

Abatement

by Benjamin Hanson

Chapters Seven through Ten

Statement and Disclaimer

The response to this story has been little so far, but I can't help but remain committed to the project. I've found myself inspired far beyond what I'm used to, and I am beginning to etch a path for this story to travel on. With that being said, comments and suggestions are still very much welcome. To the two of you that have commented, I thank you for your support and well wishes. I promise to continue this story either way. Please feel free to email me at benhanson1980@yahoo.com

With that being said, the same rules apply to this submission as did the previous. If this story is illegal in your particular jurisdiction then please don't continue reading. If you are under eighteen, are offended by cross generational themed stories or the age regression genre doesn't interest you then don't read this either.

Chapter Seven

The remainder of my day was spent searching for James and trying to avoid Jose as much as was possible. Fortunately he seemed to have no desire to leave the electronics room until something necessitated that he do so. I found myself feeling more hurt by the encounter than I had imagined. As an adult, such an encounter would have been exciting, erotic and invigorating, but as a child I found myself torn. A part of me that I didn't understand sought his acceptance, and another part of me hated him for the vile act he committed. It wasn't my desire to bring any more attention to my presence than was necessary, so I chose to not tell Bessie. The only person I knew I could talk to was James, and he was nowhere to be seen. I decided to go outside, shortly before dinner, to search once more.

"Hey dude!" I heard a familiar voice call from beneath the hedges that surrounded the porch.

"Hi?" I asked, almost certain now that I knew who it was. As soon as Jack and David's heads popped up my suspicions were confirmed.

“Do you want to play now?” They asked in unison, looking up to me in some unfamiliar manner. I wondered if they saw me as older, as a big brother type. They were obviously actual children, there was no denying that, and apparently I wasn’t as obvious as I felt I had been.

“Uh, what do you want to play?”

Jack and David looked at each other, shrugging silently. All of a sudden David’s eyebrows stood sharp again his forehead and he turned to stare at me, a curious expression etched across his freckled face.

“We don’t know any big kid games, could you get us into the electronics room?” His eyes seemed to plead with every inch of their scope.

“It’s really not that exciting. I’m sure there are a ton of games we could play out here that would be a lot more fun.”

“Oh...” Jack and David said together with a slight look of disappointment. I didn’t have to wait long for them to perk up again.

“Let’s play tag!” David shouted.

I laughed a little, feeling quite pleased that the subject of that damned room had been dropped so quickly. “Sure, anything you want.”

Jack giggled and ran up to me, slapping me hard on the arm. “You’re it!”

I watched, stunned for a moment. as he ran off into the yard, giggling the whole way. David was soon to follow and it amazed me how much energy they had. They had been outside for hours at this point. I tried hard to remember how much time I had spent outside as a child and it completely escaped me; my parents, being better off than most, prized tutoring sessions and violin lessons before all else. I found myself experiencing the antithesis of my youth, the opportunity for wild abandon, a life devoid of responsibilities and unpleasanties. Maybe this wouldn’t be so bad after all? My grin spread wide across my face as I let my childhood instincts overtake me. My legs shot forward and I was soon in hot pursuit of Jack as he ran into the woods.

“You’ll never catch me!” I heard Jack shout as I rounded the first set of trees and I managed to clear the gap between us quite quickly. It amazed me how good the wind felt against my face and arms, and the amount of energy that I had. A mere walk home at the end of each shift as an adult left me winded, but running as a child left me more energetic, left me feeling free. I couldn’t help but laugh; I couldn’t help but enjoy myself. I noticed David out of the corner of my eye running through the trees next to me, fighting hard to catch up to his brother. I snickered to myself as I shot off the path and after David who seemed to be the slower of the two.

“You can’t catch me!” David giggled wildly as he started rounding around random trees to lose me. I imagined that I had already lost the opportunity to catch Jack at this point but passing the “it” to someone else seemed worth it. It was, after all, the point of the game.

“You wish!” I laughed as I sprung forward, tackling David into a pile of leaves as we both giggled wildly.

“You’re it!” I shouted as I stood and prepared to run back further into the woods. As soon as David began to rise and follow, we heard a scream beyond us.

“Help!” I heard the familiar voice of Jack shout. David and I looked at each other earnestly and nodded, running together back towards the trail to find him. It didn’t take us long to see the reason for his distress, as we came across a large pit with Jack stuck at the bottom of it. I stopped, frozen for a moment, as my mind raced to find a solution.

“Are you hurt?” I asked, already expecting the answer I would receive.

“I think I hurt my ankle!” Jack groaned, using his arms to reposition his leg.

I glanced over at David who had tears welling up in his eyes. He grabbed hold of my arm tightly, looking up at me.

“Please help him you’re older!”

I smiled a little, unsure of how I would accomplish the feat but I knew it had to be done. I shook David off of me and walked over to the edge of the pit. The walls were fairly steep and I would imagine it was about four feet deep. Being somewhat shorter than that, it would be a challenge to get him out but I knew there had to be a way.

“Go back to the house and get help!” I shouted at David who nodded and very quickly ran back up the trail towards home. I looked around for a vine or an old forgotten rope, anything that would help me in getting him out.

“I’m trying to find something to lift you out with, hold on.” I said as calmly as I could. Jack nodded, rubbing a few errant tears from his cheeks. While I couldn’t find anything that resembled a rope, I did manage to find a fallen branch that was long enough to make a ladder of sorts.

“Get over to the far side of the pit!” I shouted down to Jack who nodded. I watched as he crawled over, wincing each time his leg moved. I sighed, feeling more helpless than I had in many years. I grabbed the edge of the branch and pulled, straining with every ounce of me to get it within a comfortable distance of the pit. Once it was close enough, I grabbed the other end, lifted it up, and began to push as hard as I could. My feet kept sinking into the wet earth beneath me, but I finally managed to exert enough pressure to make it move. I grinned, feeling fairly accomplished, as I pushed it far enough to collapse the rest of the way into the pit. I looked down at Jack who was sobbing into his hands.

“Hold on, I’m coming down!” I called, taking a seat next to the pit and dangling my legs inside. There were two feelings that overwhelmed me at that point; the first was my desire to not get hurt, and the second was an intense fear of heights that I had nearly forgotten. Four feet seemed a long way to go for one so small. I swallowed deeply, accepting what I had to do, and pushed myself down. I thankfully landed on my feet and breathed a sigh of relief. As soon as I collected myself I bent down to look at Jack’s leg.

“Are you okay?”

He shook his head, wiping more tears away as I noticed it was turning blue.

“Can you move it at all?”

Jack’s right arm grabbed me tightly as he made an effort to move it. Thankfully it managed to turn a little but with no small amount of pain in return. He let out a yell that could probably be heard from miles away. I patted his shoulder, trying to comfort him as best as I could.

“It’s not broken if you can move it so that’s good. Now we just have to get you out of here.” I bent down in front of him and motioned for him to put his arms around my neck. I braced myself on my feet and tried to raise us both up. It amazed me how heavy he seemed, and it took a great amount of personal effort on my part to actually manage to stand. Jack yelled out, wrapping his good leg around me and allowing the other to dangle near inches from the ground. I grabbed his arms and held them, hoping that he wouldn’t fall.

“Okay you have to hold on tight alright?” I wasn’t able to see him nod so I assumed that he had heard me. I walked over to the branch and began to climb. Navigating my way up it was fairly difficult; I had to search for holes and crevices in which to place my feet and my hands. By the time I had managed to get half way up my legs were so weak from the weight I was holding that I didn’t think I could go on. My hand grabbed wildly to support myself and I felt a splinter go into my hand. I yelled out in pain, grabbing Jack’s arm even tighter with my free hand.

“Are you okay?” He asked with concern between snuffles.

“Yeah I just got a splinter.” I turned my head and smiled at him. I moved my hand and grabbed another knot in the branch higher above me and willed my legs to move. No matter how weak I was, or how impossible it seemed to accomplish, I knew that I had to get Jack out of that pit. I climbed and with each step I groaned, fighting against the will of my knees to buckle. At last I felt my hand touch the soil above and I felt an unbelievable sense of relief wash over me. I managed to step on another knot and with a quick thrust; I propelled us both onto the forest ground above.

Jack winced as he rolled over onto his back and I panted right alongside him. My knees were still weak but I was pleased with what I had managed to accomplish. Having nearly forgotten my charge, I quickly rolled over to make sure he was okay.

“You okay?” I asked, looking at his face so filled with agony.

"I'm really glad we got out, thank you." He smiled what little he could.

I smiled back and helped him to sit up.

"I'm going to get you as far up the trail as I can. Do you think you can ride on my back some more?"

Jack nodded and I stooped down in front of him. As soon as he wrapped his arms around me and I stood to my full height once more, I started back up the trail. I silently cursed David, wondering why he hadn't ran back immediately with help for his fallen brother. It wasn't his fault that this had happened, but I could only do so much as a nine year old. I realized my limitations, probably more than anyone could, and he seemed to have no concept of them. At least I knew in my heart of hearts that what I was doing was a noble act. I had visions of being lauded as a hero, carried on shoulders back to the house and declared a child messiah. I didn't know why I wanted recognition for what I had done but I did just the same. As I made it nearly close enough to see the clearing ahead, I saw Bessie running down with David leading the way. I smiled gratefully, in full knowledge of the relief I would soon receive.

"It's going to be alright honey!" Bessie shouted as she ran towards me. I bent down what little I could as she swept David from my arms, cradling him like an infant against her chest. She said nothing to me, only turning and heading back towards the house. I looked at David who was out of breath. His already cheeks were even rosier than usual.

"Thanks." He spoke genuinely, fully confident of his brother's recovery in the care of Bessie.

"Anytime..." I whispered in reply. I didn't want to toot my own horn or anything. David wrapped his hand in mine as we started walking slowly back towards the house.

When we reached the clearing we saw that the yard was devoid of life. There was an older station wagon situated next to the porch with a medical cross on the side.

"Doctors still do house calls?" I murmured to myself mostly but David had heard me.

"Yeah anytime somebody gets sick or hurt the doctor comes up here. We really aren't near any cities."

I nodded, suddenly realizing that this child obviously had more knowledge of the area than I did.

"Where are we exactly?"

David giggled for the first time since the incident. "We're in Maine of course!"

I simply nodded. The pine trees should have been a dead giveaway but I didn't expect to be this far away from home. I wondered logistically how they could get James from Maine all the way to Massachusetts to serve his duties each night. It had been awhile since I made the trip, but by car I remembered it being about two hours if we were as far south as Portland. When we approached the door I could see Bessie rushing towards us. For the first time since the earlier incident with Jose, I felt

genuine fear rise inside of me. I didn't know why, it was fairly irrational, but I held David's hand even tighter than I had before. As the door burst open she looked down at me with an unreadable expression on her face.

"Now you listen here. You are nine years old; you are supposed to be responsible! What you did leading them down into those woods was reckless and foolish!"

I felt my eyes begin to water up. I had no idea what to say in my defense and all of my prior desires for praise had escaped me completely.

"With that being said, I can't believe what you did to save him. I'm very proud of you!" She wrapped her large arms around me and lifted me up, pressing me firmly into her bosom. I smiled deeply, wrapping my arms around her. I had been vindicated and recognized for what I was, a hero. She sat me down and patted my head.

"Now go on upstairs and take another bath, I've got to make sure Jack is okay and dinner gets made on time."

She looked at David next to me.

"Take him with you."

In any normal circumstance the fact that I was completely covered in mud and dirt would have been obvious, but in the rush of the moment I hadn't noticed. I looked at David who was in a similar state and giggled to myself. I grabbed his hand and led him back inside. I peered over towards the electronics room and saw no sign of Jose or Jake.

"The coast is clear..." I said in silent relief. David had noticed but decided not to say anything.

We ascended the stairs together and I was grateful that I had David with me. He made quick work of showing me where the towels and rags were. He showed me the linen closet that held all the clothing. Apparently everything that we wore was community property, donated by local charitable organizations for us to wear; when I asked David why that was, he explained that Bessie didn't want anybody to have something that somebody else didn't. She wanted everyone to feel equal and the same. I couldn't help but smile; it was a remarkably clever idea. After finding some clothes that fit us we marched into the bathroom where David started to disrobe. I stood there for a minute, staring in amazement of his nonchalance about it.

"Are you going to get naked?" He asked as though I were committing some egregious crime.

I nodded, and slowly took off my shirt, still a tad embarrassed to reveal myself. My eyes cast over David's naked form. As were most children of Irish descent, his skin was pale. He had an adorable bubble butt that fit his age quite well. I watched in mild curiosity as David turned on the water. My eyes broke away as soon as he climbed into the tub. After completely undressing and climbing in to join him, the tenseness in my body began to fade away. We each washed individually and David blabbed on and

on about Jack and how he was really tough. He told me about all the delightful meals that Bessie made, and how she always kissed everyone goodnight, even the older kids. One item of interest was his mention of the “bad boys”, a pair of teenagers that made life hard on everyone else. I felt my muscles tense again at the thought of one of them violating this child before me; he seemed so sweet and innocent, vibrant with life and purity. I tried my best to ask without being too explicit.

“Have they ever done anything bad to you?”

“Yeah! They made me lick their feet one time!”

I breathed a sigh of relief. Apparently such treatment was either reserved for me personally, or for people closer in age to them. I relaxed a little, still unhappy they’d do anything mean to him or his brother, but it was certainly better than the alternative. As we finished and dried off, we stood at the sink together combing our hair and brushing our teeth. As soon as I managed to wipe my mouth and slip on my pants I caught sight of David running back towards the entrance. I smiled to myself, glad to have made a friend. I walked out of the bathroom and turned the corner stopping dead in my tracks. It was James.

Chapter Eight

James led me to the top story where the pre-teens rooms were located. It was obviously a former attic that had been converted into six bedrooms. Each bedroom was shared by two boys. Thankfully, I had been assigned to James’ room and he led me in to sit down on my bed. He sat across from me and stared with a dreamy look in his eyes. I smiled a little, unsure of what he wanted.

“I really didn’t mean to lead him into the woods like that. They wanted to play tag and I just decided to do it! I saved him, I mean, yeah I saved him!” I said preemptively protesting any accusations that could come. I felt my stomach churn at the words that I had said. I sounded more childish than I had thus far. James held up his hands and laughed a little.

“Dude, no reason to be sorry, you were just being a kid.”

“That’s kind of the problem...” I muttered to myself.

“What do you mean?” He asked with a curious expression on his face.

“I’m not the same anymore! I feel all these emotions that I can’t explain and I want to go out and run and play. I actually want to make friends with these kids and I just don’t understand it.”

James smirked, laying back on his bed and placing his hands over his stomach.

“Well there’s a reason for that, you are a kid now. You will always be aware of your past, but things just start to change. You feel more energetic, want to play, and want to have fun... At the end of the day you are just a slave to your emotions. There isn’t anything you can do about it.”

I blinked. I had suspected that I was acting this way due to shock or due to some innate survival mechanism that I couldn't explain. The fact that the transformation did this as well was a new revelation.

"Then the medicine changes your brain?"

James shrugged, turned on his side and propped his head up on his arm so he could see me better.

"The best way that I can explain it is how Frederick explained it to me. You are smaller; you no longer have hormones coursing through you, so naturally you are going to be different. I go whole days that I forget how old I really am but I always remember eventually. There isn't anything wrong with it, you get used to it after awhile. When you start serving your purpose you'll start to lose it a little bit."

I looked down at my feet. I had completely forgotten about my "purpose". I guess the change and the emotions it was causing occupied my mind too much.

"Are you going out on the streets or did you get a bidder?" James asked.

"I have a bidder."

James winced uncomfortably as he turned back over onto his back. I felt fear rush through me as he did.

"What's that supposed to mean!?" I asked breathlessly.

"At least while you're on the streets you get to come here during the day. You can have a little bit of a childhood and it's kind of a reward after everything is said and done. When you have a bidder you don't get breaks, you don't get to be a kid. I think I'd rather die than live like that."

I swallowed deeply. I had my suspicions as to what kind of a life that would be but he had confirmed it. I wasn't sure what to do or what to say as I felt tears begin to slide down my cheeks. James immediately stood up and came to sit next to me. He wrapped his arm around my shoulder in comfort as I laid my head against him.

"I don't want to live like that! I just want to stay here and never leave!" I said in between sobs. James sighed and patted me gently.

"I told you not to stay but you chose to. You made your bed and now you have to sleep in it."

I looked down at my feet again. He was right, he had given me a warning and I chose not to heed it. I didn't feel that it warranted such a life, but maybe it did? Was I really that bad of a person? I didn't want to think so but my life before meant absolutely nothing. I worked at a job I hated; I had no ambition to improve my station in life. The only reason I ever went down to that place was because I was feeling sorry for myself. I should have been more grateful.

“Maybe if you give him a hard time he’ll sell you back.” James laughed a little nervously. I took his suggestion as what it was, pointless hope.

“When is Frederick going to come back?”

“He’ll be here tonight with Horace to take me back to Mass. He’ll stick around though to give you your training.”

“I think I’m going to talk to him.” I said with a small amount of misplaced confidence. I slipped off of the bed and turned on my heel to stare at James. The look on his face was fairly sympathetic. I knew that talking was useless, and that he didn’t want to burst my bubble, but I would look forward to it just the same. I had a Bachelors in Philosophy after all. If I couldn’t talk my way out of something then what were all those years for?

James stood up and patted my head. “Ready to eat?”

“Yep!” I shouted and ran out of the room ahead of him. I wasn’t going to lose hope until I absolutely had to.

As soon as I reached the bottom of the stairs I saw David and Jack already sitting together. Jack had a pair of crutches stacked neatly against the wall behind him and I decided to quickly run over to make sure he was okay.

“Hey, what happened?” I asked with genuine concern.

“The doctor said it was just a bad sprain. I haveta have this stupid stuff wrapped around it for a week but he said it should be okay after that. Guess I can’t go outside and play anytime soon.” He lamented his situation in classic style.

“Well at least you’re okay.” I smiled, preparing to leave when David caught hold of my arm.

“Sit with us!”

I smiled and obliged, taking a seat next to David and looking around the table at the other boys. Jose and Jake sat together near the end of the table and they were throwing spit wads at some of the younger kids. James had taken his place near a shifty looking ten year old with messy black hair and blue eyes. He looked decidedly uncomfortable and I assumed that he must be like us. Before I had the chance to examine anyone else, Bessie was coming into the room with large plates full of food for everyone.

“Alright everyone y’all get ready to eat!” She smiled from ear to ear, putting down the dishes she could carry and busily hurrying back towards the kitchen to get more.

Each dish was a delight to behold; mashed potatoes, green beans, macaroni and cheese, corn, stuffing, cornbread, fried chicken. It was an entire southern feast and it seemed as though there wasn’t any taste ignored. Everyone became very quiet as the serving dishes were passed around and everyone got whatever they wanted. I went for a leg, some green beans and some mashed potatoes. David and

Jack seemed to take way too much of everything. I knew there wasn't any way that they could actually finish all of it. By the time everyone had been served I dug in and felt a warm sensation cover my entire body.

"Ish gud!" I said. My mouth was completely full of chicken as David was hungrily shoveling the contents of his plate into his mouth. He swallowed and grinned at me happily.

"Yeah it is! Bessie makes the best food ever!"

Bessie, who was a few seats down, had heard the compliment and smiled at us.

"Well thank you sugar I appreciate that."

I nodded, continuing to eat as much as I could handle and actually managed to polish off my plate. My mind wanted more, but my small stomach just couldn't take it. I sat back and groaned, entirely too full to even think about moving. I watched David and Jack give up around the same time but they had actually managed to eat about two thirds of their plates. They seemed even more miserable than I was. Bessie disturbed my moment of peace very quickly.

"Alright everyone! Tonight we have Jose, James and Colby on dishes, the rest of you can go play for the rest of the afternoon!"

Jose groaned immediately and stomped away from the table into the kitchen. James and Colby, the black haired boy from before, simply stood and began collecting things. I now knew that my suspicions were confirmed about the boy. David tugged on my shirt.

"Do you want to play some more?"

Jack's face seemed to contort into one of bitter loneliness. I smiled at him gently before returning my attention to David.

"I think I'm going to go upstairs and take a nap. Why don't you play with Jack for awhile?"

David groaned but accepted. Jack smiled appreciatively at me as I rose from my chair and went back into the entrance to climb the stairs to my room.

Chapter Nine

I must have slept for awhile because I was surrounded by nothing but darkness. I sat up, semi coherent, to see Frederick standing above me and the large thug from that night. Upon seeing him I scooted back immediately in shock, unable to contain myself.

"What are you doing here!?" I demanded in a voice that sounded more adult than it had in many days.

The man laughed, mostly to himself, and Frederick smiled in turn.

Frederick soothingly spoke, "There is nothing to worry about; he's just here to take James back to Massachusetts for the night."

I nodded, still a little disturbed by his presence. "Then he is... Horace?" I suddenly remembered the name that James had mentioned earlier that day.

"Yes. He provides security for the boys and in your case inducts them I suppose..." His voice trailed off as he looked thoughtfully at the ceiling.

James walked into the room; completely dressed in the same frock I had seen him in the previous evening. His face looked completely different to me, as though he hadn't eaten in weeks.

"Hey Ben, catch you tomorrow." He waived a little.

I silently waved back, a little concerned that we might turn into something entirely different at night. Perhaps it was something like being a werewolf... I prepared myself to ask when Frederick, seemingly knowing what I was going to ask, answered.

"Part of not wanting to face any legal investigations is taking as many precautions as possible. If he looks homeless, then people assume he is. For those who come through unaware, for the police, for... well you catch my drift. It's easier this way."

I nodded understandingly. I was glad to hear that we didn't turn into some deviant creature when night fell.

"I'm glad you came; I have a lot of stuff to ask you." I spoke suddenly, rising up on my knees and looking up at Frederick.

Frederick smiled, patted my head, and took a seat next to me. He was wearing the same white lab coat he had worn the night I first saw him.

"I'm sure you do."

I nodded and began to incoherently blab out everything on my mind, "Basically I mean I went downstairs today and this one older kid made me suck him! He completely tricked me and it wasn't even my fault! Then I started feeling really funny I mean like I don't think or talk the way I used to... See what I mean!? THEN! THEN I went down into the woods to play with these two kids and one fell in a hole and I had to save him, but it was okay because Bessie didn't get too mad at me. Oh and I don't know what you think but I'd rather go on the streets and stay here than have to be leased to somebody, and..."

My voice suddenly trailed off as my hands rose to cover my mouth. I knew how foolish I sounded, and everything I said was mostly involuntary. I knew, because of James, the sort of emotional changes that I was going through but I didn't expect them to be so powerful. I looked up at Frederick who was merely smiling. I looked down below me onto the bedspread and hoped that I could

completely disappear. This man was, at the end of the day, my mortal enemy. It was because of him that I was experiencing these things. I may have erred, but this punishment was not legitimate or even moral. I should be an adult right now, repeating the exact same mundane routine that I always had. Instead of hating him I cleaved to his presence like a son would to a father. I wanted his wisdom and there were so many answers that I craved. Before I could try and convince myself to feel anger he had already begun speaking.

“To begin with that was a whole mouth full but that’s okay. I’ll answer all your questions and tell you things you didn’t even know you wanted to know. All I ask is that you sit back and relax.”

I nodded, unable to keep my curiosity at bay. I scooted backwards onto the headboard and sat, my eyes locked permanently on his.

“I am well aware of the incident this afternoon. The young man in question has a wealth of problems that certainly need to be addressed. You did exactly what anyone would expect a child to do. You wanted acceptance, therefore you relented. If he attempts to pursue the issue again then I suggest you either politely refuse or relent. Either way the leaders at this establishment do not need to be notified.”

I raised my eyebrow, unaware of how he knew so much.

“As far as your emotional state I realize that James explained to you a little of what’s happening. We aren’t entirely sure what causes it to occur, to what severity it will present in each person, or at what speed. You seem to be very susceptible to it. Once you start having relations with your bidder the innocence that you are reclaiming will be slowed considerably.”

I nodded. I wanted to protest the bidder part but he had already begun speaking again before I could.

“I’m very happy to hear that you are getting along so well with everyone. I know that Jack and David value your friendship dearly, and I assure you that no one blames you for the earlier incident. You were, after all, just being a boy.”

I sighed to myself. Part of me was comforted, another part infuriated by being talked down to.

“As far as your bidder is concerned, we have already signed a legally binding contract with him and short of the funds not clearing or his choosing to cancel it, there’s nothing that can be done. Your personal happiness, while important, isn’t more important than twenty-five million dollars.”

My jaw nearly dropped when I heard that. Was I truly worth that much? Perhaps the better question would have been was I worth that little? Could a value really be put on a person’s time? Was it more or less valuable if they were, for all intensive purposes, immortal?

"It's just not fair! I'm not a bad person, I promise! I don't want to go." I shook my head as hard as I could. My eyes began to well up with tears and I felt completely hopeless again. As I began to sob and the tears flowed like a river, Frederick placed both hands on my shoulders.

"You made the choice of servitude over death. This was your decision. I realize that you are overcome by these emotions but there is nothing I can do. I can assure you that this client will not relinquish his control over you, no matter what you do, so you better learn to accept your fate now."

My tears stopped as I looked up at him in anger; every fiber of my being ached to lash out at him. I wanted so badly to make him feel the same pain that I did. I wanted to use my arms, my hands, my legs... anything available to me to cause him excruciating pain. I knew that I couldn't; I knew that as a nine year old I didn't have nearly enough physical strength. I was unsure of what to say, what to feel.

"You said that you wanted to create someone that could psychologically handle this; if I am becoming a child then how does that qualify!?" I asked, looking at him with eyes aflame.

He looked at me with the same cold expression I experienced the first night we met.

"This little maturity regression will end in due time. As soon as you are within his control, this youthful vigor will be lost. Do you see how much more mature James is than you? Do NOT attempt to psychoanalyze my methods. I know very well the ramifications and regardless of how small you are now, you are still a despicable, foolish, ungrateful twenty-nine year old."

I looked at him with a slightly hurt expression. The emotions of my reviving youth and my adulthood were fighting once more.

"What if... what if..." my voice trailed off as I tried to find something, anything to support my case.

"There are no what ifs you damned fool!" He slammed his fist down on the bedside table causing me to jump. I looked at him in terror for the first time.

"Do you want to hear more about this or would you like for me to just let you find out on your own?"

I shook my head unable to know what I wanted. My curiosity existed, but so did my anger. There was so much I wanted to say but simply couldn't get out. I began to cry uncontrollably again, falling into Frederick's side against my better judgment. Frederick wrapped his arm around me and held me for a minute, letting his fingers pass through my hair.

"I'm sorry that I yelled," he whispered.

I chose not to reply. All that I wanted was to cry, and for him to comfort me in turn. I may have hated him but I knew that I needed this more than anything else right now. I felt myself weaken, my body waned. As soon as I began to relax he began speaking once more.

“Two weeks from now the funds will have been received and sent to the appropriate accounts. Once that is accomplished, you will be immediately sent to Mr. Terrance via secure transport. You will be put to sleep so that you do not recall how or where you arrived. Once you are in his possession it becomes your responsibility to do as he says. There is no request that is beneath you. If you choose not to fulfill his requests then your punishment will be determined by Mr. Terrance. The only rule is that he cannot terminate your life. If he does so, then he will not be welcome to bid on anyone else in the future. Once your contract of twenty years is over, or Mr. Terrance dies, you will have the option of either going to the streets or being placed up for another bidder for the remainder of your time. Once you have hit the fifty year mark, well you know what happens after that.”

I backed away from him so I could look at him. The requirements that he had for me were so inhuman.

“What do you know about Mr. Terrence?” I asked, lips trembling.

“I know that he is a very wealthy man. He doesn’t tolerate insolence so it would be in your best interest to obey. I feel fairly certain he has an adequate housekeeping staff so you will probably just be there for his personal pleasure. As far as what that entails, I’m not entirely sure.”

I nodded, more curious than angry. I wanted to know everything that I could.

“What would happen if I murdered him?”

Frederick laughed before returning his gaze to my serious expression. “You’re serious? Let’s see, if that occurred which is fairly near impossible, then... I’m not entirely sure. There would certainly be dire consequences I assure you.”

I nodded. “Are there any ways for me to get out of it without him?”

Frederick laughed again, rolling his eyes at my futility. “It’s adorable that you’re trying but sadly no there are not. He would have to voluntarily relinquish control in order for that to happen and I assure you he won’t.”

I sighed, looking down. “Does he know my real age?”

“Thanks for mentioning that. No he does not. All of our clients know that we stop the aging process not that you are actually adults. It is extremely important that you not reveal this or you will be terminated.”

I frowned. As much as I tried there appeared to be no outlet.

“Is there anything else?” He asked with mild interest. His eyes were staring at the window.

“I guess not...” I whispered, accepting my fate to some degree.

“That is grand. Considering the late hour I feel that it’s time for me to depart. Prepare for another meeting at this same hour tomorrow.” He inclined his head in my direction before walking towards the door.

I watched silently as he left, closing the door behind him. I was left alone once more, and as a slave to my thoughts. I thought momentarily about the option of death that I had so easily passed up. What was life without freedom, without liberty? Was the price of survival worth it? I made the decision to reflect on the issue later. It was extremely late and I was very exhausted. The various emotional states I cycled through that evening left me exhausted and in need of some well deserved sleep. I lay back against my pillow, closed my eyes, and quickly drifted off into my dreams.

Chapter Ten

As the sun peered in, bathing me with its warmth, my eyes batted open to greet the new day. I sat up quickly, remembering where I was, and immediately noticed that I was alone. I strained my ears to try and get some indication of the time but it was useless. Either everyone was downstairs or everyone was asleep. Either way, I couldn’t be sure. I slid my legs off the side of the bed and sat up, yawning and stretching as I did. Just as I prepared to stand a furious knock came at the door making me jump.

“Come in!” I called. I wasn’t sure if I’d ever get used to these constant intrusions.

“Hey!” David grinned as he slid in, shutting the door quickly behind him. He was wearing the same clothes from the day before and looked winded.

“What’s up?” I asked, unsure of what to do.

“Not much.” He stuck his hands in his pockets and strolled into the room. He examined James’ already made bed and the window behind it. I began to feel confused.

“Is there something you need to tell me?”

“Oh I’m sorry I guess I forgot you’re new.” He giggled, rubbing his ginger hair with his right hand. “We aren’t supposed to be up here.”

I nodded and smiled a little. “So this is your first time up here?”

“Kind of, I mean I’ve been up here before but I’ve never been in any of the rooms. They’re bigger than ours are. Plus we have to share with three others boys!” He looked personally insulted.

I smiled, trying to sympathize. “I guess that kind of sucks... You can come up here anytime you want though.”

He grinned from ear to ear. “Really!?”

“Sure.” I laughed. I appreciated how much he seemed to like me.

“Good! Have you taken your bath yet?”

I shook my head. Apparently he hadn’t assumed I’d just woken up.

“Oh that’s cool. We don’t have breakfast for another hour.”

I nodded, immediately glad that it was still early. I didn’t want to arouse any suspicion concerning my being up so late the previous evening.

“You want to take a bath together again?”

“Sure!” At that point he ran out of the room and I could hear his feet rushing down the stairs to the second floor. I laughed to myself again, and followed at a much slower pace. By the time I had reached the lower level he was rushing back from the linen closet with clothes in hand.

“I got us matching clothes so we can be twins today!”

I smiled and swung the door to the bathroom open, letting him enter ahead of me. My mind raced back to the hurt expression on Jack’s face from the day before. I hoped that he wasn’t forsaking his brother due to his injury. It wasn’t his fault that he couldn’t run around anymore. I tried my best to remove the thought from my mind as I took my shirt off, staring at the nude form of David in front of me.

“How’s Jack?” I asked, deciding it was okay to know that much.

“Oh he’s okay. He said you’re really cool for saving him.”

I smiled, glad that what I had done was appreciated. I really didn’t have much of a choice in the matter but they didn’t have to know that. David slipped into the tub and I followed suit, sitting directly across from him.

“What do you want to play today?” He asked, soaping up a rag and rubbing it across his chest.

“Whatever you want to I guess. What does Jack want to do?”

David’s nose scrunched up a little bit. “All he can do is sit around now, I want to do something cool!”

I frowned a little. I didn’t want Jack to see me as a threat to the relationship he shared with his brother. Children are somewhat selfish, it is the nature of who they are, but I couldn’t help but hope for some manner of sympathy on David’s part for his brother. “I know he can’t walk as good but I think you should play with him. I think he’s really lonely right now.”

David looked slightly distressed as he launched himself at me, wrapping his arms firmly around my body. Our young members mashed together and I began to blush.

“Please don’t hate me! I promise if I’m annoying I’ll get better!”

My feelings of sympathy for Jack immediately shifted to David. I had never thought of him feeling lonely and left out with the absence of his brother. He craved my attention, and was glad to have it. It was in that moment that I decided to be the best friend I could be. I wouldn’t question him, and anything that he wanted would be my command; damn the consequences. As David shifted down a little to look at my face, I remembered the closeness of our bodies and I became red again.

“Please?”

I smiled, patting his back softly. “I think you’re cool, I’ll play with you anytime.”

“Hurray!” David shouted as he hugged me tightly again, pushing himself upwards and causing our cocks to come in contact once more. I at once felt dirty for enjoying it and excited by the contact. I was no longer an adult, technically, so maybe it was alright to like it? Then again David was an actual child in his own right. It wasn’t that I had any plans to do anything; I just wanted to understand how I was feeling and how he possibly felt. The answer to the last part became immediately apparent. David let go, a look of delight etched across his face, and resumed his washing. He seemed blissfully unaware of our physical contact, or what exactly it had meant to me. I guess I should have expected as much. I joined him and as soon as we were rinsed, we dressed and walked down the stairs together.

At the bottom I caught sight of Jose in the corner, talking intensely with Jake. I grabbed David’s hand tightly and turned towards the dining room, watching them cautiously while trying not to draw their attention. Jose cast a quick gaze in my direction and another towards my young companion. He winked at me, a cocky expression crossing his face.

“You going to come finish our game today?” He asked. Jake immediately turned to see who he was talking to. David looked first at me, and then to the other boys. I knew what was coming before it happened.

“He’s my friend now, go pick on somebody your own size!” David squeaked, sticking his tongue out. I began to flush violently in both fear and regret. Either David felt invincible in my presence or he was prepared to defend me. Either way, I just wanted to steer clear of Jose entirely.

“Is that so?” Jose asked as he strolled over, towering above David.

David immediately clinged to my side and I conjured up the most threatening face I could. I had no chance of defending myself against Jose but I couldn’t let him pick on David like that. “Yeah!” I shouted; my voice quivered.

Jose and Jake both laughed. My eyes grew large as Jose began to draw up a fist. I grabbed onto David as tightly as I could, trying to protect him. Thankfully Bessie chose that moment to intervene.

“Now what do you think you’re doing? These boys are too young for you to be bullying them around. You get in here right now and eat your breakfast!” She immediately grabbed Jose by the arm and pushed him into the dining room. I watched as Jose turned his head before disappearing.

“This isn’t the end of this.” He said with violent anger.

David hugged me tightly as tears began to pour down my cheeks. I was afraid, and there was nothing that could be done to stop Jose; he was a bully and a deviant. David looked up at me and frowned.

“It’s gonna be okay! Bessie won’t let him beat you up!”

I sniffled, wiped the tears from my face, and forced myself to stop crying.

“I hope so.” I said. David smiled as much as he could manage and slipped his hand back into mine. We both entered the dining room together and took our places next to Jack.

“How are you feeling?” I peered over at Jack, doing my best to forget about the previous altercation.

“I’m okay I guess.” He smiled at me. While the two boys were very much similar, there were some subtle differences that one could see on closer examination. Jack had a slightly thinner face than David, but their smiles were identical. He also seemed to have slightly darker hair.

“I was worried about you.” I said, smiling back. I wanted Jack to know that I wasn’t a threat to him in any way. I hadn’t lied either, I truly was concerned.

“Thanks.” Jack said. He didn’t say a lot but I didn’t detect any jealousy or pain.

Bessie exited the kitchen with the same voluminous array of food as she had before; eggs, bacon, sausage, pancakes, biscuits, gravy, hash browns, grits and toast. I wasn’t sure how she found the time to do all this but I was grateful. As long as I stayed here, I knew I would eat well. Unfortunately I had no idea how long that would be.

As soon as we finished David and I quickly ran off to play. I cast a glance back at Jack who seemed to not care either way. I hoped that that meant everything was alright. I had made it a point to not look at Jose, but he had been selected to wash dishes once more. I wondered if it was some form of punishment, but I found it hard to believe that James or Colby would do anything that would deserve that. As soon as we reached the entrance David pulled on a pair of flip flops and I did the same. Right before I stepped out James and Colby walked over to us with unreadable expressions on their faces.

“Can we play?” James asked. Colby looked at him with a look of bewilderment for a brief moment.

My eyebrow rose in confusion but I couldn’t fight my curiosity.

“What do you think David?” I asked; my eyes still locked on James.

“Sure! Let’s play hide and seek!”

“Sounds fun...” Colby murmured as he crossed his arms across his chest.

I could tell this was going to be interesting.