, you're going to tear yourself up. Try focusing on what you are." I said in thought.

"What am I?" Ronny asked with a note of fear in his voice.

I thought about the question and could tell by the look in Ronny's eyes that my answer was very important to him.

"You're a good person who is concerned about everyone around him. You're a good brother to Bobby. You've got a really cool mutant ability... you're my friend." I finished with a shrug, hoping I hadn't done too bad at answering his question.

"Do you ever think of me... that way?" Ronny asked hesitantly.

"What way?" I asked, trying to understand his meaning.

"In a sex way." Ronny asked timidly and didn't look in my eyes.

After some careful thought I said, "No. I never have. But that's because I knew you weren't interested in me like that."

Ronny nodded in thought.

"Guys, we're here." John called out from the drivers seat, looking at us in the rearview mirror.

We spent a few minutes getting unfolded and out of the back of the truck. As we walked to look at the house, Ronny put a hand on my arm to stop me.

"If I was interested in you like that... what would you think about me?" Ronny asked with tension.

"Are you asking if I find you attractive?" I asked carefully.

Ronny nodded shyly.

"Yes." I said simply.

Ronny looked at me with an imploring look that prompted me to continue.

"Ronny, you're handsome, smart, kind, gentle, honest. If I didn't already have two guys that I was crazy in love with, I'd probably ask you out." I said, holding his gaze to show my honesty.

"C'mon kid. We're in." Logan said as he swung open the front door.

* * * * *

"I guess this is your room Logan." Ronny said as we walked into the master bedroom.

"Why you think that?" Logan asked seriously.

"Cause it's the master bedroom." Ronny said seriously.

"No. We're equals in this. I ain't startin out by taking the big room." Logan said firmly.

"Okay, who gets it?" Ronny asked in confusion.

"It'll be the spare. Maybe an office or a study room. We'll each get one of the smaller rooms. That way we start out the same." Logan said firmly.

"Okay. That's cool. Thanks Logan." Ronny said with a smile.

"No problem kid. John, what you thinkin bout all this?" Logan asked and turned his attention to John.

"I like it. I could call it home." John said seriously.

"That's all I needed to hear." Logan said and walked out of the room.

"What?" John asked quickly, following Logan.

"I just need to check out a few things, then I'm gonna buy it." Logan said as he walked through the kitchen and into the basement.

"What things?" John asked as he followed.

"I gotta look at the plumbing, electrical. I wouldn't mind having a look at

the roof." Logan said as he looked around the basement.

"Look at all this space." I said, looking around the huge open basement.

"We'll need to get a washer and dryer." Logan said as we passed the laundry attachments.

"Gas heat." Dr. McCoy said with approval.

"I don't see any signs of water damage." Mr. Summers said, looking around.

"Water damage?" John asked curiously.

"Yes. When you look at a house that you aren't familiar with, you have to be concerned if it was built on a flood plane or on the natural draw of the land. If there were signs of previous water damage, it could mean that you'll have constant problems with flooding." Mr. Summers said as he looked around.

"Anybody seen a ladder? I'd like to check out the roof." Logan said as he walked upstairs.

"I can fly us up there." Ronny said timidly.

"Come on and show me." Logan said and walked through the kitchen and out the back door.

* * * * *

We stood around and watched as Ronny floated up to the roof, then a moment later, Logan rose and landed beside him.

"He's really a fast learner." I said to Mr. Summers in an impressed voice.

"Yes. He's incredibly powerful for a mutant who's just awakening." Mr. Summers said seriously.

"What's wrong?" I asked at his serious expression.

"Bobby's mutation was high alpha to begin with. Though we haven't gauged it recently, I believe he crossed over into the omega range. I think Ronny may be joining him there soon." Scott said with concern.

"What's wrong with that?" I asked curiously.

"Omega class mutants are capable of terrible destruction. They have to maintain exact control because their power can be overwhelming. Professor Xavier, Ms. Munroe and Andrew are the only omega class mutants we have at the mansion. Should Professor Xavier lose control of his ability, he could effect the minds of the majority of the state. Orroro could destabilize the weather of this entire state, maybe more. She's so powerful, we haven't been able to test her ultimate limit. I haven't thought of a practical way of testing Andrew's ultimate limit, but I suspect that if he wanted to he could put Brooklyn on the moon with a thought." Mr. Summers said as he watched Logan and Ronny on the roof.

"So that's why you have us practicing every day and are so careful to teach us control." I said in realization.

"Exactly. In your situation, a slip could hurt one or two people, but in Ronny's, he could potentially disrupt gravity for the state, maybe even the east coast by the time he fully matured." Mr. Summers said in thought.

"He's that powerful?" I asked in wonder.

"He's just come into his power. It generally starts with a trickle and increases until adulthood. Like with me, I started with heat vision that would melt candle wax if I stared long enough. As time went on, the beams became stronger until I had to wear sunglasses all the time. Finally I had to get special glasses because I kept melting the sunglasses." Scott said as he focused his attention on me.

"So you don't have control of your ability like I do?" I asked in fascination.

"No, when my eyes are opened, my blasts are going. I could control my ability when I was young but something happened... and now I can't" Scott said evasively.

"Now I control my ability with the shutters in my visor or by taking off my sunglasses." He said seriously.

"So that's why you have Alex teaching me instead of you?" I asked, not really thinking about that before.

"Yes. Even though Alex's ability isn't technically the same as mine and Alan's, from what I understand of it, the control is the same. Alan and I

neither one have that type of control of our ability. Alex has good control and is the best one to understand what your feeling." Mr. Summers said as we watched Logan and Ronny float down to the ground.

"But Alan doesn't wear sunglasses." I said in confusion.

"Alan has a Borg device inside his head that controls his optic blasts. He can operate the device consciously, but it's still a device." Mr. Summers said as we walked to join Logan and Ronny.

"It's fairly new. Only one layer of shingles. I'd say it has at least five years till we have to re-shingle." Logan said in thought as we walked around the yard.

I looked at Ronny who seemed to be soaking in every detail of his surroundings.

"Okay, what's everyone think?" Logan said as he stopped abruptly.

"I like it." Ronny said in thought.

"Yeah. It's good. I couldn't think of anything else that I'd want in a place." John said as he was also looking around.

"A garage, but we'll deal with that in a while." Logan said as he started walking to the truck.

"Are you going to do it?" Mr. Summers asked as he followed.

"Yeah. I think so. The price is right. The place looks good. The guys seem to like it. Close to the school..." Logan drifted off as he automatically got into the passenger side of the Bronco.

The rest of us piled into the truck and Trey took the seat beside Ronny in the cargo space.

"You sure you want me to drive?" John asked hesitantly.

"That's why I'm sitting over here. Let's get goin'." Logan said as he closed his door.

* * * * *

"Mr. Logan. Would you like to come with me to see my brothers? They were born yesterday." Trey asked hopefully from the back of the truck.

"You one of Alan's kids?" Logan asked curiously.

"Yes sir. I am Trey O'Seofon Summers." Trey said in a very respectful voice.

"You can call me Matt. And yeah, I'd like to meet your brothers." Logan said as he carefully watched John's driving.

* * * * *

"Welcome back guys!" Andrew said happily as we walked into the boathouse.

"Matt?" Alan asked in surprise when Logan walked in behind us.

"Doc says I'm cured." Logan said with a grand smile.

"That's great, come in. The family's all here. We were just about to sit down to dinner. Will you join us?" Alan asked as he shifted a baby in his arms.

"Yeah. I hear you got some babies to show me." Logan said, looking at the baby in Alan's arms.

"This is Thomas... William, will you get Chakotay? He should be ready for his dinner." Alan asked gently.

William hurried out of the room.

"An dis be Marguerite." Remy said with pride as he held his daughter.

"Whoah Cajun. How'd you manage that?" Logan asked in surprise as he walked to stand before Remy and Xander.

"Long story. But she got out of the hospital yesterday and the judge said the words over the final adoption papers today... we're officially her parents." Xander said with joy.

"She's beautiful." Logan said with uncharacteristic awe in his voice.

"She be a beauty." Remy said in confirmation.

Icheb walked into the room carrying bottles. He handed one to Andrew and one to Remy before taking a seat beside William and taking Chakotay into his arms to feed.

"Would you like to feed her?" Xander asked quietly, looking at Logan.

"Yeah, I'd like that." Logan said in a near whisper.

Xander shifted over to make room for Logan on the couch and gently took Marguerite from Remy's arms.

"As soon as the babies are finished, we'll sit down to dinner." Andrew said with a peaceful smile.

"How's the construction going?" Mr. Summers asked as he perched on the arm of the couch beside Andrew.

"Right on schedule. We should be ready to move in by this time next week." Andrew said happily.

"We're getting a house." Ronny said abruptly with a grand smile.

"Really?" Alan asked with surprise.

"Yeah. We looked at it before we came over here. It should be just right for all of us. I'm gonna get it taken care of in the morning." Logan said quietly as he fed Marguerite.

"She be finished." Remy said and handed a towel across to Logan.

"Lay her on your lap and rub her back gently to burp her. She doesn't like to be patted." Xander said with a gentle smile.

Logan did as he was told and before long, Marguerite let out a very delicate, lady-like burp.

"Janine, would you ask Robert if dinner is ready?" Andrew asked as he watched Alan burping Thomas.

Janine got up off the floor and hurried to the kitchen.

"Robert's cooking?" I asked in surprise.

"Yes. Remy show Robert what to do. He wan to try." Remy said quietly as he watched his daughter.

"The food is in the dining room awaiting us." Janine said happily from the kitchen doorway.

"Us?" Alan questioned.

"Robert prepared some food for us as well." Janine said happily.

"Gods protect us." Andrew said as he hung his head.

"What's wrong?" Logan asked curiously.

"Food... their bodies don't process it the same as ours." Andrew said brokenly.

"It's bloody awful." Spike said as he and Alex walked into the room.

"Yeah. That's about right." Alan said with a weak smile.

"Let's get these babies put down and get to dinner." Andrew said and stood, then put out his arms for Thomas.

"I'll stay with the babies while you eat." Lee said quietly. I hadn't noticed him before.

"No Dad. I'll stay with the kids. You enjoy dinner with the family." Andrew said firmly.

Lee looked like he was going to fight it, but then just nodded and went to the dining room.

Icheb and Logan each carried a baby to follow Andrew into the bedroom.

* * * * *

Dinner had been interesting. Robert cooked the food very well, but his combinations were unusual. Roast beef with potatoes, but they were sweet potatoes. I don't know what he used to season the roast but it was delicious. We also had asparagus with... gravy? I'm not sure exactly what it was, but it was very good and I ate until I was stuffed.

Then desert came and the real surprise. I've never seen so much Jell-O in my life.

But as it turned out, there was just enough for everyone. Apparently all Andrew's kids love Jell-O and each of them had second helpings.

Finally, dinner was over. Everyone headed for the living room as William, Icheb and Jimmy took care of the dishes.

I stopped just outside the dining room and said quietly to Robert, "Dinner was great. You're a really good cook."

"Thank you." Robert said shyly.

"What is your family doing for Thanksgiving?" I asked as I was assaulted with inspiration.

"Father says we will celebrate the holiday at the mansion. Dad says he will prepare food for us as well." Robert said happily as we walked and joined the others in the living room.

"You should talk to your fathers about preparing something for the meal. Your food is really good and I think everyone would enjoy it." I said honestly.

"Really? I will ask my fathers tonight." Robert said happily.

I nodded and took my usual seat in the floor beside the couch beside John.

Janine walked into the bedroom and a moment later Andrew walked out.

Trey moved to sit on my other side.

"I know you were planning on taking Ronny and John shopping tonight, but now that I'm out, I can do it." Logan said to Scott.

"Would you guys mind if you had a few more people on your shopping expedition?" Andrew asked hopefully.

"Who you got?" Matt asked as he took a seat on a sofa.

"My dad, my brother and my brother-in-law." Andrew said with a smile.

"Who?" Logan asked in confusion.

"You'll have to forgive Andrew. He's just so happy to have his father here and a new brother that he can't pass up an opportunity to say it. What he means is Lee, Spike and Alex would like to go clothes shopping with you." Alan said with a loving look at Andrew.

"Fine with me." Logan said and looked to John and Ronny who both shrugged noncommittally.

"Great. We're going to need to take two cars for the clothes shopping and a truck for the food shopping. Does anyone need anything from the grocery store?" Andrew asked the room.

"Jell-O!" Icheb, Trey and Jimmy said immediately.

"Lots of Jell-O, got it." Andrew said with a fond smile.

"Remy need to buy clothes too." Remy said shyly.

"Go ahead Remy, Alan and I will stay here with the babies. Some of the kids can go to help with groceries and some can stay and help with babies." Xander said tenderly.

Remy nodded and gave Xander a gentle kiss.

"Who's riding with me?" Logan asked the room.

Trey, John, Ronny and I raised our hands.

"Scott will be riding with you too. He has the credit card." Alan said to the group.

"Who's with me?" Alex asked the group.

Jimmy, Lee, Remy and Spike raised their hands.

"Clark, you got a minute mate? We need to have us a quick chat before we leave." Mr. Burroughs said seriously.

"Um, sure." I said and got up to follow him out of the room.

Mr. Burroughs closed the door of the dining room and asked, "First off. Do you have your story written?"

"Kind of. I still want to do more with it. But I think you'll get the idea." I said uneasily.

Mr. Burroughs held out his hand and I gave him the folded up piece of paper.

>Those who are gone. My Friends.

>

>My Friends - When I was alone, they came to talk to me.

>

>My Friends - Depend on me when they are in need.

>

>My Friends - Are popular and loved by all.

>

>My Friends - Warn me away from others who would hurt me.

>

>My Friends - Show that they care for me by including me in their plans.

>

>My Friends - Are the only friends I ever knew... until now.

>

>My New Friends - Talk to me, even when others can see.

>

>My New Friends - Depend on me, but let me depend on them too.

>

>My New Friends - Aren't just a popular image, they're real people.

>

>My New Friends - Encourage me to meet others and support my choices.

>

>My New Friends - Care for me, whether we do what they want or what I want.

>

>My New Friends - Are the kind of friends that last a lifetime.

>

>Clark

"Don't change a word of it mate. It's bloody brilliant just as it is." Mr. Burroughs said with a smile.

"Really?" I asked with wide eyes.

"Really. That's what I wanted to talk to you about. You've got talent as a writer. You can let your feelings show and not muck about. I was thinking of starting a school newspaper and wondered if you'd be interested in being on it." Mr. Burroughs asked seriously.

"But... I'm not even sure if I'm staying." I said in wonder at the offer.

"This is a whole other thing from that. If you decide to go to the Wagner school or someplace else, that won't change this. You can still write for our paper as our lead reporter, you'll just email your article to me." Mr. Burroughs said with hope in his voice.

"Who else? I mean, how many others are there on the newspaper?" I asked as a million questions flooded my mind.

"Right now? You and me. But if you say yes, I'll be asking our next reporter to join us in just a moe." Mr. Burroughs said with a big smile.

[He wants me to write for the newspaper. He says I have talent. He chose me before anyone else. Even if I don't go to this school, he still wants me.] I thought frantically.

"Yes." I said firmly.

"Good. You'll never regret it mate. You've got what it takes, I can tell." Mr. Burroughs said and walked to the door.

"Jimmy, If you'll come here, I think I've got a job for you." Mr. Burroughs said with a smile.

"Yes Uncle Spike?" Jimmy asked happily.

"Come in. Clark has just agreed to be on the school newspaper as our lead reporter. I just wondered if you'd like to be on the paper too?" Mr. Burroughs asked kindly.

"Yes. Oh, thank you Uncle Spike." Jimmy said and hugged Mr. Burroughs close.

"So how do you want your 'by' line to read?" Mr. Burroughs asked, directing his question to me.

"I... I guess I'll just use my name." I said with question.

"Think about that mate. We're at a school for mutants. I'm going to suggest that we not use anyone's real names either in the 'by' line or in the content of the articles. It's just too risky." Mr. Burroughs said seriously.

I thought about using 'Kal-El' but it just didn't feel right.

"Can you come up with something for me? I can't think of anything." I said helplessly.

"Farm boy?" Mr. Burroughs asked weakly.

"No thanks, I was worried when I came here that I'd be called farm boy. I'm not going to name myself that." I said with a laugh.

"Why don't you ask Uncle Scott? He bestows mutant names, he could name you too." Jimmy said helpfully.

"Whelp's got 'im a good idea." Mr. Burroughs said as he nodded his head.

"What about you Jimmy?" I asked curiously.

"I'll ask Uncle Scott too. I do not believe I want my Borg designation associated with my writing." Jimmy said seriously.

"Why are you coming with us?" I asked curiously.

"I have been told that I have a good sense of style. Perhaps I could be of assistance." Jimmy said plainly.

"That'd be good. You saw what my sense of style looked like." I said with a grin.

"Some clothes look better on the hanger.' Jimmy agreed.

Mr. Burroughs laughed as he opened the dining room door and led us back into the living room.

[Chapter 10: Shopping]

After dropping Dr. McCoy off at the mansion, we were on our way.

"Mr. Summers?" I asked hesitantly.

"We're outside class Clark, you can call me Scott." Mr. Summers said gently.

"Scott? Mr. Burroughs asked me to be a reporter on the school paper and suggested that you might be able to give me a name to use in my 'by' line." I said hesitantly.

"I guess I could. Let me think about it for a while." Scott said in thought.

"Jimmy needs one too. He said he doesn't want his Borg name connected with his writing." I said quickly.

"Good idea. I'll need a while to think about it. If anyone has any suggestions for a name for Clark and Jimmy let me know." Scott said to everyone in the van as he drove.

"Perhaps you could call Clark 'Vision'." Trey suggested.

"Vision... I think I like it." Scott said in thought.

"Why vision?" I asked curiously.

"Since your ability is optical, it conveys that obvious meaning. Deeper than that, to say that someone has vision speaks of their desire for a better future and commitment to make that future possible. I believe you have those traits." Trey said as he looked in my eyes.

"Thanks Trey... that's a good name." I said with a tender smile.

"Guys, don't leave me out." John said from Trey's other side.

Trey immediately put his arm around John and pulled him close.

"I think we should call Clark 'Heat Vision'." John said firmly.

"Why do you believe that?" Trey asked curiously.

Trying to match Trey's expression and inflection, John said, "Because Vision

sounds a little girley by itself. Clark's ability *is* optical, but it is also heat. And deeper than that..." Then his voice dipped into a seductive growl and he said, "...He's so fucking hot."

"John." Mr. Summers said sternly from the driver's seat.

"Come on Scott. When it's just us guys can you leave the teacher at home?" John asked hopefully.

"Okay John. But I don't like that kind of language, even from other adults." Scott said quietly.

"And now that you know that cussing makes Cyke uncomfortable, then doin it in front of him is showing disrespect. Think about how you feel about Scott and make your own decision." Logan said from the passenger seat.

"Got it. I'll keep a lid on it." John said seriously.

"Just tellin you cause I don't know if anyone explained it to you like that before. I'm not raggin on you." Logan said, then turned his attention back to the road.

"No. No one did. Thanks Logan. And I'm sorry Scott." John said timidly.

"No reason to be sorry, you didn't know. Now you do." Scott said in a tone of voice that said more than his words that he wasn't angry or offended.

I couldn't help it. I leaned across Trey and gave John a big kiss, then kissed Trey as I made my way back into my seat.

"So what about Jimmy?" Scott asked as he drove.

"What about him?" I asked in confusion.

"His name, do you guys have any ideas?" Scott asked with a smile. He'd seen us kissing.

"Our fathers call him squirt." Trey said in thought.

"That's fine for fathers, but from anyone else, it could be seen as an insult." Scott said carefully.

"It's just going to be for writing, right? More like an Internet ID than a

mutant name." John asked in thought.

"Yes, it'll just be for the newspaper." I said and flashed John a curious look.

"How about 'Mr. Roboto?', like from the old song?" John asked seriously.

"But Jimmy is not a robot. In fact, he demonstrates the least Borg behavior of any of us." Trey said defensively.

"I didn't mean it as an insult. I just thought it would be a cool name, it has something to do with him personally, since he has machines in him, and the Mister says that he is also organic, since you don't call a machine mister." John reasoned to Trey.

"We'll ask him. If he likes it, that's fine, if he doesn't, we won't push it on him." Scott said firmly.

I gave Trey a quick kiss then whispered, "Give that to John for me."

Trey smiled and gave John a quick, gentle kiss.

"You guys experimenting with sex?" Logan asked from the passenger seat.

"Not at the moment." John said carefully, looking at Logan.

"Not what I meant, and you know it. Come on, if we're going to be living together, I need to know what's going on." Logan said simply.

"We've kissed some. That's it." John said seriously.

"You and Clark?" Logan asked to be sure.

"Yeah, and Trey." John said, watching Logan closely for his reaction.

"You know about safe sex?" Logan asked without a flinch.

"Yeah, but Clark and Trey aren't human and probably can't get any human diseases anyway. Besides, I got my test back today and I'm clean." John said and noticed Ronny's wide eyed gaze.

"Okay. Ground rules. What you do in your room is your business. Me and the kid will stay out of it. But keep it in your room. I find you humping on the couch, I'm gonna throw a bucket of cold water on you." Logan said firmly.

John nodded, then asked, "What about overnight guests?"

"Scott needs to know if Clark stays over, and you be honest about what you'll be doing. Trey will need to tell his fathers. As long as you're honest with everyone. It's fine... but don't let it interfere with your schooling." Logan added firmly.

"Yeah. I can live with that." John said in thought.

"It ain't just for you. That's the same for me and tha kid. What we do in our rooms is our business. We can have overnight guests as long as everyone is honest about it. No secrets, no lies." Logan said and made eye contact with John.

John met his gaze and broke into a smile.

"It's a deal." John said happily.

There was a long minute of silence before John finally thought of something to ask.

"What's the dress code around the house? I mean, I may need to buy some pajamas or shorts or something." John asked cautiously.

Logan thought for a second, then asked, "Kid, you got any problem seeing a dick or a bare ass?"

"No problem." Ronny said quietly.

"There you go. Wear some shorts or somethin around the house, but if it's just us in the house and you walk from the bathroom to your room naked, it's no big deal." Logan said without concern.

"Thanks Logan. I think this is gonna be cool." John said with a smile.

"You may not think so when you see me come out of the shower. I got a hairy ass." Logan said and turned his gaze back to the road ahead.

John, Ronny and I chuckled like a bunch of six year olds as Trey looked out the window without expression.

"What's wrong Trey?" I asked with concern.

"I don't want John to leave." He said, still not facing me.

"He needs a place to stay and it costs money to stay at the mansion." I tried to explain.

"I understand the reason, I just don't want him to leave. I want to be able to see him every day. The separation will be distressing." Trey said darkly.

"You'll see him every day at school, and you'll probably spend most every weekend together." Scott said from the front.

"It will be difficult for me. I am used to having all those I love near me. The distance will be uncomfortable." Trey said with difficulty.

"I know Trey, but we'll adapt to the change, and we can help each other." I said, trying to convey the sincerity of my words.

Trey nodded and went silent.

* * * * *

I walked into the bedroom carrying nearly a dozen bags, John followed me in carrying just as much. The shopping trip had been a lot of fun.

"I can't believe we bought all this stuff." I said in wonder.

"I can't believe *you* bought all that stuff. I thought you'd pick out one or two things at the most... off the bargain rack." John said as he started opening bags.

"Gee, thanks." I said before turning my attention to my own bags.

"I was just surprised, that's all." John said uncertainly.

"Yeah, well, Mom gave me a handful of money when she left, it was almost \$400. I figured that I needed the clothes, so I spent it." I said, keeping my attention focused on my clothes.

I was surprised to feel John's hand on my shoulder, turning me.

"Clark, can I have a kiss?" John asked in a whisper.

I responded by giving him a full, deep kiss.

Everything else melted away as I lost myself.

Finally, the kiss broke and John pulled back to look me in the eyes.

"I love you." I whispered, looking deep into John's gaze.

"I love you too Clark." John said with a gentle smile.

John pulled me into a firm hug and we just stood there, holding each other, for long minutes.

"We'd better get these clothes put away so we can get to bed." John whispered into my ear.

"Now that's what I call incentive." I said with a smile.

John chuckled and released me from the hug.

* * * * *

John and I finished putting our clothes away at nearly the same time.

"You want to join me for a shower?" John asked tentatively.

"Is there enough room for both of us?" I asked, thinking that the shower stall was awfully small.

"I think we'll be able to manage, come on." John said with a small, peaceful smile.

* * * * *

I carefully pulled off my clothes and followed John into the bathroom.

John turned on the water and adjusted it to just the right temperature.

"You okay? You look a little nervous." John asked as he put a hand on my shoulder.

"Better than okay." I whispered.

We got into the shower and strangely enough, we got to the business of showering right away. Somehow I had imagined us having sex in the shower, but instead, we washed each other.

John washed my hair so gently and tenderly that it was an act of love. I did my best to be just as gentle and loving as I washed his hair.

The rest of the shower went by too fast. We *did* linger on a few choice parts of each other's anatomy, but not too long. Finally the shower was finished.

John dried me with gentle care. He toweled my hair, then moved to every part of my body, patting me dry with the most delicate touch. I dried John just as carefully and finally it was time for bed.

"Do you want to share my bed tonight?" I asked quietly.

"Do you want me to?" John asked, matching my quiet voice.

"Yeah, I do... but..." I trailed off.

"...You don't want to go too far. You want to wait for Trey." John said, finishing my statement.

"Yeah, I feel like we'd be cheating on him if we had sex without him." I said as we walked to my bed.

"Me too. I'm glad you feel the same. I was worried about telling you." John said with relief.

"We love him. We need to wait for him." I said as I crawled between the sheets.

"Yeah." John said as he moved to my side.

"Do you think this is wrong?" I asked as I pulled John close.

"No. It doesn't feel wrong. It feels perfect." John said as he laid his head on my shoulder.

"Me too." I said as I enjoyed the feeling of being held and loved.

"Goodnight Clark." John whispered in a sleepy voice.

"Goodnight John." I said and drifted into sleep.

* * * * *

The day flew by.

Classes and power training just flew by. I don't know why Marie feels that the day drags. It seems to go by in a heartbeat to me.

The first time all day I had time to stop and think, we were all in the car, Scott, Trey, John and me. Logan needed to stay and clear up some things to do with buying the house.

We were about ten minutes away... from John's father.

"Guys... I'm... I'm kinda scared." John admitted. He had been silent up to now so I figure he's been coming to grips with everything he's feeling.

I was really regretting the choice for John to ride shotgun. He was in the front seat beside Scott and I wanted to hug him so bad.

Scott must have known what I was feeling or recognized John's need because he pulled off the road and came to a stop.

"Get in the back seat John." Scott said seriously.

"What?" John asked in a worried voice.

Scott smiled to let John know that he wasn't upset and said again, "Get in the back seat."

John looked at Scott curiously, then did as he was told.

I hurried to get out of the car and let John sit in the middle.

I guess he was expecting me to trade places with him and sit up front because I had to nudge him over to sit in the middle.

Once we were all belted in, Scott brought the car back onto the road.

Trey and I moved as one to hug John.

"Guys..." John whispered.

"We love you John. We know you're scared and this is all we can do to help." I said as I hugged him tightly.

"You looked like you needed it John." Scott said from the front.

"Thanks Scott. I mean really, I never would have expected you to be okay with this." John said as he relaxed in our embrace.

"We all support each other. It's how we get through." Scott said peacefully.

John nodded and seemed to be soaking in the comfort.

* * * * *

We walked into the building and John led the way into the elevator.

"We're on the fifth floor." John said and pressed '5'.

We stood silently, ready to face the unknown.

As I watched the numbers increase, I grabbed for John's hand and found it.

I gave his hand one quick squeeze before the doors opened and we separated.

John led the way out of the elevator.

Trey followed on his left as I followed on his right and Scott followed behind us.

"Over here." John said and walked to an office door.

John hesitantly opened the door and walked in.

* * * * *

I looked around the small office and noticed that it was the impersonal, sterile environment of any other office. This could easily be the office of a dentist, lawyer or tax preparer. Somehow I thought the office of a therapist would be more... inviting.

"Hi Dad." John said in nearly a whisper.

"Hi John." Mr. Allerdyce said, matching John's tone.

"Gentlemen, come in, the Doctor will see you now." The receptionist said in a professional and somewhat bored voice.

We all moved into the inner office.

* * * * *

"Hello, which of you is John?" The plump, thirty-something woman asked warmly.

John raised his hand a little.

"And who are your friends John?" the woman asked delightedly.

"Um, this is Scott, one of the teachers at the Institute, and this is Clark and Trey, my friends." John said in a broken meter.

"Well, I'm going to ask your friends to wait in the outer office." The woman said assertively.

"No." John said firmly.

"What?" The woman said, surprised at his non-compliance.

"No. If they leave, I leave." John said as a statement of fact.

"Okay... how about one of your friends stay? How's that?" the woman asked hopefully.

"Yeah, that'll work." John said and looked at me.

I nodded and took one step to stand at John's side. Trey and Scott quietly left the room.

"Where are my manors? My name is Susan, please, have a seat." Susan said, once again comfortable and at ease.

John and I sat down side by side on a couch as Mr. Allerdyce sat down in a chair.

"Rick's been telling me about your history and we've been trying to work out a way that you two can have some sort of a relationship." Susan said in thought.

"Why?" John asked without emotion.

"Excuse me?" Susan asked in surprise.

"Why should we have a relationship? I've been emancipated, I've got friends, I've been adopted into a family that wants me. I'm doing fine the way things are." John said coldly.

"But he's your father..." Susan said in disbelief.

"He knocked up mom. That's the only tie we've got as far as I'm concerned." John said, not looking at his father at all.

"John... please... can you work with me? Just give me a chance? Maybe you can have all that and a relationship with Rick too." Susan asked hopefully.

"I'm here. It's your move." John said firmly. I was surprised at John's cold attitude. I'd never seen him so closed off.

"Okay... Rick, why don't you tell John about your feelings?" Susan asked, turning her attention to Mr. Allerdyce.

"Yeah, John... I'm real sorry. I got no excuse for treating you bad. I was wrong, but I'm trying to be better. Will you give me a chance?" Mr. Allerdyce asked with hope.

John remained silent, and I could see the icy, impassive glare on his face. I touched his arm hesitantly.

John turned his attention to me and I looked into his eyes. John seemed to be looking for something in my eyes and I felt my eyebrows raise in question. A small smile fell over John's face, so I guess he found what he was looking for.

"Okay dad, but let me spell it out for you." John said and waited for Mr. Allerdyce's nod of confirmation.

"I'm a mutant and I'm gay. Either you can accept me as I am or not. If you

can accept me and not try to change me, I'll give you your chance. If you can't, then I don't need you in my life. I'm happy and I won't let you change that." John said with strength.

Mr. Allerdyce sat silently with wide eyes.

"John, is Clark your significant other?" Susan asked quietly.

"No, not yet. If I'm very lucky, maybe we'll be ready to take that step sometime. But for now we're friends... if it's any of your business." John finished in nearly a snarl.

The attitude seemed to roll off Susan without notice.

"Just wanting to understand your relationship." Susan said with an unconcerned shrug.

"John." Mr. Allerdyce said with a thoughtful expression, drawing our attention.

"I can do it." Mr. Allerdyce said, looking into John's eyes with hope.

"Okay dad." John said with a softer tone to his voice, then he turned to Susan and asked, "What now?"

Susan seemed a bit flustered by the development and paused before saying, "I guess we should set up some boundaries... ground rules for you both. That way you'll be able to deal with each other in a mature and productive way."

"I'm listening." John said, returning to his impassive voice.

"What do you see as Rick's roll if he's part of your life?" Susan asked hesitantly.

John thought for a second, then looked at me. His impassive expression faded to one of caring when he caught my eyes.

John looked at his father and said, "I think the father/son thing is pretty much shot. I'm considered an adult by the state of New York. I'm going to be moving into a house that I'm going to share with two other guys. If dad wants to come over and visit or go out and do something... as friends... we could try that."

Susan seemed to be surprised by the statement, but eventually nodded and asked, "Rick, how do you feel about that?"

"Yeah, I could do that." Mr. Allerdyce said quietly.

"What kind of things would you two be doing as friends?" Susan asked cautiously.

"I don't know. Maybe go to a monster truck rally or a wrestling match. Dad and I both like things like that." John said in thought.

"I'd like that." Mr. Allerdyce said with an almost happy expression.

"Good, good." Susan said with a gentle smile.

"But I think I'd need to take one of my friends with me. I don't think I could be comfortable with just the two of us yet." John said seriously.

A pained look came over Mr. Allerdyce's face but he eventually nodded.

"Okay, it sounds like it's worth a try. But if things don't go the way you expect, will you come back and let us try to work something else out?" Susan asked John hopefully.

"I'll come back, and I'll listen. I'm not promising any more than that." John said firmly.

"Good enough." Susan said with a nod and made a note on a pad before her.

"Do you want to do something for Thanksgiving?" Mr. Allerdyce asked John hesitantly.

John thought about the question before saying, "Let me ask Scott something. Give me a second."

John left the room and I sat looking at Susan and Mr. Allerdyce.

"Do you love him?" Mr. Allerdyce asked in a quiet voice that I could barely hear.

I nodded.

Mr. Allerdyce nodded back and hung his head.

"Scott says it's okay. If you want, you could come to the mansion and have Thanksgiving dinner with us. It'll start around two." John said as he came back into the room and sat beside me again.

"Yeah. Okay." Mr. Allerdyce said in a whisper.

"Well, that went better than I expected. John, Clark, it was nice to meet you. Rick, I'll expect to see you next Tuesday." Susan said as she got up from her desk.

John stood, and I followed.

Mr. Allerdyce walked to face John and gave him a questioning look.

John hesitantly took one step closer to Mr. Allerdyce and was pulled gently into a tentative hug.

John didn't respond at first, just stood stiffly as he was hugged. But finally he brought his arms up and returned the hug... a little anyway.

We left the office. Scott and Trey stood immediately and had twin expressions of concern.

I nodded a little to let them know it was okay.

"Let's go home." John said and led the way out of the office.

* * * * *

"God, I was so nervous. I didn't know if I was going to pass out or throw up." John said when we got into the car.

John, Trey and I automatically got into the back seat.

"Is everything alright?" Scott asked with concern as he started the car.

"I guess. Clark, how did I do?" John asked with uncertainty.

"You were perfect. You stood up for yourself, you told them exactly what you expected and were willing to listen. There's no way I would have done half as good." I said with pride for John.

"Thanks, I tried to remember all the things all three of you told me. There's no way I could have done that by myself." John said in an exhausted voice.

"But you did it. I can't think of anything more you could have done or said." I said as I held close to John's right side.

"Are you guys going to be up to 'family time' tonight?" Scott asked from the front.

"Yeah, I think I need some serious family time." John said as he enjoyed Trey and I holding him.

[Chapter 11: Cartoon Revelation II]

"Hey Guys!" Andrew called as we entered the boathouse.

I smiled at the warm and genuine greeting. I couldn't imagine what it would be like to be somewhere without family and wouldn't want to find out.

"How did things go?" Logan asked with concern.

"Good." John said, his warm look conveying more meaning than his monosyllabic response.

Logan nodded and turned his attention back to the television.

"What are we watching?" I asked, looking at blobs of color moving on the television screen.

"We're not exactly sure. It's like each color is a different army. Some of the strategies are amazing. We've been watching it since classes let out." Xander said from the couch beside Remy.

"Are you guys hungry? Dad made stew and biscuits for dinner and it was really great. It's still on the stove if you want some." Alan said, holding a baby in his arms.

I thought about the question and decided that I'd like something to eat. I'd eaten dinner before we left for the meeting, but I was too nervous to eat very much.

Apparently John was the same because he nodded and walked to the kitchen with me.

Scott, Trey and Alex came in with us.

"I can't get enough of his stew. This will be my fourth bowl." Alex said happily.

"Stew is the perfect food on a cold night like this." Scott said as he dipped a bowl of stew for himself.

"There's tea in the fridge if you want some. Just don't get the tea in the yellow pitcher." Alex said as he picked up two biscuits.

"What's wrong with the yellow pitcher?" Scott asked as he carried his food to the kitchen table.

"It's Borg tea. You probably wouldn't like it." Alex said with a smile as he sat beside Scott.

Trey seemed to perk up at that and went to the refrigerator to get himself a glass of tea from the yellow pitcher.

"What have we missed around here?" Scott asked between spoons of stew.

"Not much. Alan told us what was accomplished on the construction today and we compared notes on our classes... that's about all. Spike and Chris went with Angel over to Julia's for dinner. Oh yeah, Lee is going to start his mutant power training with Andrew on Monday." Alex said in thought.

I looked at Alex curiously and he continued, "Lee's ability is like Andrew's but he hasn't learned to target. They're going to work on it after the holiday."

I nodded and took another spoon. The stew really was excellent.

"How about you? What happened with your appointment?" Alex asked John curiously.

"Me and dad came to an understanding I guess. We're gonna try and work things out." John said uncomfortably.

"John was great. I'm proud of him." I said as I gave John a quick hug from the side.

"I don't know what was said in there, but he walked out with their respect." Scott said in confirmation.

John ducked his head and focused on his stew.

"That's great. I hope it works out for you." Alex said quietly.

John met Alex's eyes and nodded.

"Clark, come here quick!" Xander's voice called from the living room.

I ran out of the kitchen and into the living room. On the television, I could

see an image that I'd only ever seen in my dreams.

"It's about Krypton! Come on Clark, you don't want to miss this!" Andrew said with excitement.

I sat in the floor in front of the television, stunned.

The cartoon showed many people worrying about the red sun of their planet becoming unstable. Ja'reth, a leader of a group of people contacted some traders from the neighboring system of planets to arrange for his group to leave their home world.

The story continued to tell how the people were able to gather enough resources to get their own ship. They made way from their home system across the galaxy for nearly a hundred years before they settled on a new planet in a system with a red sun... just like Krypton. They named their colony 'New Krypton'.

I watched in wonder, in shock, as the story unfolded.

The cartoon told of survivors of my home planet... across the galaxy, but survivors. People like me. Living and growing, using their technology to create a sort of utopia. A perfect peaceful life for every person.

"What's wrong with the color?" Lee asked, squinting at the screen.

"That's what it looks like on a world with a red sun. The colors don't filter the same as with a yellow sun." I said as I watched the strangely familiar patterns of color.

The voice that had been in the background, describing the Krypton colony, was now coming from the mouth of one of the animated characters.

"Please, may we land and make repairs? Our ship has been damaged." The animated character asked in worry.

"New Krypton is a closed colony. You may land in an unpopulated area, make your repairs, then leave." A stern voice said from a speaker.

The animation showed the ship landing in a desert area, and clearly showed a large rip in the side of the ship's hull.

"Are you well?" A woman asked, running to the ship as the door opened.

"Yes, But I don't think we're supposed to be talking to anyone from the colony, they told us to land, make repairs and leave." the man said.

The woman nodded and said, "I am Venga... When you leave... may I go with you? The founders do not allow us to question them or participate in the decision making process. This colony is becoming stagnant and cannot survive." The woman said desperately.

The man smiled and said, "Come with me, I'll take you to a world where you can live and grow in freedom."

The scene skipped to show the ship leaving 'New Krypton' and going into space.

"In due time Venga became my wife and mother to my many children... We pass this story along so our children will know their heritage and be warned of the sin of hubris."

Then the cartoon showed the Borg coming and... scooping up... the colony. The fading image of the barren wasteland that was 'New Krypton' burned itself in my mind as the voice on the screen said, "Those who live their lives believing only in technology are destined to meet their end when superior technology arrives."

Silence fell over the room. My people, the last of my people... gone. Taken by the Borg.

"Clark? Are you okay?" Xander asked in a small, worried voice.

I snapped out of my shock and said, "Um, I don't know."

"This came from another dimension... it doesn't mean that the same thing happened here." Andrew said cautiously.

I nodded, not really understanding, but too shocked to really think about it.

I felt an arm come around my shoulders and looked to see Trey holding me with a fearful expression.

I hesitated, but finally leaned over and rested my head on Trey's shoulder.

"Clark, if you need to talk about anything, we're here for you." Andrew said with concern.

I nodded. My thoughts were racing and I couldn't focus on any one thought.

Then something occurred to me and made me jolt up out of Trey's embrace.

"How did you know?" I asked suddenly.

"What?" Andrew asked in puzzlement.

"I never told Trey or anyone the name of my home planet. How did you know?" I asked, feeling certain that they had lied to me somehow.

Andrew and Xander shared a look.

Alan was the one who finally spoke.

"Clark, those of us from other dimensions know about you. You're kind of a legend... or your counterpart is..." Alan trailed off and looked to Andrew for help.

I followed his gaze and looked at Andrew expectantly.

"Clark Kent is a fictional character in my world. In his secret identity... Superman... he fought crime and protected the Earth." Andrew said in thought.

"We didn't tell you because we didn't want to pressure you with all that." Xander said from the other couch.

I thought about what they said and finally asked, "So how much do you know about me?"

"You see, that's the thing. It isn't exactly about you. It's about someone else. We don't know how much of what we've learned is real and how much is made up." Andrew said with a helpless expression.

Lee got up off the couch and left the room.

"When were you going to tell me?" I asked in a small voice, feeling that I'd been betrayed.

"We wanted to be sure that you knew we were here for you. We didn't want you to feel that you were among strangers having to deal with this." Andrew said with a look of pain.

"But you are strangers. You pretended to not know me. You acted like you cared for me but you lied... a lie of omission." I said as tears welled up in my eyes.

Trey pulled me back into a hug.

"Did you know?" I asked Trey hesitantly.

"I knew that father knew of someone with your name from another dimension. That is all." Trey said fearfully, I could see that he was bracing himself for rejection.

"Why didn't you tell me?" I asked in a whisper.

"It never seemed topical." Trey said in a pained voice.

I nodded and pulled Trey close, letting him know that I wasn't angry at him.

Lee walked back into the room carrying a bag.

"Clark, after we met, I went back to my dimension to get my clothes and things... I picked this up while I was there." Lee said quietly as he handed me a plastic shopping bag.

I opened the bag and looked in wonder at the thick comic book compellation.

"This should tell you what you want to know. It's pretty much the origin of Superman and his early life." Lee said and walked back to the couch.

I looked at the book and then up at Andrew and Lee.

"Go ahead Clark. This will tell you what we know about you... or the other, fictional you." Andrew said with worry.

I nodded and opened the comic.

* * * * *

I had to laugh. Tights and a cape?

"What is it Clark?" Andrew asked at my reaction.

"Th... That outfit! Can you imagine... me... wearing that!" I said between chuckles.

Andrew laughed and even Trey smiled.

"Look... look at this. Lois Lane?" I said, as I laughed at the very thought.

Everyone was silent as they watched me leafing through the book.

"Wait..." I said as I found a name... a familiar name.

"Jimmy Olsen?" I said and looked at Jimmy.

"Yeah, funny coincidence isn't it? He was named after that fictional character." Andrew said weakly.

"Funny." I said uncertainly and flipped through a few more pages.

"We never considered we'd be meeting you back then. Alan and I thought Jimmy's personality was a perfect match for the fictional character we'd both read about... that's all.

"Clark, I would very much like to read that when you're finished, I would like to know more about my namesake." Jimmy said quietly.

I nodded and continued to page through the book.

I froze in place as I saw another familiar name.

"What is it?" Xander asked in concern.

"Lex." is all I could say.

"Oh... yeah." Andrew said shyly.

"One of my friends is a bad guy?" I asked uncertainly.

"In this story, yeah." Andrew said, sounding uncomfortable.

I closed the book and looked up. "I need some time to think... I'm going back to the mansion." I said as I stood.

Trey stood too and looked at me with concern.

"We're okay Trey, I'm not angry at you or anything. I just need some time." I whispered to Trey.

Some of the worry on his face lessened and I pulled him into a hug.

Trey pulled back and put his hands on the sides of my face then guided me into a full kiss.

Everything else faded as I focused on the sensation of Trey's passionate, loving kiss.

"Um... Guys?" Alan asked hesitantly.

Trey reluctantly broke the kiss and looked to his dad.

"It's okay if you kiss around us but... tone it down a little." Alan said carefully.

"Yes Dad." Trey said with a blush.

"I'll see you all tomorrow..." I said as I walked toward the door, diverting slightly to hand Jimmy the comic book.

"Clark, can I come with you?" John asked hopefully.

"Yeah." I said and continued to the door.

John hurried to follow.

* * * * *

"Did you know?" I asked as we walked in the chilly night air.

"No. Not at all." John said immediately.

I nodded and continued to walk.

"What's wrong? I mean, I sort of know, but I don't know what you're feeling." John said brokenly.

"Neither do I, not really. I'm feeling too many things all at once to be sure. I know I'm feeling betrayed. I trusted them and they lied to me... for whatever reason, it doesn't change the fact that it hurts." I said as I gazed ahead of us.

"I know. It'll be tough to trust them again... but you will, won't you?" John finished quietly.

"Yeah... I think... I don't know. I thought they really liked me, but now... what if it's the guy in the tights they really like and they want me to be him?" I asked as I stopped to look in John's eyes.

"I don't think they want you to be anything but yourself. What would you have done if they told you all this on Sunday?" John asked seriously.

I thought about that... I was scared... alone... didn't know anyone... If they told me this, I would have left, avoided everyone, wouldn't have been able to accept Trey... maybe not even John.

"Okay, I got that... in my head at least. But I still feel like I was betrayed." I said as I started to walk again.

"This is the bad thing about schools." John said distantly.

"What?" I asked in total confusion.

"They make you think that there's always a right answer. But in life, sometimes there's only wrong answers. You just have to pick the one that's least wrong." John said in thought.

I considered his words and continued in silence.

"Clark?" He asked hesitantly.

"Yeah?"

"Are you going to stay?" John asked quietly.

"Yeah, I am. I think I knew the first night, I just told myself that I wouldn't decide till Thursday." I said as we finally reached the back of the mansion.

* * * * *

As we walked into the bedroom, we both automatically shed our clothes.

"Clark?" John said quietly.

"Yeah?" I asked, devoting my attention to him.

"Wanna race?" John asked with a shy smile.

"No... I think I'd like another game." I said shyly.

"Like what?" John said as he took a step closer to me.

"I don't know, something that involves kissing, holding... and ends up with us both getting off." I said as I looked into his eyes.

"I think I like the sound of that game." John said with a smile.

"What about Trey?" I asked as I took a step toward John, bringing me within touching distance of him.

"I want to save sex... I mean real sex... until he can join us. But this... fun sex, where we get each other off. I think this is okay with just the two of us." John said as he gently let his fingertips drag from my shoulders, down my arms.

"I really wish he could be here with us." I said as I moved my hands behind John to rest on his butt.

"Yeah, maybe he can sleep over after Thanksgiving... when we don't have to be up early for school." John said as he moved one hand down between us to fondle both our growing erections at once.

"Love you." I whispered as I looked deeply into his eyes.

"Love you too." He whispered back.

John began pumping us both with his one hand as the other hand rested on my butt.

I held his butt firmly in both my hands and got lost in the sensation.

"Let's get into bed Clark, I want to get off by rubbing up against you." John whispered.

"Yeah." I whispered back, thinking that was the most erotic thing he could have suggested.

I moved away to turn off the light and crawled into bed with John.

"I love you Clark." John said as he moved on top of me. He positioned himself over me and gently came to rest on top of me with his erect cock lined up right next to mine.

"Move." he whispered.

I experimentally moved and felt the friction of my cock against his.

Slowly I began to grind my pelvis against his.

"Yeah." John gasped and began doing the same to me.

I brought my hands to his sides and gently dragged them down till they cupped his butt. Then I started pulling him in time with my thrusts.

"God Clark, that's good." John whispered in my ear with a hot breath.

I turned my head and kissed him while continuing to pull his butt in time with my own thrusts.

We moved in perfect synchronization as our bodies began to sweat.

The sweat provided lubrication and the new sensation took us to another level of pleasure.

"I'm close." John gasped as he continued to thrust.

"Me too." I rasped.

John continued to thrust and I could feel the tingle growing deep inside me.

I started pulling John's butt with more force, grinding him faster and harder against me as I felt his hot breath on my neck.

I felt John's arms wrap around me and he squeezed me tight against him as he thrust and held for a second.

The gush of John's warm seed spilled across my belly and the feeling and the tightness caused my own orgasm to begin.

John began to thrust in long sharp jabs as more spurts of semen filled the space between us.

I felt like every fluid in my body was being forced out through my cock. The release was more intense and satisfying than any I'd ever had before.

Silence fell.

I was acutely aware of John's breath against my neck and the sticky warmth on my belly.

"Clark?" John said quietly, but it seemed loud in the otherwise silent room.

Rather than further disturb the silence, I turned to place a kiss on John's neck.

John turned his head and we shared a long, comfortable kiss.

"I really love you Clark. I never imagined it would feel like this." John said as he looked in my eyes.

His expression surprised me. He seemed to be... depressed, lost in darkness.

"What's wrong John?" I asked with immediate concern.

"You deserve better than me." John said as tears began to well up in his eyes.

"John, tell me what's wrong. Why would you think something like that?" I asked as panic began to well up in me.

John shifted his weight and came to rest beside me.

"Ewww." I said, looking at the sticky mess on our stomachs, glittering in the moonlight.

"I guess we're going to need another shower." John said, not looking at me.

"John, please tell me..." I said, willing him to look at me again.

"Just a minute." John said quickly and jumped up out of the bed.

I waited with cooling semen on my stomach and worry in my eyes.

John came back a minute later with a damp hand towel. He gently cleaned me up, then let the hand towel drop to the floor beside the bed.

"Will you tell me?" I asked, begging with my eyes and voice.

John sat on the edge of the bed, looking away.

I sat up and moved beside John. I didn't know if he would accept a hug from me right now, so I carefully took hold of one of his hands and gripped it firmly.

John looked at me with fear and misery in his eyes.

"Please tell me." I said in my softest voice.

"Clark... I've done some things... I don't deserve you." John said, obviously trying to hold back his tears.

I didn't even think, I pulled him into a hug and held him, not pushing anymore.

We sat, holding each other in silence. Just giving and receiving comfort.

I don't know how much time passed, but finally he calmed and I had to say something.

"If you want to tell me, I'll listen. But if you don't I won't ask again, I promise." I said as I continued to hold him.

John pulled out of my arms and drew in a deep breath to brace himself.

I waited expectantly for whatever admission he was about to make, promising myself that I wouldn't let whatever it was change my feelings toward him.

"I killed some people." John mumbled.

I forced myself to not react and said, "Tell me what happened."

"The school was attacked, some of us got out. We went to Bobby's family's house, thinking it would be a safe place." John said, looking into a place of distant memory.

I remained silent, letting him go at his own pace.

"Ronny called the cops and told them we were mutant terrorists." John eventually said with pain in his voice.

I nodded slightly but said nothing.

"The cops came... one of them shot Logan in the head and I... I lost it." John said with a tremble in his voice.

"Go on." I whispered and took hold of his hand.

"I killed them... I lit my lighter and used my power full force against the cops."

The tears were streaming down his cheeks now, but I wanted to wait till he got it all out.

I waited as John sat there, looking off into space with tears falling.

Finally he turned his attention to me. I took this as my cue to speak.

"I love you." I said in a whisper.

"What?" John said in disbelief.

"I love you. I know what kind of person you are, and whatever happened before doesn't change how I think or feel about you now." I said firmly.

"Okay, but there's more." John said in a mumble and looked away from me again.

I took hold of his hand again and squeezed to let him know that I was paying attention.

"I... I..." He trailed off.

I pulled him to stand with our joined hands and into a hug and whispered, "Just tell me."

"I had sex for money... When I left the school... I didn't know what else to do... There were guys willing to pay me... I was so hungry..." He said in pain.

"I love you." I whispered. His admission was a surprise, but I put that aside to deal with the emotional pain before me.

"You do?" John whispered in surprise.

"Yeah. I really do. And all that stuff just makes me love you more. You went through all that and still turned out to be the wonderful guy I fell in love with." I said as I stroked his back in comfort.

I could actually feel John's muscles relax and the tension release from his body. He was really worried that I'd reject him because of all that.

"I have something to tell you too." I whispered to John.

John pulled back to look me in the eyes.

"I'm cold and I'm standing on the wet towel." I said as gravely and seriously as I could.

John smiled and pulled me into bed with him.

We laid there for a few minutes holding each other before he asked, "Are you really okay with everything?"

"Yeah. I really am. I haven't gone through anything like that, so I don't know how you feel, but I know how I feel. I love you... that's all I need to know." I said in thought.

"Ya know, I think I believe you." John said as he snuffled against my chest.

"Superman wouldn't tell a lie." I said with a smile as I enjoyed John's warmth against my side.

John chuckled. We both went silent, lost in our own thoughts until we drifted into sleep.

* * * * *

"JOHN! CLARK! COME QUICK!" Ronny screamed from our bedroom door, then ran away.

I bolted upright in bed at the sound of panic in his voice.

John was out of bed and grabbing clothes a heartbeat before me.

As soon as we both had pants on, we hurried out of the room and into chaos.

"What's wrong?" I asked as I noticed everyone looking around.

"Peter... something happened to him." Ronny said from outside his bedroom door.

"What happened?" John asked as Dr. McCoy ran down the hall and into Peter's room.

"I don't know." Ronny said helplessly, then continued, "Bobby got ready to go running with Peter and found him... he told me to call Dr. McCoy and went back to Peter's room."

Ronny was about to lose it. I looked at John and jerked my head in a 'come on' gesture and went to Ronny's side.

John went to Ronny's other side and we each put a casual arm around him to offer support.

Dr. McCoy ran out of Peter's bedroom carrying Peter followed closely by Bobby. Peter was dripping wet and wrapped in a sheet.

"I need Scott, Andrew and Tara. Call them to MedLab." Dr. McCoy said as he ran by.

"I'll get Tara." Marie said quickly.

"We'll get Scott." I said, looking at John.

"I'll call Andrew." Kitty called and ran to her own room.

John and I walked to Scott's door with Ronny between us.

John knocked forcefully and in a second, Scott was there.

"What's wrong?" Scott asked with full worry.

"Something happened to Peter. Dr. McCoy wants you in the MedLab." Ronny said in a surprisingly steady voice.

"On my way... will you guys try to keep everyone calm and away from MedLab?" Scott asked as he grabbed a sweatshirt from just inside the door and pulled it on.

"We're on it." John said firmly.

"Thanks guys." Scott said as he hurried down the hall in his bare feet.

[Chapter 12: Coping]

Ronny organized the kids into a breakfast making brigade.

French toast isn't that complicated to make, but somehow Ronny was able to make the process have twenty steps, and each step required one of the kids.

There was a mountain of French toast toasted, sausage cooked, coffee made and juice poured before Mr. Summers came into the dining room.

"How is he?" John asked immediately.

"I don't know. Dr. McCoy is still working on him." Scott said in shock.

"What's wrong with him?" Artie asked with worry.

"He had an attack..." Mr. Summers said, obviously withholding the truth.

I looked at John and met his gaze, we were going to talk to Scott privately later.

"Look at all this French toast!" Scott exclaimed, effectively changing the subject.

"We all made it... it was fun." Clarissa said happily.

"Do you mind if I have some?" Mr. Summers asked hopefully.

"Sit down and we'll bring it to you." Clarissa said proudly.

Mr. Summers took a seat. I looked at John, and he nodded. We moved as one to sit with Scott.

* * * * *

We all three had plates put before us and were eating in relative silence until John asked, "What's really wrong with Peter?"

Scott turned to face John and was obviously in thought. Finally he said, "Sometimes people have things... personal things that they don't want other people to know about. Do you know what I mean?"

"Yeah." John said darkly.

"Peter has some too. I'd never tell yours, and I won't tell Peter's, that's all I can say." Scott said seriously.

John nodded and focused back on his food.

"Is there anything we can do?" I asked, feeling kind of a numb shock about the whole morning.

"Yeah, actually there is. You guys... and Ronny, you can help Bobby and Robert through this. They're a lot closer to Peter than anyone else. I think they'll need your support." Scott said in thought.

"We can do that." John said firmly.

"Yeah, we can do that now." I said and stood up.

"Bobby's with Peter now, you can't go down there." Scott said quietly.

"I need to talk to Bobby, just for a few minutes. I promise I won't bother Peter, I just have to let Bobby know that we're here for him." I said in concern.

"When you get down there, tell Hank I said it was okay for you to be there." Scott said grimly.

"I promise I won't stay long or get in the way." I said and looked at John.

"I'll talk to Ronny, then we'll find Robert." John said quietly.

I nodded and left the room.

* * * * *

I walked into the MedLab and found Bobby sitting in the waiting room staring into space.

"Bobby?" I said in a whisper.

Bobby looked up at me, but his expression said that he didn't really see me.

"Come here." I said and opened my arms to him.

Bobby stood and I pulled him into a hug.

We stood silently. I just held him, trying to offer comfort as Bobby stood rigidly.

I heard a sound and turned to see Alan and Robert walk into the room.

"Bobby?" Robert said in a small voice.

I released Bobby from the hug and motioned for Robert to take over.

Robert ran to Bobby and held him tightly.

"What happened?" Alan asked in a whisper.

"I don't know. I just got here." I said quietly, watching Bobby and Robert holding each other tightly.

Andrew walked out of the examining room and the look of despair on his face made ice flow through my veins.

"Andy?" Alan asked in panic.

"We were too late." Andrew said in hitching breaths and ran into Alan's arms.

"No." Bobby whispered as tears began to fall.

"I'm sorry Bobby, there was nothing we could do. We tried everything..." Andrew said as he held tightly to Alan.

"No. He can't be... I just saw him last night." Bobby said as he held Robert in a crushing grip.

I wanted to help, I wanted to hold someone, I wanted to be held.

I looked to the doorway and saw Trey standing just outside, watching silently.

Without thought I ran to him and pulled him close.

"What is wrong?" Trey asked in a whisper.

"Peter's dead." I said, feeling bitterness in my mouth at saying the words.

Trey was silent after that and we held on to each other as the rest of the world took care of itself.

* * * * *

"Clark." A voice intruded on my flood of emotions.

I looked up into the concerned eyes of Ronny and John.

I released my grip on Trey and put out one arm to invite Ronny and John into the hug.

"What happened?" John asked in fear.

I couldn't say it again. I couldn't say anything.

"Peter is dead." Trey whispered into the four-way hug.

Ronny pulled out of the hug and ran to Bobby and Robert.

He hugged them both as tightly as he could.

"Everyone, you need to go upstairs." Dr. McCoy said in a hollow voice.

"I... I don't want to leave him." Bobby mumbled from his three-way embrace.

"It's okay Bobby, stay as long as you need to." Alan said and looked at Dr. McCoy, hoping for understanding.

"Yes, stay as long as you need to." Dr. McCoy whispered and walked back into the examination room.

Ms. Munroe and Mr. Summers came into the room at a run.

"Where is Hank?" Ms. Munroe asked breathlessly.

I pulled an arm free and pointed to the room behind us.

Ms. Munroe ran into the room as quickly as she could. Scott walked over to

us and said, "Come on guys, you don't need to be here."

I looked at Scott and could see the tears falling under his glasses.

I pulled myself out of the hug and hugged Scott instead.

Scott accepted the hug and we stood there silently but for the occasional sob.

"Come on." Scott whispered and pulled me to walk with him, his arm still around me.

Trey and John followed us, then Andrew and Alan.

Bobby, Ronny and Robert stayed there.

We got into the elevator, still holding each other, still silent.

* * * * *

"Logan, will you see to the kids... we won't be having classes today." Scott said from my side.

"Sure Cyke." Logan said quietly and gripped Mr. Summers shoulder firmly in support.

Scott led us to the library and closed the door behind us.

"What... what happened to him?" John asked in a small voice.

"He cut his wrists... last night from the look of it." Scott said as he took a seat.

"What? Why? Peter is one of the friendliest, happiest people I've ever met." John said in disbelief.

"Peter had his own problems, just like anyone." Alan said darkly, still standing, holding Andrew.

"Peter had a disorder, I knew he was prone to bouts of depression... but I thought he was doing so much better." Scott said in despair.

I couldn't help it, he needed to be held. I moved my chair beside his and

hugged him again.

He turned and took off his glasses then put his head on my shoulder. He held me tightly and cried into my shoulder.

Scott's open crying was the trigger for the rest of us. All of us, Andrew, Alan, Trey, John and I cried openly as we held on to each other.

The door opened and Ronny walked in alone.

He didn't say a word, just walked to Trey and John and was immediately drawn into their hug. He began to cry with the rest of us.

* * * * *

The world had changed.

Something in me died with Peter. I'd never lost anyone before, not like that. He was a friend, my age, alive the day before. Now he's gone... forever.

I looked up from my hug with Scott and... where did all my emotions go? I was feeling and crying and grieving... now nothing.

Scott lifted his head and put his glasses back on.

"We need to take care of the kids now. They're going to need us, all of us." Scott said as he wiped the tears off his face.

"Yeah, Alan and I are going to get everyone at the boathouse and bring them here. I think we need to be together." Andrew said weakly.

"I guess we'll go to the common room." John said in a hollow voice.

"No, John, Clark, Ronny and Trey, you need to take care of Bobby. He and Robert need you." Scott said as he stood and straightened his sweatshirt and pajamas.

"We're on it." I said and walked to the guys.

"This is going to be tough, find me if you need me." Scott said seriously.

I nodded as I laid a hand on John's back.

"And Clark... thanks." Scott said with a note of tenderness.

I nodded in confirmation before leaving with the guys.

* * * * *

We walked into the MedLab to find Bobby and Robert just as we'd left them.

"Bobby, come on." John whispered and put a hand on his shoulder.

Bobby looked up at John with watery, questioning eyes.

"Let's go up to your room. You need to get dressed." John said quietly.

Bobby allowed John to draw him away.

I looked into Trey's eyes, then glanced at Robert.

Trey took the hint and pulled Robert to his side.

I moved to Robert's other side as Ronny moved to Bobby's other side.

The six of us awkwardly made our way out of the MedLab.

* * * * *

There was a knock on the door.

I got up from Ronny's bed where I'd been sitting and answered it.

William was standing there with a helpless, devastated expression.

"Come on in, Robert's over there." I said and guided William into the room.

Robert pulled away from Trey and ran to his twin.

The two held close and then finally Robert began to cry for real.

Trey moved beside the two and gently draped an arm around each boys shoulder.

I moved to Bobby's bed and sat beside John, the other side from Bobby.

"Why did he do it?" William asked through his sobs.

All of us had been wondering, but none of us had dared to ask.

"He said... He left a note... he said he couldn't live like this anymore." Bobby said through his own sobs.

"He said... he was sorry. Over and over he said how sorry he was... but he hated himself... and his life, and... and he couldn't go on." Bobby said before breaking down into fresh tears.

"But he was happy. I saw him yesterday. He was happy." William said in confusion.

"He said... he loved me." Bobby said into John's shoulder with great heaving sobs.

"He said... he thanked me for being... the best friend he... he ever had..." Bobby said, between gasps of breath.

I reached around John to lay my hand on the back of Bobby's neck, wanting to offer him some kind of comfort, anything.

Silence fell over the room. There was nothing left to say.

* * * * *

There was a knock on the door a while later, Ronny got up to answer it.

"Can I come in?" Alan asked quietly.

"Yeah, we're havin a party." Ronny said with a weak, watery expression.

"They're having a party in the dining room and common room too." Alan said as he walked in and draped an arm around Ronny's shoulder.

None of us had anything to say.

"Do you guys want to talk about it?" Alan asked as he pulled a chair between the two beds.

"I just... I don't understand." Trey said in bewilderment.

"I know. And if you've never felt it, I don't think there's any way of describing it." Alan said, looking off into the distance.

"It's like everything is dark... and cold." I said, thinking about some of the things I'd felt in the past.

"And everyone is watching you... judging you." John said from beside me.

"People who are happy are mocking you." Ronny said with a distant expression.

"No one cares." I said as I held John just a little closer.

"There's no point to anything... living just hurts." Ronny added.

"It's so lonely. Nothing and no one can break through it." Bobby whispered.

Alan looked on in surprise as we described the feelings, apparently feelings we had all had.

"I've thought about it. I almost did it." John said darkly.

"I've thought about it too. I didn't try it but... It wasn't too far off." I said quietly.

"I was gonna do it a couple times, I just... didn't." Ronny said as he looked at the floor.

"I did." Alan whispered and pulled the sleeves of his shirt up to expose the scars on his inner arms.

William, Robert and Trey encircled Alan and held him close.

"So it could happen to any of us." Ronny said in thought.

"It could." I said, knowing that if things had turned out differently in my own life...

"How can we prevent it? I do not want any of you to die." Trey said with worry.

"This is something each of us has to do for ourselves. No one can do it for you." Alan said firmly.

"I know if I was feeling... that way... that I could talk to Andrew or Scott and they'd help me come back to my senses. I'm pretty sure you guys would do that for each other." Alan said speculatively.

"Yeah, we would." John said quietly.

"Bobby, if Peter had come to you last night... what would you have done?" Alan asked carefully.

"Listened, talked to him, helped him however I could." Bobby said with a helpless look in his watery eyes.

"Do you think he knew that?" Alan asked, meeting Bobby's gaze.

"Yeah, I know he did." Bobby said with certainty.

"I don't know of any more you could have done then. Bobby, it isn't your fault." Alan finished firmly, trying to force Bobby to accept the point.

Bobby reluctantly nodded.

"If you guys are up to it, I'd like to go to the clearing by the lake for some power training." Alan said as he stood.

"What?" Ronny asked in disbelief.

"Okay, maybe not power training exactly... more like blowing things up until I feel a little better." Alan said with a timid smile.

I thought about that and said, "I feel like blowing away some rocks."

"I'm going to incinerate a tree or something." John said as he stood.

"Would you like to join me for some combat training?" Trey asked William and Robert.

Both twins nodded.

"Do you think anyone would mind if I froze the lake?" Bobby asked as he stood to join the rest of us.

"Today, I don't think anyone would mind." Alan said with a smile as he led the way out of the room.

* * * * *

Wednesday night...

It came so quickly, and yet I've lived a lifetime in the days that I've been here.

I've found friends, found love, lost a friend... I don't think I was really living before I came here.

My whole life was... two dimensional, like that comic book. My friends didn't have any substance. My days were filled with meaningless repetition.

I was living out of habit... I didn't do anything different. Nothing challenged me, nothing was asked of me, I was a kid.

Tomorrow my Mom and Dad will be here... What am I going to do? How can I explain?

"You ready for bed?" John asked as he walked out of the bathroom... naked as usual.

"Yeah." I said with distraction.

"How are you doing?" John asked with concern.

"Better than ever." I said as I pulled him into a kiss.

When the kiss broke, we crawled into bed and held each other close.

This is what it's all about. Having someone who loves you.

"Love you." I whispered.

"Love you too." He whispered back and placed a kiss on my collarbone.

I smiled as I felt sleep overtake me.

* * * * *

There was a knock on the door.

"Come in." I said, hopefully loudly enough for the person outside the door to hear me.

"Clark?" Trey said as he walked into the room.

"Come in Trey." I said with a peaceful smile.

Trey got a look of tenderness in his eyes.

"Dad and Robert came early to begin preparing Thanksgiving dinner, I thought we could visit while they cooked." Trey said shyly.

"Well, there's some room over here if you want to join us." I said with a smile.

Trey began to move toward the bed and I held up a hand.

"You're overdressed for this activity." I said in my best imitation of Borg inflection.

Trey smiled at my adoption of his manner of speech and began to undress.

"Did you and John enjoy sexuality last night?" Trey asked timidly.

"No Trey, we just slept. John and I fool around a little, but we both decided that we didn't want to have actual sex without you." I said, watching for Trey's reaction.

Trey blushed as he slipped under the covers and spooned behind John.

"Comfortable?" I asked with a smile.

"Quite." Trey said happily.

I lifted my head, trying not to dislodge John from my chest, and gave Trey a welcoming kiss.

"Now this is the way to wake up." John said with a chuckle.

"How's that?" I asked with a smile as I relaxed back on the pillow.

"With two horny guys in my bed, kissing over me. One boner stabbing me in the belly and another in my ass cheeks. I can't think of a better way to wake up." John said happily.

"Since the three of us are here... and naked... and it's not a school day..." I said with a leer at John.

"Yeah, Trey, what do you think? Are you ready to go all the way?" John asked, turning his attention to Trey over his shoulder.

"Yes, I have been unable to think of much else for days." Trey said with a predatory grin that seemed uncharacteristic of him.

"Okay, Trey, I need you to let me out to get supplies. I'll be back in a minute." John said quickly.

"I will be timing you." Trey said as he moved from behind John.

John looked surprised, but hurried out of the bed and ran to the bathroom, he quickly ran back to the bed carrying a towel and a tube of something.

Trey was standing beside the bed looking delicious. His skin was flawless and his erection was slightly bobbing with his heartbeat... [I wonder if that's how he keeps time?] I thought to myself and smiled at the thought.

"43 seconds." Trey said with a smile as he crawled into bed behind John.

"First things first." John said firmly and looked Trey in the eyes.

"I love you Trey." John said in a no nonsense voice.

Trey smiled a radiant smile and said, "I love you too John."

"I love you too Trey." I said, looking in his eyes and waiting for one of those smiles directed at me.

"I love you Clark." Trey said... and there it was... big and bright and full blast and just for me.

"Okay, now that we understand each other... anyone know how we're going to do this?" John asked looking at Trey, then at me.

I looked at Trey and John and shook my head.

Trey also shook his head.

"Trey and I are virgins, you'll have to take the lead." I said shyly.

"Okay... let me just say it..." John said with a look of barely restrained humor.

Trey and I waited anxiously.

"I woke up this morning with two... gorgeous... naked... extra-terrestrial... virgins... in my bed. And they want me to show them how to make love. Am I the luckiest guy in the world or what?" John said with a glorious smile.

Trey and I both moved in to kiss John at once. Trey kissed him first, then moved away so I could have a turn. We took turns like that for a while, and every third or fourth kiss, we'd stop to kiss each other.

"Clark, roll over and I'm going to show Trey how to prepare me by preparing you." John said with a smile.

"So I'm a visual aid?" I asked with mock hurt.

"Oh no. Once I prepare you, I'm going to make slow, passionate love to you... But while I'm doing that, Trey is going to be making slow passionate love to me." John said in a seductive growl.

"Oh God." I whispered, able to visualize the whole thing.

"Does that sound okay to you Trey?" John asked with a smile.

"Will I get a turn on the bottom?" Trey asked speculatively.

"Sure." John said with delight.

"Proceed." Trey said with a very Borg expression that broke into a smile.

I rolled onto my belly and tried to watch what John was doing.

He put some... stuff, from the tube he'd brought from the bathroom and coated his fingers.

"This is lube, it's really important." John said as he spread the cream.

"I am familiar with some of the uses of lubrication." Trey said with a smile.

"Show me?" John asked hopefully.

Trey put a squirt of lube in his hand, then coated his erect shaft.

Slowly Trey began to stroke himself, it was hypnotic.

Finally John broke from the trance state with a visible shake of his head and said, "Hold that thought. Watch what I'm going to do."

Then John moved to my butt and began putting the lube... back there.

It wasn't like he was coating me, it was more like a very intense massage.

"Let me know if this bothers you Clark. I'm going to go slow." John said, then his finger slipped inside me, just a little.

"Um... okay." I said, not sure if I liked the feeling. It seemed... dirty or wrong somehow.

The finger started to move and all those dirty/wrong feelings evaporated.

"So you are lubricating the passage and relaxing the sphincter." Trey observed.

"Yeah, if you don't take the time to do this, it hurts... I mean it really hurts." John said as he carefully worked his finger in and out.

"Before we do this... I have a question..." Trey said with a note of hesitance in his voice.

"What is it?" John asked as he continued working his finger deeper and deeper, then withdrawing it.

"I would like to know about commitment... when we do this... will we have a committed relationship?" Trey asked with concern.

"We already do Trey." I said, trying to keep my voice even.

"How so?" Trey asked, moving his gaze to meet mine.

"We waited for you. We wouldn't have done this without you." I said as John took his finger completely out.

"But when we have done this... are we... exclusive?" Trey asked in confusion.

"Yes... As far as I'm concerned, we are. John?" I asked, then felt his finger enter me again... but it was tighter... two fingers.

"Yes Trey. The three of us love each other. Even though we might mess around in pairs, the real sex will be for all three of us." John said as he gently worked the two fingers in and rotated them slightly.

"But... next month... next year... fifty years from now... what then?" Trey asked seriously.

"I see." John said in thought, and began to spread his fingers as he worked them in and out. It felt tight and weird.

"Yes." I said seriously.

"What?" John asked curiously.

"Yes, I love you both. I want you both forever." I said as I began to enjoy the feeling again.

John continued to move silently.

"John?" Trey asked reluctantly.

"Yeah, I was just trying to wrap my mind around forever. It's a big step, I want to be sure." John said and withdrew his fingers again.

"Stop." I said as I felt pain. The three fingers were trying to work their way in and wouldn't fit.

"Deep breaths Clark. Give the muscle a minute to relax. I'll hold it right here till it does." John said quietly.

I took a deep breath... then another. I felt the muscle loosen and the three fingers slipped in.

"Good, just stay relaxed, you're doing fine." John said in a soothing voice.

"John?" Trey asked again.

"Yes Trey, forever... but I think we need... something, like a ceremony or rings or something. If we just say it, it doesn't seem real enough." John said in thought as he worked his fingers deeper.

"If you have no objection, I will make those arrangements." Trey asked cautiously.

"Okay, is that okay with you Clark?" John asked.

"Yeah." I said, feeling the tight thrusting in my butt.

"Trey, would you lube me up while I finish getting Clark ready?" John asked hopefully.

"My pleasure." Trey said with a smile.

I looked back over my shoulder to see Trey gently stroking John's penis with lube.

"Here we go... Clark, I'm going to go slow. Don't worry if it hurts a little, I'll wait till your ready before I push all the way in." John said in a soothing voice.

"Trey, once I've entered Clark, you can get started preparing me. It probably won't take as long." John said and moved himself behind me.

I felt John's fingers withdraw, then I felt a slimy, blunt hardness pressing against my opening.

"Deep breaths Clark, just relax." John whispered.

I took in a deep breath and felt the hardness nudge it's way in just a little.

I took another deep breath and felt it move further in.

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

"I know. Just give it a second." John said and halted his motion.

"That's right Trey, just like that." John said. I'm not sure what he was doing, but I imagined Trey with one finger in John's butt.

I took another deep breath and John pushed in a little more.

"Okay Clark, how are you doing?" John asked as he lowered himself so his chin rested on my shoulder.

"Good." I said in a gasp as he began moving, just a little, in and out.

"Just relax, the hard part is over." John said with assurance.

I felt sweat drip into my eyes and awkwardly moved my hand to wipe the sweat away.

"Just like that Trey." John whispered into my ear.

I turned my head to try and catch a glimpse of what Trey was doing when I noticed the mirror on the closet door.

I could just make out Trey, knelt behind John with his fingers moving in and out of John's butt. The sight was so hot that I felt myself begin to harden.

"Is it sufficient?" Trey asked timidly.

"Yeah, lube yourself up good, then give it a try." John said as he increased his thrusts.

A wonderful feeling flooded through me and I gasped for breath. A tingle seemed to spread out through my entire body.

"There it is. I was afraid you might not have one." John said with a smile in his voice.

"What was that?" I asked in wonder.

"It's your prostate... hang on." John said and shifted himself a little higher on my back.

There it was again, the tingle... and it felt like my dick was going to tear through the mattress.

"Yeah Trey, go on, just keep pushing." John said as he stopped his motion.

I felt additional weight pressing down on me.

"Yeah, now hold still. This is the tricky part. I'm going to start moving. You need to synchronize your thrusts to mine." John said as he thrust into me just a little.

I could feel that he had... softened... just a little.

Two thrusts later he was back to full hardness and I could feel additional movement.

"Yes." John said in a breathy whisper.

"Clark, are you well?" Trey asked in concern.

I looked into the mirror to see Trey looking back at me.

"Great." I said in a gasp and closed my eyes.

My eyes popped open at the feeling of a tongue on my ear.

[John must be a master of multi-tasking.] a distant part of my mind thought.

John began hitting that spot in me again and any stray thoughts went away as I was lost in sensation.

"I'm getting close." John whispered into my ear. His hot breath, the thrusting, the magical spot he was now hitting every single time, the sight of them on top of me...

"Me too." I gasped.

"Twenty minutes to breakfast." A voice said from the door.

All three of us turned to see who had walked into the room.

Ronny was standing there, blushing wildly with wide eyes.

"Give us a few minutes Ronny." John said hoarsely.

"Um, yeah... I'll, um, lock the door." Ronny said in a flustered voice as he

fumbled with the lock.

"Thanks." I said... God it was funny. I couldn't help it. As soon as the door closed, I broke into laughter.

"Focus, Clark." John said as he began to thrust again, trying not to laugh.

I craned my neck and was barely able to meet his lips. As uncomfortable as the position was, the kiss was fantastic.

"I am nearing completion." Trey said in a small voice from way above me.

"Me too." John said, humping faster.

"Uh, huh." I grunted.

John's forceful thrusts were scooting me against the mattress, rubbing me, and I was on the brink.

"Unngh." I said as I felt myself release.

At nearly the same time I felt John release within me. It was warm and so erotic that I felt my own release become impossibly more intense.

I could feel jerking movement from above me and could tell that Trey was experiencing his own release.

I turned my head to see Trey's expression, and as I expected, it was beauty.

His body glistened with sweat and his head was thrown back in ecstasy. I had only seen such beauty and grace in frozen images, like sculptures and paintings of the great masters through the centuries.

I spasmed with another release and felt the echo of it from John... cause and effect? [I'm spending too much time in school if I'm thinking about physics during sex.] I thought before the random thought was lost in my passion and release.

Trey came to rest beside and put his hands on my face to guide me into a kiss.

I gladly accepted the kiss as I felt John withdraw from me. It was tender and loving.

John squeezed in between me and the wall beside the bed.

I broke my kiss with Trey and turned to kiss John.

John's kiss was more forceful and he seemed sure of what he wanted and how to get it.

Finally our kiss broke and John lifted up and behind me.

I awkwardly turned myself over to find John and Trey kissing above me.

"I can see why you'd enjoy waking up like this." I said as I watched.

John pulled out of the kiss and looked deeply into Trey's eyes.

"Breakfast will be starting in fourteen minutes." Trey said seriously.

John and I began to laugh.

"What is funny?" Trey asked defensively.

I tried to stop laughing and said, "We'd just rather be here with you than eating."

Trey looked at me cautiously, then nodded in acceptance.

"But he's right, we really should go down to breakfast. It'll be a while before I'm ready to go again and I'll probably need my energy to keep up with you two." John said playfully.

"Well, let's get up then. I need to take a shower... and change the sheets." I said, looking at my two beautiful lovers.

"Here's a towel, I can clean you up real fast." John said, pleased with his preparedness.

He began to wipe down my belly with gentle strokes.

"And my back too." I said shyly.

"Sit up." John said with a smile.

I sat forward and John began to wipe my back as Trey pulled me into a kiss.

"Save some of that for me." John said as he finished behind me.

"This one's yours, I was just keeping it warm for you." I said and gently moved Trey to John.

"Thanks Clark." John mumbled before moving into a full deep kiss with Trey.

[Who could have guessed there was such beauty in the world.] I thought as I watched them kiss.

The kiss finally broke and John looked at me with hungry eyes and said, "How can I ever thank you for keeping that warm for me? How about this?"

And he moved in and kissed me with fire and passion.

When the kiss ended, I took a deep breath and said, "You'd better not do that again if you expect to have breakfast."

"It'll just leave more room for Thanksgiving dinner." John said with a leer.

[Thanksgiving dinner... my parents... will be here soon.] The thought came unbidden to my mind.

"What is wrong Clark?" Trey asked with immediate concern.

"My parents... they're going to be here sometime soon." I said with distraction, not knowing how to explain.

"His parents don't know he's gay." John said to Trey quietly.

"I wasn't till I met you." I said with a teasing smile.

"So it's *my* fault that you're gay?" John asked with mock surprise.

"Uh huh. I was a heterosexual naive farm boy before I met you." I said, trying to keep in my chuckles.

"So I did this?" John said in thought.

"Yep, and I can think of only one way to thank you." I said as I pulled John close.

There was a knock on the door and Ronny's voice could barely be heard saying, "Five minutes to breakfast."

"Right." I said in resignation and scooted off the bed.

All three of us hurried and put on our clothes. John and I each pulled out some of the new clothes we bought.

John spared a few seconds to fuss with my hair, making it 'just so'. I really don't know what he does to it, but it looks good so I'll let him.

"Ready?" I asked as I looked over John and Trey.

"One second." Trey said, then pulled me into a full kiss that nearly sucked the breath out of me.

The kiss went on and on, and sparkles started forming at the edge of my vision.

Trey ended the kiss and said, "Now I am ready."

I couldn't find my voice so I followed behind them obediently.

[Chapter 13: Facing It]

What could be more agonizing than waiting for my parents to arrive?

John and Trey both tried to get my mind on other things since breakfast, but it kept finding its way back to the same place.

"Clark?" Scott said from the common room door.

"Yes?" I replied, then noticed John standing beside him... I never even saw John leave. How zoned out am I?

"Can you come with me a second?" Mr. Summers asked and waited.

I hesitantly got up and followed him out of the room.

John squeezed my shoulder as I passed him, then went into the room to sit with Trey.

* * * * *

"John told me that you're going to 'come out' to your parents today." Scott said as we walked down the hall.

"Yeah." I mumbled.

"Is there anything I can do to help you? To make it easier?" Scott asked carefully.

"Would you stay with us? I mean, not leave me alone with them till the dust settles." I asked hopefully.

"When do you plan to tell them?" Scott asked in thought.

"As soon as they get here. That'll give them plenty of time to say what they want to say before they leave." I said seriously.

"Do you think they'll try to take you away... I mean, will they think we did this to you somehow?" Scott asked with concern.

"Made me gay?" I said with a smile, remembering my teasing with John.

"Yes, some people still think that who you're attracted to is a choice. They

could think we turned you." Scott said carefully.

"I don't think so, my parents aren't like that... at least I hope they aren't... we never really talked about it." I said and could hear the fear in my own voice.

"I'll talk to them Clark. I'll do everything I can to make sure they understand before they leave." Scott said as he stopped to look at me.

"Okay Scott. Thanks..." I trailed off, realizing how much of a friend Scott was being.

"Clark, you remember when I said that Trey is my nephew and John is like my brother... that goes for you too. I care for you like a younger brother. Whatever I can do to help, I'll do it." Scott said seriously.

I nodded and tried to smile.

"And I won't let my brother face this alone. Why don't you come to the kitchen with me and peel or chop something for dinner." Scott said with a smile.

"Do you mind if John and Trey help?" I asked with a sideways glance.

"I'd be surprised if they didn't." Scott said with a smile.

* * * * *

After peeling about a hundred thousand sweet potatoes, I finally finished and was able to sit back and take a break.

John was still stirring something on the stove and looking bored. I'm not sure that whatever it is needs to be stirred constantly for over an hour, but it kept John busy so everyone was pretty happy with the way things worked out.

Trey was waiting by the sinks, washing whatever dishes were dirtied during the lengthy cooking process.

Ronny walked into the kitchen carrying a large covered granite roaster.

As soon as he saw me his face went red.

"Right over there Ronny." Alan said from behind him and pointed at a spot beside where I was working at the table.

Robert came by and took the last of the peeled sweet potatoes from me without a word.

"Ronny, can I talk to you for a minute?" I asked, hoping he wouldn't refuse.

"Yeah." He said in a mumble and started to walk away.

I followed Ronny into the hall and said, "I'm sorry you walked in on that this morning."

"Yeah, you guys should really lock the door if you're going to be doing that." Ronny said as he blushed wildly.

"We will from now on. I promise. Ronny, you're our friend and I don't want this to make you uncomfortable around us." I said with concern.

"It's gonna be tough, every time I look at any of you, I see it... you kind of freaked me out... I mean, I just kind of figured you'd kiss and stuff but you were doing *it*, right there... I saw everything." He said in a trembling voice.

"Yeah, and if I could take that image away, I would. I know you're not ready for that. I'm really sorry Ronny." I said, not knowing what else to say.

"I'll be okay, but thanks for worrying about me. It's really cool." Ronny said shyly.

"How's Bobby doing?" I asked, figuring we needed another topic now.

"I'm not sure. He spent the night at Robert's house. Alan and Remy stayed up with him most of the night talking. He's kind of in a daze now, but I think it's from lack of sleep more than anything." Ronny said with worry in his voice.

"Tell me if there's anything I can do to help. He was my first friend here and I'll do whatever I can to help him." I said seriously.

"Thanks Clark." A raspy voice said from over my shoulder.

I turned to see Bobby looking tired and ruffled and holding a bowl of fruit salad.

"I mean it Bobby, anything... if you need to talk, or if you just want to be distracted, you name it and it's yours." I said, looking Bobby in the eyes.

"Yeah, there is one thing." Bobby said, his voice sounding horrible.

"What can I do?" I asked with immediate concern.

"Take this fruit salad, it's really getting heavy." He said with a small, pained smile.

"Sure." I said and took the fruit salad from him.

* * * * *

"A car's coming!" Janine's voice called from the front door.

She'd announced every visitor that had arrived the same way.

I got up and walked to the window in the common room and saw Mom and Dad's car coming up the drive.

"It's them." I said in resignation and took a deep breath to brace myself before I walked outside.

* * * * *

I walked out the front doors of the mansion as Mom and Dad got out of the car.

"Clark!" Mom yelled and ran to hug me.

I held Mom tight and smiled... [I hope she'll still be as happy to see me after I tell her.] I thought to myself.

"You look like you've aged about three years since last week." Dad said with a look of surprise.

"Five years." I said with a teasing smile and pulled Dad close for a hug.

"I made my sweet sauerkraut salad with apples and walnuts, just the way you like it." Mom said with pride.

"Thanks Mom, where is it? I'll bring it in." I said as I let go of Dad.

"Your father can bring it in. You need to get the bag from the back seat... And don't let your father see inside." She said sternly.

I looked from Mom to Dad with surprise.

"Don't ask me. She put it in the car and threatened me if I even looked at it." Dad said with wide eyes.

"I'll get the bag." I said with a smile and went to the car.

* * * * *

We walked into the entry hall and Mom stopped us.

"See Jonathan, didn't I tell you it was beautiful." Mom said in wonder.

"Yes dear." Dad said tolerantly as he looked around.

"Come on, I want to introduce you to everyone." I said with excitement.

"Just a minute, we need to drop off the sauerkraut salad first." Mom said quickly.

"Right this way." I said and led them to the dining room.

I opened the door and pointed to the table that had been reserved for salads.

Dad put the salad down and stopped to look around.

"This is some room." He said in an impressed voice.

"Yeah." I said absently as I looked around. I guess I'm used to it.

"Go ahead Clark, where are your friends?" Mom said with a smile.

"Come in the kitchen and we'll see who's there." I said and led them through the side door.

"Mom, you remember Ms. Munroe don't you?" I said as we walked to the stove.

"Yes, nice to see you again." Mom said with a smile.

"Yes, very nice to see you Mrs. Kent." Ms. Munroe said pleasantly.

"And this is my Dad, Jonathan Kent." I said proudly.

"A pleasure to meet you. You must be very proud of Clark, he's a wonderful boy." Ms. Munroe said with a gentle smile.

"Yes, I've always been proud of him." Dad said happily.

[I wonder if he'll still be proud of me when I tell him.] I thought darkly. Then saw John carrying a large rack of bread.

"Mom, Dad, this is my friend John Allerdyce." I said with a great smile.

"Hi." John said timidly.

"Nice to meet you John." Mom said with a smile.

"I'd shake your hand but..." John trailed off and shifted the rack of bread that he was carrying.

"We'll catch you later." Dad said with a chuckle.

John walked past us and into the dining room with the bread.

"This is Dawn Summers and Tara McCoy. Ms. Summers, Ms. McCoy, this is my Mom, Martha and my Dad Jonathan." I said as we walked past the stove to the prep island.

Dawn and Tara both looked up and smiled. "Nice to meet you." Dawn said pleasantly as she shook hands with Mom and Dad.

Mom moved to shake Tara's hand but Tara pulled her hand back and lifted it to show it covered in flour.

"Sorry, I'm making pie crust." Tara said shyly.

"Quite alright." Dad said with a smile.

"And over here is my friend, Trey Summers. Trey, this is my Mom, Martha

Kent and my Dad, Jonathan Kent." I said and we walked over to the sinks.

Trey quickly dried his hands and waited hopefully.

Dad shook Trey's hand first, then Mom.

"Nice to meet you. Clark has spoken of you often." Trey said shyly.

"I hope he said nice things." Mom said in mock worry.

"Only the best. And he has told us much of his father who is such a good friend to him." Trey said with a sincere smile.

"Aren't you a charmer." Mom said in delight.

"I say only the truth." Trey said warmly.

"Trey and John are going to sit at our table at dinner." I said to Mom and Dad. Then I turned to Trey and said, "I'm going to take them to meet everyone in the common room."

"I will see you at dinner." Trey said and gifted me with one of his smiles.

* * * * *

We walked into the common room to much commotion. I felt a hand on my shoulder and saw that Mom was holding me back with a hesitant expression.

"What?" I asked her in a whisper.

"Watch." Mom said into my ear and pointed to Mr. Summers.

Dad continued walking into the room in front of us. He stopped about four feet from Mr. Summers.

"Scott?" Dad asked in wonder.

Mr. Summers looked at Dad, then his eyebrows went up in recognition and he said, "Jonathan?"

Dad and Mr. Summers closed the distance between them quickly and hugged each other tightly.

"Scott, oh God, I tried to find you for... years. How are you?" Dad asked with a tearful voice.

"I'm good. I didn't have any way to contact you. I didn't even know your last name. How did you find me?" Scott asked as tears dropped under his glasses.

"I didn't... I came here to visit my son, Clark." Dad said in a shaky voice.

"Clark's your son?" Mr. Summers asked in wonder and looked over at me and Mom.

"Yes, are you a student here too?" Dad asked with excitement.

"Not exactly. I'm kind of in charge of this place until the Professor gets back." Mr. Summers said with a proud smile.

Dad pulled Scott into a close hug again and I looked to Mom for an explanation.

She pointed back to Dad and Mr. Summers.

"Jonathan, why don't you come to my office where we can talk?" Mr. Summers said with a grand smile.

Mom and I followed, knowing that the invitation included us too.

* * * * *

"I tried to meet you that last day, but the cops picked me up..." Scott began to say.

"I know, I'm the one who called them." Dad said quietly.

"What?" Scott asked and fell back into the couch.

"Actually, I called Martha's sister Lucie who called her college roommate Cheryl and *she* called the police and had them pick you up." Dad explained with hope for understanding in his eyes.

"You called Cheryl?" Mr. Summers asked in disbelief.

"Yes. You were on the streets and I was trying to find some way to help you..." Dad started to say.

"Jonathan, do you think you could start at the beginning for Clark?" Mom asked from my side.

Dad looked at me and smiled.

"I went on a trip to New York to arrange financing for some equipment when you were... seven? Do you remember that?" Dad asked me carefully.

I thought back and finally said, "When you got back, Mom said you were sick and I needed to be quiet around you for a while."

"That's right. I'll get to that part in a minute. When I was there I saw a boy wearing sunglasses, he was so skinny and lost looking that I had to talk to him." Dad said and looked fondly at Mr. Summers.

"I told him that I was new in town and missed my son and asked him if he would have lunch with me to keep me company." Dad said with a smile.

Scott nodded and Dad continued.

"After we ate, I told him that I had a meeting in the morning but I'd be done around noon if he wanted to have lunch with me." Dad said in a voice of distant memory.

"We met for lunch and hung around the rest of the day, then had dinner. I told him that I'd meet him the same place the next day for lunch again." Dad said with less of a smile.

"That's when the police picked me up and turned me over to child protective services." Mr. Summers said quietly.

"I called Martha, and Martha called Lucie, Lucie called Cheryl... eventually I talked directly to Cheryl and asked her if there was any way I could adopt you or be a foster parent or something. But since I lived in another state... there really wasn't much she could do. I ended up trusting her to do the right thing to help you." Dad said sadly.

"I was placed with a foster family and stayed there for about a month before I met Professor Xavier." Scott said distantly.

"I tried to contact you, I even tried to mail you a package but it came back with a note from Cheryl. She said that you'd left foster care and she couldn't find you." Dad said with remembered pain.

Mom squeezed my shoulder.

I looked at her and she pointed to the bag that I forgot that I was carrying.

I looked at her in question and she pointed to Mr. Summers.

I took the bag and handed it to him.

Mr. Summers opened the bag and looked carefully at the address label.

"That's where I was living." Scott said in wonder.

"Martha? You knew?" Dad asked in surprise.

"I suspected. I remembered you telling me about Scott, and how he always wore sunglasses and then I met Mr. Summers. I brought that along in case I was right." Mom said proudly.

Dad had such a look of pride in Mom that I thought he would bust.

Mr. Summers opened the box carefully and pulled out a knitted sweater.

"It's great." Mr. Summers said and pulled it on over his shirt.

"It may be a little small on you now. You've filled out some since last time I saw you." Dad said tenderly.

"It's perfect." Mr. Summers said as he straightened the sweater.

"Martha made it for you. I was afraid you'd be cold." Dad said as his eyes filled with tears.

Scott looked in the box again and pulled out a CD Player and headphones.

"I thought you'd like something like that." Dad said with a smile.

Scott pulled out three CDs and looked at them carefully. Then said, "They're wonderful, these are classics."

"They were top 40 when I bought them." Dad said with a smile.

"We thought it would be a shame if you had a CD player and didn't have anything to listen to." Mom said tenderly.

Next he pulled out a package of batteries.

"Those probably won't be any good now, but at least we didn't put them in the player before we shipped it." Mom said cheerily.

Scott nodded and looked in the box again. He came back with an envelope.

"Can I read it?" He asked cautiously.

Dad looked at Mom, then said, "Please read it aloud."

"Scott, if there were any way I could make it happen, I'd make you my own son. Even though I can't find a way to make that happen, you'll always be the son of my heart. I hope you enjoy these things, please write and let us know how you're doing. You'll always be part of our family. Love, Jonathan, Martha and Clark." Mr. Summers said with tears streaming down his face.

Scott turned and pulled my Dad into a full hug.

Finally they released the hug and Scott turned to face me.

"When I came home, I was worried and heartsick. I felt like I lost a child." Dad said darkly and glanced at Scott.

"I guess we really are brothers now." Scott said with a watery smile.

"How many does that make?" I asked, trying to keep my own tears from falling.

"Alex, Alan, John and you... that makes four." Scott said happily.

"Alex? You're brother's okay?" Dad asked suddenly.

"He's fine. He's probably in the dining room by now." Scott said with a warm smile.

"I remember you telling me that you left him behind when you ran away. Did that work out okay?" Dad asked with concern.

"Yeah, Cheryl took care of it." Scott said peacefully.

"Good. I knew you were worried about him." Dad said with relief.

"I have another brother too. Alan, you'll be meeting him at dinner. And John is someone that I feel a kinship with and has become the brother of my heart... like Clark." Scott finished with a smile at Dad.

"Is that the young man with the bread?" Mom asked quietly.

I nodded.

"So is it time for dinner?" Dad asked, looking like he was ready to stand.

Scott looked at me and raised his eyebrows. He was letting me decide... giving me a way out.

"Not yet." I said and took a deep breath.

"What is it son?" Dad asked with concern.

"Dad, Mom..." I started, feeling like I was going to choke, pass out, vomit, drop dead... e. all of the above.

"...I'm..." [Hungry... I could just say hungry... wouldn't that be the simplest thing for everyone?]

"...gay." It's over. All over. No going back. Can't take it back.

There was silence. It went on... oh, about twelve days or so.

"Clark? Did you just 'come out' to us?" Mom asked carefully.

I nodded.

Mom walked to me and held me gently.

"It's okay, we're not upset." Mom said in a soothing whisper as she stroked my hair.

I kept my eyes tightly closed, I couldn't look my Dad in the eyes.

"Clark." Dad said firmly... I had to look.

I peeked one eye open to see Dad looking at me with amusement.

"It's okay. We discussed this possibility years ago. You know your Aunt Lucie's friend Chrysta..." Dad began.

"...They're more than friends." Mom finished.

"All we want is for you to find someone who makes you happy and appreciates you." Mom said quietly.

"Um, I have." I said in a mumble.

"What's that?" Dad asked.

Scott gave me a nod and quickly left the room.

"I found someone... two someone's... who make me happy and appreciate me." I said numbly.

"Two?" Mom said in surprise.

"He always was something of an overachiever." Dad said in a considering tone.

"Do you love them?" Mom asked in a shaky voice.

"I love them a lot." I said with more strength.

The door opened and Scott walked in, followed by John and Trey.

"Hello again." John said shyly.

Dad got off the couch and walked to John.

John looked as if he wanted to run.

"I said I'd catch you later." Dad said and held out his hand.

John cautiously took Dad's hand to shake it and was pulled into a full hug.

Mom moved to Trey and gently pulled him into a hug of her own.

"So John, tell me about yourself." Dad said seriously and guided John to sit beside him on the couch.

John had a look of terror in his eyes.

"John doesn't like talking about himself Dad, but once you get to know him, you'll love him." I said, trying to stop the interrogation.

"What about you Trey? What's your story?" Mom asked.

Trey looked at me in question and I shrugged. "They know about me, so it's okay if you want to." I said simply.

"I was taken from my home world by a collective called the Borg. They put machines in my body and erased my memory. I was rescued and my fathers helped me become an individual again. Three months later Aunt Dawn created a temporal/spatial vortex to bring us here. That was two weeks ago." Trey said in a steady voice.

"So you're an alien?" Mom asked uncertainly.

I flinched at the word and said, "We prefer non-human or extra-terrestrial." I said quietly.

"I am not offended. Yes, I cannot be sure of my home planet because my species have colonized many worlds, but I am of the N'Mgilia people." Trey said simply.

"What about you John?" Dad asked carefully.

"Just a plain old mutant." John said, looking more relaxed.

"Clark, you said we prefer non-human... you and Trey?" Mom asked carefully.

"And some of his brothers and his sister." I said, much more comfortable with this subject.

Mom nodded and continued to hold Trey closely.

"Are we ready for dinner?" Scott asked hopefully, I think he was wanting to rescue John and Trey from Mom and Dad's attention.

"Just a minute." Dad said and let loose of John.

"Yes?" Scott asked curiously.

"We need to talk some business... and since we're here. We might as well." Dad said seriously.

"Okay, I've got the paperwork right here." Scott said and moved behind the desk.

"Bottom line, how much are we talking about?" Dad asked seriously.

Scott came around the desk and sat beside Dad on the couch, the other side from John.

He flipped through the pages and handed them to Dad, pointing at something.

Dad looked at the paper and read for a minute. He flipped back to the previous page, then reread the page again.

"Jonathan? Too much stress is bad for the heart, dear." Mom said as she sat nervously watching, still holding Trey.

"Clark, you *do* want to stay don't you?" Dad asked uncertainly.

I looked at Trey and John before saying, "Yes, I really do want to stay."

Dad nodded and looked at the paper again.

"Dad?" I asked, beginning to seriously worry.

"I don't think we can do it." Dad said in defeat as he looked up at me.

[Oh shit, oh shit, no. Dear God, no.] I thought frantically.

John got up from the couch and whispered to Trey then left the room.

Trey left Mom, walked to me and put his arms around me.

"How close is it?" Scott asked with concern.

"It's close, and I could probably do it for a couple months, but long term... I don't see how I could manage it." Dad said darkly.

"I trimmed off everything I could. I'd help if I could but I'm stretched to my limit." Scott said helplessly.

"Maybe I could get a job?" I asked hopefully.

"I'm afraid it wouldn't be enough. Working enough hours to make a difference would cut into your study time and probably effect your grades." Scott said sadly.

John walked into the room and asked, "If room and board weren't included could you do it?"

Dad looked at the paper again and Scott pointed to a number.

"Yes, I could manage that." Dad said and looked at John in question.

"I'm going to be living in a house off the property in a few days. Clark could live with me." John said proudly.

"John, you need to talk to Logan before you decide something like that." Scott said carefully.

"He did Cyke, me an tha kid already said it's okay." Logan said from the doorway with Ronny at his side.

Dad looked at Logan in question.

"Clark's a good guy. We need someone like him at the house... like an example." Logan said with a teasing smile.

"Remember, I know where you live..." John said with his own teasing.

I gave Trey a small kiss, then said, "Matthew Logan, Ronny Drake, this is my Dad, Jonathan Kent and my Mom, Martha Kent."

"Nice to meet you." Dad said and stood to shake Mr. Logan's hand.

Mr. Logan shook the offered hand.

"Clark's a good guy. John an Ronny like him and I can tell that you must be

real decent people to have a kid as good as him. I'm buying the house anyway so it ain't no hardship." Mr. Logan said firmly.

"Do you work here?" Dad asked curiously.

"Yeah, I teach English an Grammar." Logan said seriously, then smiled.

"Matt is our Physical Education and Driving instructor." Scott said with a laugh.

"Okay, that makes more sense." Dad said with a smile.

"So is Clark stayin or what?" Logan asked impatiently.

"If you're serious about letting him live with you, yes." Dad said in a disbelieving voice.

Logan stood silently, just looking at Dad.

"I thought I was the only one who got that look..." Scott said in wonder, then told Dad, "That means he's serious... and also that he's disappointed that you had to ask, I think."

"Alright then. Let's make it legal so we can have dinner." Dad said in a relieved voice.

Scott walked to the desk and drew some lines and some X's on the contract, then handed it to Dad.

"Where?" Dad asked.

"There, there and there." Scott said pointing.

"And there." Scott said when Dad turned the page.

Dad turned another page and waited.

"That's all. We'll mail you all the information in a few days." Scott said happily.

There was a knock on the door and Jimmy poked his head in.

"John, your dad's here." Jimmy said quietly.

[Chapter 14: Thanks]

We all left the office and walked as a group to the dining room.

We walked in and saw that about fifteen people were already there, sitting at different tables.

Mr. Allerdyce was standing alone inside the door, looking lost.

"Hi dad." John said quietly.

"Hi John." Mr. Allerdyce said in a matching quiet tone.

"John, why don't you introduce us?" Dad asked from behind me.

"Dad, you met Scott, Clark and Trey already. This is Ronny Drake, Matthew Logan, Jonathan and Martha Kent. Everyone, this is my dad, Rick Allerdyce." John said formally.

"Nice to meet you." Mr. Allerdyce said uncomfortably.

"Our table is over here, let's sit down until the meal is ready." Scott said and led the way.

Mr. Allerdyce sat down and John took the seat next to him. Trey took the next seat and I sat by Trey. Mom sat next to me and Dad next to her, then Scott, Mr. Logan and Ronny. There was still one open chair and I wondered who would get it.

"So Rick, what kind of work are you in?" Dad asked conversationally.

"I'm a forklift operator in a warehouse." Mr. Allerdyce said in a quiet voice that sounded ashamed.

"I'm a farmer." Dad said shortly, I guess to let Mr. Allerdyce know that he was a working man too.

Mr. Allerdyce nodded but didn't pick up the conversation.

"So do you like to bowl?" Dad asked. Dad's a good one to keep a conversation going.

"I ain't done it in a few years, but yeah." Mr. Allerdyce said and met dad's

eyes.

"Next time I'm in town, we should get together for some bowling, you, me, Scott and Matt." Dad said with a slight smile.

"Yeah, that sounds good." Mr. Allerdyce said, and for the first time, I saw a real smile on his face.

Now I know where John gets his smile, his father has exactly the same smile. It's actually kind of creepy.

Robert walked out of the kitchen and to our table.

"We are ready to move the hot food into the dining room, would you assist us?" Robert asked John, Trey and I.

We went immediately to help.

* * * * *

After the last of the food was placed in the dining room, we went back to our seats.

Scott stood up and cleared his throat loudly to try and get everyone's attention.

A hush fell over the room and everyone waited for him to speak.

"I'd like to begin by welcoming all the parents to this Thanksgiving celebration." Scott said loudly enough for all to hear.

"If I tried to tell you everything I'm thankful for this year... well the food would be cold before I'd finish, so I'll just tell you what I'm most thankful for today... my family." Scott said with a warm smile.

"I can't remember the last time I told them how much I loved them, so it's probably well past time." He said as a guilty expression passed across his face.

"Alex, you were there when things were worst and you stood by me and believed in me no matter what. There aren't words to describe how glad that I am that you're here. I love you." Scott said looking at Alex.

Then he turned slightly and looked at Alan. "Alan, you were there for Andrew when I wasn't. If that was all you ever did, I'd be forever grateful. But on top of that you've been my encouragement, my friend and my example. You've made me an Uncle eight times over and there's nothing that can compare to that gift. I love you bro."

Then he looked further down that same table and said, "Dawn, my one and only sister. If it weren't for you, our family wouldn't be together this holiday. You're the glue that holds us together. I love you Dawnie."

He turned to his side and said, "John, you're the brother of my heart. In all the ways that matter, we're family. I'm proud of who you are and who you are becoming. I love you John."

Then he turned to face me and said, "Clark, I met you on Sunday and already made you a part of my family. It turns out that you were my family all along."

Then he faced Mom and Dad and said, "I met Jonathan about eight years ago and he changed my life. If it wasn't for him, I probably wouldn't be here now. Way back then Jonathan accepted me as part of his family, 'the son of his heart' is what he called me. Now I'm accepting that position and declaring before you all that Jonathan Kent and Martha Kent are the parents of my heart. If I ever mention my Mom or Dad, these people right here are who I'm talking about."

Mom and Dad held each other and had tears about to fall.

Mr. Summers faced the center of the room again and said, "If anyone wants to tell why they're thankful before we begin, go ahead."

Andrew stood and said, "I'm thankful for all of you, for my wonderful husband and children. My whole life started since I've been here. I want to thank every teacher and every student. I've never been so loved."

Mr. Burroughs stood and said, "I've only been round you lot for a few days and you've treated me with respect. I've not had a lot of occasions to be thankful in the past. But now I am. Thank you."

Chris stood beside his father and said, "I'd like to say how thankful I am for my father, mother and brother. I love you all and thank you for loving me."

Bobby stood, looking like he was ready to cry and said, "I'd like to say thank

you to my first real friend. He accepted me even though I was a big jerk and ignored him for nearly four years. All I had to do was ask and he accepted me... I'm... I'm thankful for the time we had Peter... I hope you're at peace."

I put my arm around Trey and could feel John do the same from his other side. Then something snapped inside me and I had to stand.

I stood and said, "I'd like to thank everyone here who's helped me. I arrived Sunday and most of the people in this room have gone out of their way to accept me and make me feel welcomed. You've made me realize that in all the ways that matter, I'm just like everyone else. I can't speak for all the..." I looked at the visiting parents and considered my words, "...out-of-towners', but I can't think of anywhere in the world that I'd feel more welcomed and I'm thankful for you all."

I sat down and was pulled into a hug from Mom and Trey at the same time from opposite directions.

"If there's no one else, let's eat." Scott said and led the way to the serving line.

* * * * *

We all made our way through the serving line without incident, Mom almost got some Borg food, but Ms. Munroe caught her in time.

We took our seats again and began to eat.

"These sweet potatoes are wonderful." Mom said in surprise.

"Robert made them." I said with a smile.

"Robert? Did we meet him?" Mom asked curiously.

"You met him Sunday. He's one of Andrew's twins." I said and pointed to him at the Summers family table.

"That little boy made this?" Mom asked in surprise.

"Mom, that little boy has lived through more than I can imagine. He can do just about anything." I said with admiration.

Mom nodded and said, "Well, it sounds like he's a close friend of yours. Maybe you could find out how he made this for me."

"I'll talk to him before you leave." I said with a smile.

I felt a hand on my knee and turned to see Trey smiling at me.

He whispered in a barely audible voice, "Thank you Clark."

I smiled at him and reached under the table to hold his hand.

"Rick, have you been given a tour of the mansion yet?" Scott asked casually.

Mr. Allerdyce looked up in surprise. Then said, "Um, no. I just walked in the door and a little girl brought me here."

"That would be Janine... Trey's sister. She greeted just about everyone who arrived." Scott said with a warm smile.

"Well how about we give you and the Kents the grand tour after we eat? We can show you around the school and you can see the room they've been sharing." Scott said happily.

I felt a wave of panic when he said that... we didn't clean up the room before we came down to breakfast this morning. The sheet, the lube, the towel...

I looked past Trey to see a matching expression in John's eyes.

I gripped Trey's hand firmly to get his attention.

I whispered under my breath, knowing only Trey could hear, "Can you go and straighten up the room when we show them around?"

Trey responded by giving me a smile and squeezing my hand once.

I smiled back and went back to eating.

* * * * *

"What an excellent meal, I don't know when I've had such good food, and such variety. Thank you for inviting us Scott." Mom said as we got up from the table.

"I'm glad you could come Mrs. Kent." Scott said with a smile.

"Scott. After what you said before dinner, I'll be very hurt if you don't call me 'mom'." She said seriously.

"Yes Mom." Scott said, glowing with happiness.

"That's better, now what are you going to show us?" Mom asked as she walked beside Scott.

Dad walked to my side and we followed them, Mr. Allerdyce and John followed us.

"Dad, I need to talk to John for a minute, Is there any way you could get Mr. Allerdyce's attention for a few minutes?" I asked hopefully.

"Sure, but I want you to tell me what's going on with them later. It's like we're all walking on eggshells around them." Dad said in a whisper.

"Later, I promise." I whispered back.

Dad let his steps lag and Mr. Allerdyce almost bumped into him.

"Rick, I was wondering if you could tell me where there's a good bowling alley around here. I was serious about us all going bowling..."

I motioned for John to join me.

"How's it going? Do you need rescued yet?" I asked carefully.

"No. It's not bad... I just don't know what to say or do around him." John said with worry.

"I noticed. After we've had the tour, why don't you two walk to the boathouse. You don't have anything to hide from him, so why don't you tell him about what your life is like." I suggested.

"I guess... Will you come?" John asked hopefully.

"Could you take Trey? I'd really like some time alone with my parents." I asked hopefully.

John looked at me with a strange, sad look, then said, "Yeah... I don't know what that feels like, *wanting* to spend time with my parents... I'll ask Trey. Thanks Clark."

I pulled John to the side, out of our father's path and gave him a solid kiss.

"Clark?" Dad asked.

I broke the kiss and looked at him.

"Are you with us?" Dad asked with a smile.

"Yeah." I said and gave John a squeeze before joining my dad.

* * * * *

As promised, the tour ended at our room.

I opened the door and hoped that Trey had gotten it cleaned up.

I was surprised to see Trey, his fathers and siblings all in my room.

I walked in and looked around quickly.

It was cleaned up... phew!

Trey spoke and drew everyone's attention.

"I love John and Clark. I asked them to be my partners this morning and they said yes." He said in a firm voice.

Mom and Dad looked at me in question and I gave them a slight nod.

"I've talked to my fathers and come to a decision, so here I stand, before our parents and siblings to ask you, Clark, will you accept my promise, that one day I will ask you to be my life partner?" Trey asked nervously.

"I will." I said firmly.

Trey held out his hand, inviting me to do the same.

I held out my hand and he slipped a thin silver band on my ring finger.

"John, will you accept my promise, that one day I will ask you to be my life partner?" Trey asked in a cautious, hopeful voice.

"I will." John said with the most serious look I'd ever seen.

Trey took John's hand and placed a ring identical to mine on his ring finger.

Trey then smiled and held out another ring in his opened palm.

"Trey, will you accept our promise..." I trailed off, letting John finish.

"...that one day we will consent to be your life partners?" John asked reverently.

"I will." Trey said with happiness and pride.

I took Trey's hand and held it as John slipped the ring on his finger.

"Then it's done." Andrew said happily, then looked to Mom and Dad and Mr. Allerdyce and said, "They weren't ready for engagement, but wanted some kind of commitment. Trey asked me and I suggested promise rings. It means that they are 'officially' dating."

Mom looked at us and smiled.

"So I don't have to worry about who you'll be spending time with, who you'll be dating, who's going to be influencing you..." Mom trailed off happily.

"That's right. The boys are going to be exclusive. They're all good boys who won't let each other get in trouble." Andrew said happily.

"Congratulations son." Mr. Allerdyce said to John and held out his hand to shake.

John looked at his father in surprise, took the offered hand and said, "Thanks dad."

Mom and Dad pulled me into a hug as the entire Summers family descended on Trey.

"You always were able to surprise me, but you outdid yourself this time." Mom said in a tearful voice.

"I'm glad you were here for this. I love you." I said as I held them both.

* * * * *

"Can we go somewhere to talk?" Mom asked hopefully.

"Sure, give me a second." I said and hurried to Trey's side.

"Will you see that John isn't left alone with his dad if he doesn't want to be?" I asked hopefully.

"Yes Clark, I have informed my fathers of the situation and they will understand if I must leave." Trey said seriously.

"Thanks, I'm going to spend some time with my parents. I love you." I finished quietly as I gazed into his eyes.

"I love you too Clark." Trey said and pulled me in for a gentle kiss.

I closed my eyes and soaked in the love. Somehow it meant even more now.

Too soon the kiss ended and I went back to my parents.

"Lead the way son." Dad said with a smile.

"Let's go see if the library is empty." I said and led the way out.

* * * * *

Once the library door was closed I walked to the table where my parents were sitting down and waited for the questions.

"How did this happen?" Dad asked distantly.

I thought about the question before asking, "Which this are you talking about? A lot of things happened."

"I left my little boy here four days ago and found a young man when I came back." Mom said, looking like she was about to cry.

I smiled and said, "It was time for me to grow up. All it took was some good friends who cared about me to help me realize how to be more... grown up."

"Are you talking about sex?" Mom asked with concern.

"No Mom, not really. I'm talking about being around people who treat me with respect and expect me to behave in a mature, responsible manner. Everyone has treated me that way since I got here. John helped me really see myself and adopt a more mature appearance, Trey helped me understand my feelings, Scott sat down and helped me sort through my options when I was confused. And Ronny helped me understand how much growing I've done." I said, hoping they would understand.

"That's a lot of friends." Mom said gently.

"They're just the beginning. Alex, Andrew, Alan, Chris, Lee, Xander, Jimmy... they're all my friends." I said happily.

Mom and Dad looked at me with a peaceful expression.

I looked back curiously.

"I wanted you to come here and be happy... but I never imagined that you'd... belong... like this. It's better than I could have dreamed." Mom said, about to cry again.

"Yeah, it is." I whispered.

"Tell me about your... what do you call them? Boyfriends?" Dad asked cautiously.

"Yeah Dad, boyfriends." I said with a smile.

"How did you get together?" Dad asked quietly.

"John and I wear the same size clothes. He didn't have anything when he came here... he was... kind of living on the street. So I offered to share my clothes and let him share my room until Mr. Logan bought the house." I said with a smile.

"And spending so much time together, you got to know each other." Mom said in speculation.

"Yeah. He's really a great guy. I love him." I said peacefully.

"What about his dad?" Dad asked with a furrowed brow.

"Tuesday was the first time John saw his dad in over a year. He hasn't told me a lot about it, but from what I can gather... it was bad. They fought all the time. His dad's in therapy now and they're trying to get to know each other as people, maybe friends." I said in thought.

"How awful. Is there anything we can do to help?" Mom asked with concern.

"Dad already did it. He invited Mr. Allerdyce to go bowling. I think if he felt like he belonged somewhere, maybe things would be better between him and John." I said, hoping I was right.

"He did seem pretty lost. I'll make sure to get his number before I leave so I can let him know next time I come to town. I haven't bowled in a while. It'd be good to do it again." Dad said in thought.

"That's good Dad. I'm hoping that they can find some things that they like doing together and can have some kind of relationship." I said as I gazed past my parents, into the distance.

"What about Trey?" Mom asked curiously.

I smiled as I thought about Trey.

"He's only been here a few weeks. All his brothers and his sister have made friends already. When I arrived, he thought we could be friends, but Bobby and John beat him to it. I noticed that he looked... depressed and asked him about it. Trey is incredibly honest and told me why he was feeling bad. So John and I took the time to get to know him and... the rest is history." I finished happily.

"He seems like a sweet boy... are you sure you're ready for a commitment? You're so young." Mom said with worry.

I looked down at my ring and said, "We're going steady. I think this is perfect for now. We're too young for marriage, or even to get engaged, but what we did today was to let all our families know that we are serious about being together and what we mean to each other."

"That's good thinking son. You've always been responsible, I'm glad you've taken the time and thought to make it official." Dad said quietly.

"I just tried to think of what you'd want me to do." I said simply as I looked at Dad.

He smiled and pulled me into a hug.

"We're so proud of you Clark. You came to a new place and made it your own." Dad said as he held me.

"Expect to see us here fairly often... Do you think Trey and John would like to spend Christmas with us?" Mom asked suddenly.

"They might..." I said in thought.

"Let's talk to their parents. We could drive up Christmas Day so they could still have time to enjoy Christmas here. Then all of us could spend a few days at home before I bring you back." Dad said speculatively.

"I don't know if Trey can be away that long without regeneration. But if we can find a way to do it, I bet he'd enjoy visiting. And I'm pretty sure John will be glad to go." I said with excitement.

"Regeneration?" Mom asked curiously.

"His machine parts need to be recharged. He hooks up to a machine at night instead of sleeping." I said absently.

"Goodness." Mom said in surprise.

"It's just the way he is Mom. It's part of being Borg." I said, trying to convey that it was no big deal.

"Talk to him and see if there's some way he can do it. If we have to cut the visit short for him, then that's what we'll do." Mom said firmly.

I nodded.

"Let's go find them, I'd like to get this all sorted out as quickly as possible." Dad said and stood.

I stood next and pulled Dad into a hug.

"Thank you for everything." I said as I held him close.

"Thank you, seeing you happy is the best reward we could have asked for." Dad said as he held me.

I reached blindly and pulled Mom to join us.

Mom joined our hug and I held them close for a minute before releasing them so we could find Trey and John and make Christmas plans.

* * * * *

We walked down the hall and saw Scott walking out of his office.

"Scott, what are you doing for Christmas?" Mom asked with excitement.

"Just staying here as far as I know." Scott said hesitantly.

"We were talking about it and wondered if you and Clark's boyfriends would like to spend Christmas day and a couple days after at our house... as a family." Dad asked hopefully.

"It sounds great, but I want to spend Christmas with my family here too." Scott said seriously.

"We thought we'd drive up Christmas day to pick you up. That way you could spend Christmas Eve and Christmas Day morning here with your family." Mom said with pleading in her eyes.

"Yeah, that sounds nice... but instead of you driving up, I could just drive us from here and save you the trip." Scott said in thought.

"That's great... but it's a really long drive, make sure you're plenty rested before you drive." Dad said in warning.

"I'll have some help driving. I'm pretty sure John will have his license by then. Clark and Trey will probably at least have their permits... I may not have to drive at all." Scott said with a smile.

"Clark, you'll be sixteen before Christmas, if you could get your license, you could take the VW bug back with you." Dad said with a smile.

"Really?" I asked in wonder.

"Then I guess it's a good thing that you'll be living with the driving

instructor." Scott said with a grand smile.

"I can really have the bug?" I asked to be sure.

"Yes Clark. I've been keeping it till you're old enough. You're going to need to learn how to take care of it." Dad said firmly.

I nodded as Scott said, "We have auto mechanics courses once a week. By the time Christmas gets here, he'll know the basics."

"Good." Dad said with a nod.

"Do you know where John and Trey are? We need to ask them about Christmas." I asked quickly, wanting to tell them about my car.

"I think they went for a walk to the boathouse." Scott said unsurely.

"We can catch them there." I said with excitement and pulled Scott close for a hug before I could even think about it.

"Go ahead Clark, before you miss them. I'll be here when you get back." Scott said with laughter in his voice.

I broke the hug abruptly and led Mom and Dad out of the mansion.

"Come on Clark, we'll drive over, it'll be faster." Mom said as she walked to the car.

I was so used to walking the path that I didn't even consider that we could drive.

I hurried into the back seat of the car and waited impatiently.

"You'd think he had some news to share." Mom said with a smile.

I tried to reign in my enthusiasm but... a car! MY OWN CAR!

[Chapter 15: Forward and Back]

We walked into the boathouse and Mom asked, "Aren't you going to knock?"

"I never have before... I'm family." I said as we walked into the living room.

"Hi Clark. John and Trey are upstairs if you're looking for them." Lee said happily.

"Yeah... but first, what are you doing here?" I asked curiously.

"Putting the babies down for their naps. If I'd kept them at the mansion, they'd probably still be getting pinched and cooed over. As much as they love all the attention, if they don't get their rest, they'll be impossible tonight." Lee said seriously.

"Oh, can we look at them? We didn't get to see them at the mansion." Mom asked hopefully.

"No cheek pinching, and keep your cooing to a whisper. I just got them to sleep." Lee said sternly, then smiled and led the way into the bedroom.

I followed as Dad and Mom looked at the babies.

"Oh Jonathan, just look at them." Mom said in a pleading whisper.

"I see dear." Dad said tenderly.

"I think Marguerite has grown since last time I saw her." Mom said, looking at the little girl.

"She should have, she's been eating almost non-stop." Lee said with a fond smile.

"I'm going to find the guys. I'll be back in a minute." I said quietly to Mom and Dad.

"Okay, if you're not down in a few minutes, we'll come up and get you." Dad said with a smile.

I nodded and left.

* * * * *

I knocked on the door hesitantly.

"Come in." Trey called from inside.

I opened the door and was surprised to see Mr. Allerdyce in there too.

"Hi Clark, we were just showing Dad Trey's room." John said with a smile.

"What are you guys doing for Christmas?" I asked suddenly.

"Um... I don't know. I figured I'd hang around the mansion like I did last year." John said uncertainly.

"My fathers have said we will celebrate by giving gifts." Trey said unsurely.

"Mom and Dad invited you both to come home with us on Christmas day. We can still do all the Christmas stuff with the people here, but then we'll drive to the farm and spend a few days with my family." I said with excitement.

"Sure, sounds good to me." John said with a shrug and looked to his dad who gave an answering shrug.

"I will be unable to regenerate." Trey said with concern.

"I was wondering if you could come up with something for that between now and then. Like a travel alcove or a porta-regenerator or something." I said in hope.

"I will need Icheb and Jimmy's assistance to design such a device. But it is a possibility." Trey said in thought.

"And when we come back..." I said, ready to explode with excitement.

"If I've got my license..."

"Dad's giving me a car." I said with a great smile.

"Really?" John asked in wonder.

"Yeah, he's had it for about three years and he's only driven it a few times. He said if I have my license before Christmas, he'll give me the car." I said,

feeling pure joy.

"That is so cool Clark. I wish..." John trailed off and looked at his father apologetically.

"...I don't wish for nothin. I got everything that's important." John finished seriously.

"Well, since you're my boyfriend, you get to drive my car whenever you want." I said with a smile.

Trey looked at us curiously.

"You too Trey, just as soon as you get your license." I said joyfully.

"I have never felt the desire to drive, but since you seem to regard the activity so highly, I will endeavor to attain a license." Trey said in a bewildered voice.

"We'll see how you feel about it when you can drive." John said knowingly.

"John... do you want a car?" Mr. Allerdyce asked hesitantly.

"Dad, you don't have that kind of money and I wouldn't ask for it if you did. I'll wait till Clark gets his, and if I decide I want a car of my own, I'll get a job and buy it for myself." John said in a considerate voice.

"If you want, I can keep my eyes open for a good deal." Mr. Allerdyce said timidly.

"Yeah, that'd be great dad. Thanks. I don't really know too many people outside the school so I probably couldn't find a good deal." John said quietly.

Mr. Allerdyce seemed to cheer up a little at that.

"My folks are downstairs looking at babies. I've got to get back to them or they'll come up." I said slowly.

"Kiss?" Trey asked.

I nodded and moved to Trey.

As I moved into Trey's hug, John moved in behind Trey and hugged him from behind.

I kissed Trey deeply as I let my hands drift down John's back to rest on his butt.

John nuzzled Trey's neck and moved his hands to my back, holding me tightly against Trey.

I broke the kiss with Trey and moved to kiss John.

As the kiss began, I could feel Trey slowly nibbling on my ear lobe.

My kiss with John broke and Trey turned his head to kiss John.

The expanse of Trey's neck was exposed to me again and... what could I do, it was there, I was there... I sucked and nibbled from his ear to his shoulder, until their kiss broke.

"You'd better get downstairs now." John whispered through heavy breaths.

"Yeah." I whispered back, then noticed Mr. Allerdyce looking flushed and timid.

"Sorry, I haven't seen them in a while." I said shyly.

"I remember that feeling... vaguely." Mr. Allerdyce said sadly.

"I'll see you later. Mom and Dad are waiting." I said in a rush and hurried out the door.

* * * * *

I went down stairs and stopped.

Mom and Dad were holding each other. They were just standing there, holding close.

They've done that a million times and I never thought about it, but now... I understand.

I stood watching silently. Lost in my thoughts.

"Clark? Did you ask them?" Mom asked and separated from Dad.

"Yeah Mom. John said he'd join us and Trey's going to try and work something out." I said quietly, feeling like I had intruded.

"That's good Clark. Are you ready to go back to the mansion?" Mom asked with a curious expression.

Trey, John and Mr. Allerdyce came down the stairs.

"Clark, why don't you three walk to the mansion. We'll drive Rick over and meet you in the dining room." Mom asked airily.

"Um, sure. What do you say guys? Up for a walk?" I asked simply.

"Yes." Trey said, seeming confused.

"Okay." John said with a shrug.

The three of us walked out and I looked over my shoulder to see Mom, Dad and Mr. Allerdyce looking back at us.

* * * * *

"How are things going with your dad John?" I asked with concern.

"I don't know. It's weird, I don't know how to talk to him. And it's like he's trying so hard, but it's artificial." John said in thought.

We continued to walk in silence until Trey said, "Perhaps your father is as unsure as you are."

"Yeah, I think he is." John said seriously.

"Follow me." Trey said and diverted us from the path.

John and I followed without question and we soon ended up at the field house.

Trey led the way in and waited for us to fully enter.

"John, do you understand that I love you?" Trey asked seriously.

"Yeah, I got that." John said with a smile.

"Then tell me what I can do to help you." Trey said forcefully.

"If I knew, I'd tell you. But knowing that you love me helps more than anything else." John said tenderly.

Trey pulled John into a hug and just held him. The scene of my parents holding each other flashed in my mind and I smiled.

"There's an open spot over here." John said as he flapped a hand at his side.

I moved close to them and put my arms around both of them.

We stood there, just holding each other. Finally John broke the silence by asking, "Where did you get the rings?"

Trey quietly said, "I made them."

"Really?" I asked and looked at the ring closely for the first time.

"From what? I mean, it's really light, like plastic but it's completely solid." John said curiously as he examined his ring.

"From me." Trey said shyly.

"What do you mean?" I asked curiously.

"My implants weren't all put into my body. Some generated from within my body. The pattern for a ring was very simple to generate. The rings are made of the same tritanium as my implants." Trey explained, sounding uncomfortable.

"They're wonderful Trey. They're even more special because you made them for us." I said in a loving voice.

"Clark's right. I wouldn't want any other ring. This is perfect." John said as he tightened his hug.

"I guess we'd better get to the mansion before the families start worrying." John said reluctantly.

"They can wait a minute. We need this now." I said and kissed John gently

on the cheek.

"Agreed." Trey said and kissed John on the other cheek.

"I can't argue with that." John said and relaxed.

"All our parents were there and understand what this means. If being around your dad gets you all tied up, try and remember that we're together. No matter what your dad does or says, we're together and we love you." I said desperately.

"I'll try to remember. Thanks guys, I really needed this time out." John said peacefully.

"I think we all needed it." I said as I enjoyed the feeling of being held.

"I also needed a respite from the activity. The level of tension with your father is most disconcerting." Trey said seriously.

"So let's think of something else... what do you guys want to do after the parents leave?" I asked with a leer.

"You promised that I could be on bottom next." Trey said immediately.

"Yes we did... which do you want Clark? Top or middle?" John asked happily.

"Top I think, I don't think I'll be ready for bottom again for a day or two." I said as I shifted my weight slightly to feel the little ached that I'd had all day.

"Sounds good, I think I like the middle." John said as his voice dropped into a seductive growl.

"So where and when?" I asked as I noticed that this room was unusually warm.

"As much as I'd like to say now... the parents are waiting. Trey, do you think your dads will let you sleep over?" John asked in thought.

"What should I tell my parents I will be doing?" Trey asked unsurely.

"Having sex." I said simply.

"Yeah, no point in lying. All our folks must have figured it out by now. If they ask, tell the truth. If they don't, then they're probably in denial and don't want to know." John said simply.

"Do you think they'll let you?" I asked slowly.

"Yes, my fathers will accept my decision." Trey said with certainty.

"Okay, then what about Scott? I mean, he already told me that he can't sanction a physical relationship between us because we're underage. Are we going to be putting Scott into a difficult position by doing this?" I asked with concern, I didn't want to cause Scott trouble.

"Ask him." John said simply.

I blinked... that would certainly do it. Honest. Above board.

"I'll do that as soon as we get back." I said emphatically.

"I'll speak to my fathers at the earliest convenience." Trey said with certainty.

"And I guess I'll talk to Logan and Ronny. I want to be sure they're cool with everything." John said in thought.

"Okay, one more kiss, then let's do this." I said, energized since we had a plan.

The three-way, marathon kiss progressed until we were all helplessly wanting to forget family, truth, and everything else and get naked now.

Finally the kissing stopped and we pulled apart.

"I love you guys." I said, looking at my two lovers.

"We love you too Clark." Trey said with a glow of peace and happiness.

"Let's do this." I said as we walked out of the field house.

* * * * *

When we got into the mansion, I went to Scott's office, hoping to find him there before I med Mom and Dad in the dining room. When I stepped into

the open door, I was surprised to find Mom, Dad, Scott and Mr. Allerdyce talking.

"Did you take the scenic route?" Scott asked with a smile.

"We stopped for a kissing break at the field house." I said as I took a seat beside Mr. Allerdyce.

"So what are you three planning?" Dad asked suspiciously.

I looked at Dad with some surprise and a little hurt. I had come here intending to be honest and was being accused of treachery.

"We're planning to be honest with everyone involved." I said with a little anger creeping into my voice.

Mom and Dad looked surprised by my tone and I immediately felt bad for my attitude.

In a friendlier voice I said, "I'm sorry. But we really decided to come here and tell you honestly what's going on with us. I wanted to talk with you in front of Scott so he knows what I'm telling you and how you feel about it."

"I can leave..." Mr. Allerdyce began to say.

"No, please stay. You're kind of my father-in-law-to-be and I'd like for you to be included." I said in thought.

"Thank you." Mr. Allerdyce said uncertainly.

"So what were you wanting to tell us Clark?" Dad asked with concern.

"Actually, I was hoping you'd ask me what you want to know." I said with a hopeful expression.

"Are you three having sex?" Mom asked immediately.

"Yeah, we are." I said quietly.

"Are you being safe?" Dad asked with worry showing in his eyes.

"John is the only one of us who's ever had sex before, and he was tested before we did anything. I trust the guys to be honest with me and not

spread the love outside our group, so... no, we're not being safe the way you mean. But we're not at risk." I said as carefully as I could manage.

"Are you guys planning to be 'out' to the whole school?" Scott asked next.

"We didn't discuss it. But yeah, we probably will." I said, trying to imagine what Trey and John would want.

"How about when you go out? To the movies? To the mall? There's a lot of people who won't accept you." Mr. Allerdyce said hesitantly.

"I know. But we'll face that when we have to. If we can't be ourselves, what's the point?" I asked the room.

"What about sleeping arrangements?" Mom asked quietly.

"I sleep with John now. Trey doesn't sleep." I said in thought.

"I'm not sure I understand the ceremony we witnessed, what did it mean to you?" Mom asked in worry.

"I'm promised. To me, that means that I have to respect and love my partners and share in their lives. I have to really get to know them. When the time comes that we're all old enough and ready, then I'll ask or be asked to get married." I said seriously.

"I see. So you're engaged to be engaged." Mr. Allerdyce said in thought.

"Yes." I said, liking the sound of that.

"Did *you* have any questions Clark?" Mr. Summers asked with concern.

"Yes. I figured we shouldn't make out in the halls, but is there anything else we should or shouldn't do at school. We all like you Scott, and don't want this to cause any more trouble for you than necessary." I said with concern.

"Just be the good guy that your parents raised. If you behave in a way that they can be proud of, I'm sure we won't have any problems." Scott said with a smile.

"Thanks Scott, I'm glad you're my brother." I said happily.

"Me too." Scott said peacefully.

* * * * *

I walked out of the office and found John and Trey standing there waiting for me.

"How did things go?" John asked with worry.

"No problem. But we've got to remember to tone it down around the mansion. I don't want Scott to have problems because of us." I said seriously.

"It'll be tough, but we'll do it for Scott." John said in thought.

"So how about you guys? How'd your talks go?" I asked as we began to walk toward the stairs.

"As expected my fathers accepted my decision. They seemed concerned at my young age and lack of relationship experience, but when I reminded them who my partners are, they said, 'We couldn't have found two better people for you to love.', and they proceeded to talk about our wedding." Trey said with a smile.

"But that's not going to be for years!" I said with wide eyes.

"From what I've seen of Trey's fathers, that may be just enough time for them to stop worrying about it." John said with a pleasant smile.

As the three of us started up the stairs, I saw a familiar figure walk in through the front door.

"Mr. Worthington?" I asked and hurried to greet him.

"Clark! How are you?" Mr. Worthington asked with a grand smile.

"Great. Perfect. Totally awesome." I said with unrestrained glee.

"Well, then I guess you're fitting in here." He said with a chuckle as a man walked in the door.

"Wesley?" Trey asked in surprise.

"Hello again Mr. Summers." He said shyly as he walked up to join us.

I looked at him curiously. I hadn't met this man before.

"I ran into Wesley on the flight here and we got to talking, so I invited him to join me here for Thanksgiving dinner." Mr. Worthington said with a smile.

"I hope it's not an imposition." Wesley mumbled.

"Not at all. Come to the dining room. I know everyone will be happy to see you." Trey said happily.

We began to walk toward the dining room as Mr. Worthington asked, "So has anything happened since I left Sunday?"

I laughed.

Mr. Worthington stopped and looked at me curiously.

I calmed myself and said as best I could, "A few things have happened."

Mr. Worthington raised an eyebrow in inquiry.

"Um, I came out of the closet, have two boyfriends who love me, a friend of mine died..." I trailed off at that, suddenly deflated.

"Who died?" Mr. Worthington asked immediately.

"Peter." Trey whispered.

"Dear God... How's Bobby holding up?" Mr. Worthington asked with concern.

"Not good." John said gravely.

"Do you know where he is?" Mr. Worthington asked with force.

"Maybe in the dining room." John said in thought.

Mr. Worthington walked with determination to the dining room.

John, Trey, Wesley and I followed wordlessly.

* * * * *

When we walked into the room, Mr. Worthington went directly to Bobby and pulled him into a tight hug.

Bobby held him for a few seconds before he started crying, really crying.

I saw everyone watching and walked over to them.

"Come on guys, I think the kitchen is more private." I said in a low voice.

After a minute of maneuvering, I got them into the kitchen.

"He's gone..." Bobby said in such a grave, hollow voice that it sent chills up my spine.

I noticed that Trey, John and Wesley were standing in the doorway and said, "Let's give them some privacy."

All four of us walked back into the dining room to the stares of all the people present.

About twelve people got up from their chairs and came to greet Wesley.

"Who is he?" I asked Trey quietly.

"His name is Wesley Wyndom-Price. He is a friend of my father's and a part of the family." Trey said into my ear.

I watched as Wesley was hugged by nearly half the people in the room before Andrew finally asked him, "Did you meet Clark?"

"We weren't introduced." Wesley said as he looked at me.

"Clark, this is Wesley Wyndom-Price. Wesley, this is Clark Kent, my future son-in-law." Andrew said in delight.

Wesley's eyes went wide and he looked at Andrew for explanation.

"Trey, Clark and John are boyfriends... show Wesley your rings boys." Andrew said, barely containing his pride and joy.

All three of us extended our left hands to show our identical rings.

"Congratulations." Wesley said absently.

"Come on Wesley, I bet you'd enjoy a good meal." Andrew said and led Wesley away.

* * * * *

I put a few things on a plate, just to nibble on and went back to the seat I had had earlier.

"Clark?" I heard Mom call from behind me.

I turned to see Mom, Dad, Mr. Allerdyce and Scott walking into the dining room.

"We're going to have to leave. The farm can't be left unattended for very long." Dad said with a note of sadness.

"I know." I said as I got up and pulled Dad into a hug.

"Do you have everything you need?" Mom asked as I moved to hug her.

"I can't think of anything. I'll call you if I need something." I said as I held her tight.

When the hug broke, we walked to the door.

Just before walking through, Robert ran up to us and said, "I have written the instructions for the sweet potato dish. Clark is quite adept at peeling sweet potatoes."

I rolled my eyes in mock aggravation as Mom said, "I'll remember that. Thank you Robert."

"You're welcome." Robert said with a smile, then went back to his fathers.

"Thank you for asking for the recipe Clark." Mom said as she hugged me to her side.

"I didn't." I admitted shyly.

"I told my brother that you enjoyed his cooking and asked him earlier." Trey said shyly.

Mom let go of me and pulled Trey into a hug.

We walked outside and stopped by Mom and Dad's car.

"Be expecting care packages from us... John, do you like chocolate chip cookies?" Mom asked with a smile.

"Yeah, love 'em." John said happily.

"Then I'll be sure to send enough for you too. You guys take care of each other, and remember to call if you need anything... that includes all of you too Scott." Mom said firmly.

"Yes Mom." Scott said with a joyful smile.

Mom went to each of us and gave us a kiss, Dad was next in line to give all of us a warm hug.

I put an arm around Scott as I stood at his side.

I watched Mom and Dad get in the car and pull away as I felt Trey's arm pull me close from my other side. I glanced over and saw John with an arm around Trey.

All four of us waved as Mom and Dad drove away.

[The End]