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Enjoy!

His Loving Beauty

Part One

I'd just gotten back from the bookstore with some new intellectual material I was excited to explore. As I was finding the key to unlock my door, a deep voice from behind me asked, "Just moved in?"

I turned around to respond but I was caught off guard by the impressive physique of the man before me, which brought a smile to my face. I inhaled sharply through my nose in surprise and appreciation. "Yeah," I answered quietly. "Um, from Connecticut."

I had recently moved to North Carolina for the first real job of my career. The only real change the move had made in my life so far was geographic, since just like back home and at college I had few friends—none here as of yet—and mostly stayed in and entertained myself.

I quickly looked this stranger over, taking him all in. Physically, he was my dream man. It was obvious from his very well muscled body he worked out often; he wasn't so big that it was freaky, but still seriously buffed and ripped. His developed chest stretched the white cotton of the T-shirt he was wearing, as did his thick hard biceps, each of which were tattooed. The one on his left bicep was another common one of a barbed wire circling his muscle. I couldn't see all of the one on his right arm, but it looked like a typical tribal tattoo. There was also a prominent vein that traced down from his shoulder, running down the middle of his bicep to the inside of his elbow. His shoulders were broad and strong, and looked oh-so cozy. Standing at least 6'5" tall, he seemed like a giant to me.

His face was just as strong and masculine as the rest of him. His eyes were deep and completely uncolored, just shining black. He had a neatly trimmed but full goatee and his jaw was very square. This combined nicely to give him a bit of a tough guy look which was mitigated by his current sly, confident smile, showing off his pearly white teeth. The man's head was shaved which worked perfectly for him. To top it all off, his skin was dark black, just a shade or two lighter than coal. While not exclusively attracted to them, I definitely have a special thing for black men.

I was very conscious of how important it was to not stare too long. After quickly absorbing the body of male perfection in front of me once more, I focused on his face again as he stepped closer and extended his right hand to me and said, "Cool. I'm Damon."

I'd always been rather awkward meeting new people, which is probably why I was still a lonely virgin at 23. The fact that I was already having sexual fantasies about this man was not helping my social ineptitude. I gave a quiet smile in an attempt to show friendliness, and I did my best to give him a manly handshake, struck by how small my hand looked in his. At first I didn't know what to say so I

just stared nervously at our hands, which was awkward for us both. When I figured out what a normal person would do in this situation, I looked up at his eyes and replied, “Oh, uh, Eddy.”

He smiled wider, “Good to meet you, Eddy.” His grin was so disarming it made me smile back at him.

I let out a short, one-syllable giggle and said, “Thanks. You too.”

Our hands disengaged from each other and I tried hard to maintain eye contact as he spoke, “So I guess you don’t have any friends around here yet, huh?”

“Um, no, not really.” It was really tough to not check out his body some more, but I managed for the most part. I was actually looking at the ground more than anything else. His stature was very intimidating even though he wasn’t trying to be.

“If you wanna hang out some time that’d be cool. You like football?”

Not wanting to deny this dark incarnation of Adonis anything and in the hopes of actually spending time with him, I lied, “Uh, yeah!”

“Cool. I usually have some people over to watch the game. You wanna come this week?”

“Yeah, that’d be great!” I knew I was a bit over the top in showing my excitement, but I just couldn’t help myself.

“Alright, I live right there,” he pointed to the door diagonally across from mine. “See you then, Eddy,” he said as he walked off.

I allowed myself to check out his butt and back as I mindlessly whispered, “Bye.”

Once Damon disappeared into his apartment, I let myself into mine, got in bed and masturbated thinking about the sexy colossus I’d just met, and all the wonderful things I wished he would do to me. After I let myself glow from my climax, I of course had to go online to figure out when “the game” was.

After a couple weeks I was already spending time at Damon’s often, along with his friends. Sometimes it was just to hang out, but it was usually to watch football. There were at least 5 to 10 other guys there every week for the game. But there were fewer (sometimes just the two of us!) if we were only hanging out.

Damon’s living room was simple but comfortable. The back of the couch was up against the far wall. The 42” flat panel HDTV sat in a big entertainment center. In front of that was a coffee table, and in front of that was the two-seat sofa which was a few feet farther away from the TV than the couch.

Since he was so tall Damon liked to stretch out. He might sit up during a game if he was excited, but he usually took up the whole couch even though a few extra people would have to be less comfortable during the game. Since I was usually the first person there, I always got to sit on the sofa next to Damon’s couch. I was late once but when I arrived, Damon made the guy in my spot stand so I could sit down because, “it’s his spot,” he said. I told them it’s okay and that I didn’t mind standing, but Damon insisted. It was so sweet I couldn’t help but smile.

Damon was definitely the top dog of the group, even though at 27 he wasn't the oldest. They were all friendly with each other, but on occasion, I would notice each of them looking specifically for Damon's approval. They'd tell their stories to Damon. Their jokes were intended to make Damon laugh above all. They wanted to impress him more than anyone else in the group. And when Damon spoke, everyone's mouths closed and they all listened. I'm sure he noticed this, but he never made a big deal of it.

I was the only white guy of the group though and I'm really small too, so I felt out of place at first. I'm only 5'6" and since I'm not very athletic, I'd always had a skinny body. I have very short brown hair that lies forward, flat on my head. I've been told by a few girls that I have amazing brown eyes, so I'm proud I have at least that one appealing feature.

In contrast, most of Damon's friends were black, and there were 2 Latinos, but none of them were quite like Damon. Some were well built, and I eventually figured that they must have known Damon from the gym where he worked as a personal trainer. Still, none of them were even near as devastatingly sexy as Damon. The one who came in second place for looks must have been Tay.

Tay's only true positive attribute was his good looks. He wasn't built big like Damon, but he was more than toned. His skin was light brown and he had black shoulder-length braids surrounding a very "pretty boy" face and he knew it. Other than being easy on the eyes, he was nothing special. He'd gotten by on his looks alone way too much in his life. He had very little character, wasn't very bright, and was just generally uninteresting. He was also flat out arrogant, unlike Damon who had very justifiable confidence in himself.

Hanging out with Damon was great, but there were downsides to the relationship, too. His friends frequently made it clear how they felt about gay people, or as they called us, "fags". Damon didn't join in on that as much as the others, but there were several instances where even he said some hurtful things. One of them once told a cruel joke about gays and after hearing it, Damon laughed and outright said that he hated fags. It hurt me a lot, probably much more than it should have, and I had to quickly make an excuse to leave because I knew I wouldn't be able to stop myself from tearing up. Looking back, it was probably obvious I was upset and I'd guess it made some of them suspicious of my sexuality if they weren't already. I wasn't sure how much thought went into Damon's declaration, but it didn't matter.

Even though he'd moved into the city, he still held onto this ugly bigotry from his upbringing in a southern Baptist family and town. He wasn't religious at all, but this was something he picked up not only at church, but at school, home, from friends, adults, everyone. He was taught from a very young age that you're supposed to hate fags. He wasn't stupid though, and I didn't understand why he hadn't overcome this bigotry already. It was hard to reconcile his intelligence with that attitude. I assumed he'd just never been challenged, by himself or anyone else, to contemplate those views.

Damon was very clever and often had me in fits of laughter from his witty commentary. He was really very intelligent and truly thought for himself. He had big ideas for both his own life and the world around him. He wasn't afraid to be ambitious, and I respected that. It was more for these reasons than his looks that I quickly developed a crush on Damon as well as my first meaningful friendship with him despite his ignorant attitude toward gay people. But I'd gotten to know him pretty well, and it was clear to me he was a good guy deep down. He had a big heart, full of empathy toward others.

I wasn't ashamed of my sexuality, but I was still very much in the closet. I'd never told anyone, not even my family because they were just too conservative and distant. I really did want to come out though. I even ordered a book that I thought might be able to help me.

Some of the details hit really close to home. The author wrote about homophobic "friends," and gave advice on whether or not to come out to them, depending on the situation. He also talked about suicidal thoughts, something I still struggled with sometimes. I related to it so much that it started to stir up too many bad emotions. It was too much for me so I had to just bookmark the page and put it down.

The fact that I was the only white guy would have made me a bit of an outsider to the rest of the group if Damon hadn't taken to standing up for me. The others picked on me sometimes, playfully, and I'd feel awkward and embarrassed, even though they all did it to each other too. Sometimes they'd imply that I was gay or something, and that made me really nervous. Damon would always step up to my defense though, putting my harasser on the spot. But one day, it went much farther than that.

I'd known him for a little more than 5 months when I was hanging out at Damon's with him and Tay. We were watching ESPN, some weekly highlights show. I was on the sofa, and Tay was to my left. Damon was in his usual spot stretching out, his legs up on the couch. The white T-shirt and gym shorts he was wearing fit loosely on his body. I was stealing quick casual glances of his body like I'd done in the past sometimes. Usually I was very careful when checking him out, and I didn't do it too often, but when his arms bent and tucked under his head on the arm of the couch, I took a bit more liberty than usual. I didn't turn my head, shifting only my eyes over to Damon's body. I figured Tay was too wrapped up in the show to notice me anyway.

I admit it, I have a bit of a thing for armpits, and seeing Damon's hairy underarm just below his huge bicep had me entranced. I was really enjoying the view, and I figured I could just soak it up for a few more peaceful seconds before it became obvious.

Suddenly, I was torn all too soon and all too roughly from the paradise my eyes were vacationing in. Tay, voice full of disgust, boomed out loudly and directly into my ear, "You a faggot or something?!"

His accusation shocked me, my whole face and ears now colored dark red I'm sure. I turned a little bit to look at him, and he pulled away from me a bit to the other side of the sofa, glaring at me with anger and revulsion. I was really scared, terrified. I visibly shook, trying not to cry. My heart raced, I began sweating, and my breathing hitched. I was prepared to swear in his Lord's name to my heterosexuality. I tried to think of something that would easily explain my gazing, wanting to refute the charge before Damon figured out what I was.

Before I could get a word out, I heard a shout from my right, "What the fuck, dude?"

I shifted my eyes to the coffee table in front of me. Just like that, I'd already lost the will to proclaim my innocence. I just wanted to get out of there, for my safety. As I tried to get an explanation out of my slightly open mouth, I heard Damon sit up on the couch. I froze completely, paralyzed by fear.

"What? He's a faggot! I saw him checking you out while you weren't looking. He couldn't take his eyes off you, man."

Damon sounded incredulous and annoyed, "Shut the fuck up, Tay."

Tay stood up and pointed at my face, accusing me again, “No, man! It’s true! The fag was fuckin’ pervin’ on you!”

Damon stood up too and took a step forward to within a foot of Tay, now standing directly in front of me. I again avoided looking at either of them by forcing my gaze down to my lap where my hands held each other. “Don’t call him that!” Damon yelled. His shouts were already very aggressive, and he was using that, as well as his impressive height, to intimidate Tay. And it was working. Tay was stepping back away from Damon repeatedly and Damon closed the short distance each time.

“Listen, dude! You got a fag in your—“

Damon interjected very loudly, “I told you to quit callin’ him that!” and stuck the forefinger of his right hand squarely in front of Tay’s eyes, as he breathed heavily and loomed over the slightly younger guy.

“But, dude!” Tay implored. “I’m your friend and he’s a fucking queer!”

“What’d I say!” Damon’s right hand sharply reminded Tay with a quick slap to the whole left side of his face. Damon’s hand then swiftly resumed its stance stiffly in front of Tay’s eyes, index finger extended.

Tay grunted, totally surprised, “Eurgh! Shit!” as his left hand went up to his face to soothe the stinging pain, and his right arm went up to his chest defensively, as he cowered a little. He pulled back again but not very far. His instinct was telling him he was way out of his league in this fight, but his ego wouldn’t let him submit completely.

“Damon... Dude...” Tay tried yet again. He put his arms out in front of him and opened his palms, trying to convince the much stronger man. “I’m telling you, man. He was looking right at your pits! You should be beatin’ the shit outta him, not me! He’s the faggot!”

“Ahh!” Tay’s scream was so loud it scared me a little bit. He was sent sprawling to the ground with such force that he slid a few inches on the hard wood floor slamming his head into the wall. He wrapped both his arms around his head, trying to protect himself. Between his arms he looked up at Damon fearfully, breathing hard through his clenched teeth. His face screwed up in what was obviously extreme pain, and I think I saw tears too.

Damon advanced toward Tay quickly, and based on his body language and what I could see of his face, he looked intensely angry, like he was controlled by rage. I was worried about what he might do so I stood and pleaded “Damon, don’t hurt him! Please!” I’d never seen him so mad or the slightest bit violent. I didn’t know how far he might go.

Damon paused shortly, took a quick deep breath, and then as he leaned down to grab Tay by the arm, he muttered, “Fuckin’ piece of shit.”

As he was dragged to his feet and toward the door, Tay struggled a little bit, trying to pull his arm out of the strong grip, but he was not released until he was shoved onto the outdoor stairway landing, stumbling to the ground again.

“Bitch...” Damon sneered before closing and locking the door.

I didn't know if my plea had an effect on Damon, but I was glad he didn't do anything that would get him in trouble. I sat down and kept watching him.

He turned around, shaking his head. His chest was still heaving, pushing out his very hard and prominent pectoral muscles and then letting them retract. He was coming off the adrenaline racing through his huge body. Some of his veins bulged more obviously than normal, most noticeably in his biceps which were now stretching out the sleeves of his shirt. I realized he was looking right at me so I immediately turned away from him.

"Fuck!" I chided myself. I shifted on the sofa, facing forward again. Clueless as to what I should do, my eyes wandered around the room, fixating on random objects, anything that wasn't in Damon's direction. *"Tay was right. I am a faggot! This man stands up for me and all I can do is start checking him out again. Fuck I'm stupid!"* Out of nervousness, the middle and index finger of my left hand were clenched by my right hand, thumbs lightly stroking each other and my other fingers.

When Damon sat down next to me I had to look down at my hands again, trying to soothe myself. I was still very afraid. His proximity to me just made it worse. I know I was trembling a lot, almost violently.

He tenderly placed his right hand on my left shoulder. He spoke in a deep gentle voice, "Sorry 'bout all that."

I stayed quiet.

"You okay?" he asked. "You're shakin' like crazy." His hand started gently massaging my shoulder.

"I don't know why he was saying those things," I stammered.

"It's okay dude. Don't worry about it."

I turned to look at him for a moment and sounding desperate, I lied as convincingly as I could, "But I'm not gay, I swear."

He laughed, "I know, Eddy." He smiled for a second and then his face became somewhat serious as if he was suddenly considering the possibility, but he didn't say anything about it.

"I should probably go." I started to get up but his strong hand held me down.

"Aw, come on man. Don't be like that. Just chill out. Quit shaking like that."

"Um, okay I guess." I didn't have much of a choice so I just settled back down on the sofa.

The rest of the day went by smoothly. Damon sat next to me and we kept watching TV. He talked to me a little bit about what happened and told me not to worry about it, that it was no big deal. I eventually calmed down, my body stopped shaking, and I tried to enjoy myself.

A few days later, Damon asked me to go see a newly released documentary with him, and I agreed. We decided we'd leave at 7:00 PM, and I heard a knock on my door around 6:40. It was Damon arriving early of course.

I noticed he was looking especially sexy that night. He had a gold link chain hanging from his neck under his very tight white T-shirt. He was also wearing a leather belt around his waist in the loops of the black jeans that clung so nicely to his strong legs.

He was really early and I wasn't quite ready so I let him inside. As he came in, I realized it must have been months since he last set foot in my apartment. Damon's place was much better suited to entertain company so we always spent our time there.

I told him I just needed to do a few more things and then I'd be ready to go. With a smile he told me "Okay, I'll wait for you here."

I rushed off to my room to finish getting ready. I shaved the thin amount of facial hair I had which was near invisible, but I liked the smooth feeling. Then I brushed my teeth, and changed into some clothes suitable for going out, just a pair of khakis and a light blue T-shirt.

After no more than 10 minutes I headed back to the front door to get my shoes. As I came around the corner, I saw Damon sitting on the arm of my loveseat. He had his head down, right hand covering his eyes, and I could tell there was something in his left hand behind his leg, but I couldn't make it out.

As I was passing by him I stopped and asked, "Damon? What's wrong?" I heard the concern in my own voice and I touched his shoulder lightly, trying to console him.

I noticed that it was one of my bookmarks he was holding, and then I looked to my little end table where the coming out book I'd bought was sitting. I knew I put it back in my bookcase so it was obvious what had happened. I realized he now knew my secret, and all those feelings I had when Tay found me out rushed back.

When I gasped sharply, his head snapped up to look at me. His jaw was tightly clenched, eyebrows furrowed together and lips closed tightly. I'm sure my eyes were wide with fear as I stepped away from him. When he stood up and his right hand flew out to grab my arm, I jerked out of the way, and he only caught air. I lost my balance though when I took another step back, stumbling on my own feet. This time Damon did not miss, hooking onto both my arms, he drew my trembling body to his.

I was terrified of him now. I tried to get away at first, but he wouldn't let me, and I knew I couldn't overpower him, so I gave up and hoped for the best. I was shaking much harder than last time, and my face was soon covered in tears as I sobbed quietly. I'd reflexively drawn both my forearms up to cover my chest, which were now pinned between us as he'd wrapped his left arm around my back to hold me to his torso. His right hand held my head tight to his chest, and his cheek was on top of my head.

He kept me like that for a few minutes and even though he didn't hurt me, I was still a little scared. He said nothing, but I found his strong embrace and the steady rise and fall of his chest to be quite soothing. He stroked the back of my head, and I eventually calmed down and closed my eyes. When I did, he bent down to hold his head to my shoulder and wrapped both his long arms around my back, each hand grabbing the other side of my torso. He pulled me into him tightly, bringing my head over his shoulder and then picked me up so I was almost a foot off the ground.

After he'd been holding me in the air for a minute or so, with my hands resting on his shoulders and my eyes looking over his shoulder, he finally spoke, "Eddy? You... You think about suicide?" His voice

seemed tentative, very unlike Damon.

I was surprised, so I didn't answer.

He pulled back to look at my face and squeezed my body, asking again, "Do you?!"

"Sometimes," I answered softly.

He let out a grunt, and stuffed his face in the side of my head, behind my ear. His breathing became heavier and he started squeezing my body hard every 10 or so seconds, not hurting me, but making it difficult to breathe, and then he'd loosen slightly, still keeping a strong grip on me.

He suddenly let out this very frustrated and even angry growl. He wasn't acting like he was angry at me, but that's how he sounded.

I was scared to say anything, but I managed to ask, "Are you mad at me?"

There was still anger in his voice when he grunted, "No!" He squeezed me too hard and this time it did hurt a little. He didn't know his own strength.

After a short pause I said, "Oh." A longer pause and then, "You sound like you're mad at me."

He shook his head for a moment and then said, "No Eddy, not you... I'm mad at myself. I've never felt so stupid." I started to understand what was going on in his head and I felt bad for him.

He was still breathing hard and my body was being gently rocked up and down in rhythm with his inhaled and exhaled. I would have enjoyed it if he weren't so upset. I wanted to try to make him feel better but I wasn't sure what to say.

"Damon, you—"

He put me down and grabbed my face in both his giant hands and I held onto his wrists. I felt like a little kid. He made me look up at his face and said, "Eddy, listen to me. Promise me you'll never do anything to hurt yourself. okay?"

That was easy enough. I'd say anything he wanted. "I won't."

"Promise me, Eddy."

"I promise I won't hurt myself."

He shook his head and rhetorically asked, "What would I do, Eddy? What would I do?"

Then he picked me up again for a moment to give me a hug and said, "You were afraid of me earlier, weren't you?... You thought I'd hurt you?"

I shrugged, and nodded.

"I'll never hurt you, Eddy. That's my promise. If anyone ever does anything to you, you tell me and I'll

take care of it. I promise.”

I nodded. Again, I would have been able to enjoy his protectiveness, but he still looked so upset. I couldn't stand it.

He put me down and continued, “Fuck... I'm sorry, Eddy.”

“What for?”

Shaking his head slowly and looking down to his right, he answered, “Everything, Eddy... Everything. I'm so sorry... You deserve so much better from your friends.” He looked into my eyes again for a couple seconds but then closed them and looked away again.

Standing about a foot away from him, I hesitantly reached up to rub his shoulder a little, trying to assure him, “It's okay.” I wanted to comfort him, but apparently I wasn't doing a very good job because a really sad look spread across his face.

I took his right hand in mine and gently pulled him over to the loveseat. I let go of him and sat down on the right side, close to the arm. He sat down in the middle, almost as close as he could get to me. I turned my body to face him and put my hand on his shoulder again, massaging him lightly, hoping it'd make him feel better like he'd done for me days ago. As much as I wanted to cheer him up, I was also inwardly rejoicing that he was okay with me touching him in any way at all after this revelation.

He leaned over, put his arm around my shoulders, and I felt his scratchy goatee as he gently kissed my forehead. He sat back up and pulled me with him into his side. He just held me there. It felt wonderful.

We sat there for at least 20 minutes just like that, Damon squeezing me periodically and then loosening his hold, like he'd done earlier. I loved when he did that. It gave me such a warm feeling.

I was thinking a million different things, and I had no idea what was going on in his mind. I was curious though. “I thought you said you hated fags.”

He squeezed, looked at me and said, “Eddy! I didn't know! I—“

“No, no. It's okay. I understand. I just... I'm curious. I thought you hated people like me.”

His voice was as deep as usual, but it wasn't as confident and he looked so sad. “Well... I guess I thought so too. But I don't hate *you*... So I guess I was wrong. Eddy, you are without a doubt the finest and most decent human being I've ever known. You have the biggest heart, full of nothing but love... I can't imagine there's even an ounce of ill will in you. You really care about other people. Even assholes like me.”

I gasped and reached across his chest to grab his other shoulder. I looked up at him and said, “No! You're not an asshole Damon. You're such a nice guy!... You're the first person to know I'm gay, and look at how sweet you're being to me. You've always been so great to me. I used to be so lonely, but since I met you... You have no idea how much you mean to me. I know how that sounds but it's true.”

A smile grew wide on his face and then after a moment faded to a frown. “Damn it,” he said. “I am so sorry about the other day.” He shook his head.

“No, it’s okay. It’s really no big deal.”

“Yes it is Eddy!” His expression changed from slight anger to deep concern. “You musta been so scared.”

“But you were there to protect me!” I smiled, still trying to make him feel better. I wanted to see him smile. And this time it worked. His smile made me so happy I sat back again and just let him hold me some more.

He was quiet for a couple more minutes and then he spoke again, “I want to do something to make it all up to you.”

“Don’t worry about it,” I said. “That’s in the past. It doesn’t matter.”

“Still... I’d like to do something for you.”

“You don’t have to do—“

“I know Eddy, but I want to.”

I laughed quietly and said, “Okay, um... Something like what?”

“Well...” He thought for a moment and then looked back down at me with a strange devilish grin slowly taking over his lips. “You ever think about me?”

“What do you mean?”

“Like... You know...” He wagged his eyebrows suggestively.

I laughed a little and insisted, “No, I don’t know. What are you talking about?” I asked, sincerely clueless as to what he was getting at. I was still naïve when it came to these things.

“Like, when I see a good lookin’ chick. You know, I think about what I’d like to do to her, and what it’d be like and shit. You ever think about me like that?”

“Oh... Well... Um...” I blushed, unable to believe what I was hearing, and I had no idea how to respond.

He rubbed my shoulder a little, trying to encourage me. “You can tell me Eddy. It’s okay.”

I couldn't have been more embarrassed or nervous. The man of my dreams wanted me to tell him if I fantasized about him. “Um... Well, yeah, I do,” I mumbled cautiously.

“Yeah? What do you think about?”

I looked over at him to see if he was serious. He still had that grin plastered all over his face, but his question was definitely sincere. He really wanted to hear it. “Um... Like... All sorts of stuff.”

“Like what?” he insisted. He definitely knew he was making me nervous, and it seemed like he was enjoying that.

“Well what do you think I think about? You’re a really attractive guy and I’m gay, so... I think about...” Can you blame me for not wanting to admit that I fantasized about licking his body all over, especially his hairy masculine armpits, and worshipping all his wonderful muscles? “You know... Stuff.”

He laughed loudly at my vague explanation. After a moment of somewhat awkward silence, for me anyway, he chuckled some more and said, “So, suckin’ my dick, right? Or would you rather suck on my muscles instead?” My jaw dropped, but a grin still curled my lips, and I stared at him with wide eyes. “I knew it! Yeah! You like my muscles don’t you?!” He accused me excitedly.

I shook my head and smiled, rolling my eyes. “Screw you!” I giggled, shoving him playfully.

“Oh, is *that* what you think about?” he teased.

“No!... Cuddling! That’s it! I don’t think about anything but cuddling! I’m a good boy!”

Our laughter died down a little bit but we were both still smiling, and he still had his arm around me, which I couldn’t get enough of. Damon spoke again, “So what do ya think? Wanna make fantasy into reality?”

That was the offer of my lifetime, without question. I didn't know what to do. Of course I wanted to jump on him and explore his whole body, but on the other hand, I didn't want him to do something like that just to be nice to me. I looked at him questioningly and asked, "Well... Are you sure? I wouldn't want you to do something you'd regret and feel awkward about afterwards. I need you as a friend more than anything else."

He smiled. “I understand Eddy, but don't worry about that. I want to show you how much I care.”

“Well, what exactly do you want to do?”

He shrugged, “It’s all about you Eddy. I’ll do anything. Just tell me. What do *you* want to do?”

Oh, the possibilities. There were a thousand things I’d like to do with this man. I decided to go for it, but I knew I couldn’t push too far.

I stood up and spoke softly, “Come here.” I reached down for him to put his hand in mine. We both smiled as he stood to follow me to my bedroom. I led him over to stand in front of the side edge of my bed. I turned him around and smiled up at him again. He was smiling too but he looked a little nervous. I could tell he was much more used to calling all the shots.

I gently pushed on his chest indicating I wanted him to sit down, and he did. I took that opportunity to remove his white Nike sneakers from his feet. I got on the bed with him and led him to the center, and then had him turn so that he was looking at me along the length of the bed. Finally, I pushed on his shoulders to get him to move backward.

Once he was in position, back slanted against the headboard, he sat up bending his knees with his arms resting over them and pulled his feet up so they were flat on the bed. I sat on my knees and just

admired the man before me.

I smiled nervously, and he could tell how I felt. “Eddy, just relax. There’s nothing to worry about.”

“No, it’s just... I’ve never done this before.”

“Come on. It can’t be much different from any of the gay guys you’ve been with.”

“No... I mean, that’s what I mean. I’ve never...” I took a deep breath to relax. “I’ve never had sex before.”

“Oh, Eddy, I... Listen, Eddy, if you don’t wanna do this, I understand if you want your first time to mean something special.”

“No, no. I really do want this. You have no *idea* how bad I want this.” When I said this he started to beam brightly with unabashed male pride. “And it would mean something special. It would mean a lot to me. I just... I’m worried that I won’t do good or I’ll do something wrong.”

He snickered and effortlessly pulled me close to him in between his spread knees. He grabbed my sides with his huge hands and allayed my worries, “Eddy, don’t worry ‘bout that. I’m your friend. You can trust me.” I nodded, and I really did trust him. He smiled, let go of my sides and told me, “Just have fun, Eddy. Enjoy yourself.” He put his hands back on his knees, encouraging me to get started.

Feeling my nervousness replaced with trust for Damon, I reached down to the end of the tight white shirt he was wearing that stopped just slightly below his waist. I pulled up on it, and he lifted his arms letting me reveal his awesome torso. Without thinking or even realizing it, I pulled back out of excitement, staring at his naked torso. I knew it would be amazing, but I was shocked at how awesome it looked in the flesh.

While Damon took off his neck chain, I held his T-shirt to my face to hide my elated smile and inhale his masculine scent that had seeped into the cloth. I just sat back and shifted my stare between his seductive smiling face and all those glorious rocky muscles with my own expression showing playful excitement and an almost hungry look that asked, “All this? Just for me?”

He smiled and took the shirt away from me throwing it off to the side. “Forget the shirt Eddy. Come get the real thing,” Damon told me as he put his hand around the back of my neck and pulled me square into his chest. I rested my little hands on his enormous pecs and I let my nose settle into the gorgeous valley between the hard muscles. My nostrils allowed themselves to be soaked in Damon’s potently virile musk. I took a deep breath in through my nose and buzzed on the powerful tonic.

Feeling very aroused now, my hands began to massage the muscles of his chest while Damon rubbed my back encouragingly. I wrapped my arms around him and kneaded the toned muscles in his back. My lips kissed the tough skin that stretched over his collar bone, starting on the left, and making my way to the right and continued that path to his bicep.

I kissed all around it affectionately, and after looking to Damon’s face to confirm his approval, I let my tongue slip out and lightly coat the strong arm in my saliva as I traced the dark wire tattoo with my tongue. He seemed to like this because he pulled his forearm up around my neck pinning the side of my head to his shoulder.

The exertion of his power over me made me moan and my heart race. I continued to display my adoration to Damon with long wet kisses while his hand stroking my back moved down to my butt squeezing each cheek hard. His breathing was heavy now and he was clearly enjoying my worship.

I gained enough confidence to drop my left hand from his back and bring it to knead his hard abs. From there I snaked my way down to a hard bulge in the black denim covering the rest of his body.

Surprised by its size, I had to stop my kisses and move over to his chest muscles again so I could get a view of what I was gripping. His member was undoubtedly much more than simply proportional to the rest of his body. I was awed, "Oh my god, it's *huge!*" He must have been longer than 9 inches, probably 10, and the thickness was at least twice my own, if not much more.

Damon chuckled at my reverence. "You like that?"

It was hard to speak at all, but I wanted to answer him in a way that would show how appreciative I was of his manhood. "Yeah... It's amazing." I squeezed and stared at it for a few seconds, then tore my gaze away to look at his face. "I can't believe you're letting me do this. I never thought I'd ever get to be with my dream man." He smiled sweetly and I returned my attention to the rest of his body. I continued to massage the monster straining in his jeans more than halfway down to his right knee. I frequently glanced down at the beast as my mouth worked over to his other arm, visiting his very hard nipples on the way.

I kissed his broad shoulder and bicep, then I began to lick the tattoo that toughened his look even more. I was incredibly hard, thinking about how awesome it was to be with such a tough, masculine man. I soon became very anxious to meet what my left hand held. I moved down his chest to his stomach, where I tongued his navel and kissed each abdominal muscle. I started working on the button of his jeans, and then pulled the zipper down. His elastic boxer briefs were stretched tight by his throbbing hardness.

I had to see the rest of his body. I pulled his jeans down and off, and took off his socks too while I was at it. I looked up and was taken aback by the fantastically awesome sight of this gorgeously muscular and almost coal black man. I could hardly believe it. There Damon was, reclining in front of *me* on *my* bed and looking every bit the in-control-stud he is. Before going for his underwear, I had a moment of indecision. Ultimately I decided to save the best for last.

"I wanna try something," I said with a hopeful smile.

"Whatever you want."

"Promise not to laugh at me?"

He chuckled, "Yeah, I promise."

I moved up between his knees again and caressed his chest for a moment before lifting his right arm up over his head. I indicated for him to keep it up and leaned in to his hairy underarm. I kissed it first and then once again took in a deep breath of his scent. The masculinity of it turned me on, and made me want to please him that much more. When I started licking at it to show my respect he flinched a little which surprised me. I don't know if it was the physical feeling or the thrill of being worshipped, but I

could tell he was enjoying this which turned me on even more. I moved to his other arm and applied the same treatment, loving the warmth I found there and totally excited to be pleasing this man.

I was lucky that I was being allowed to do this with Damon. I'd never dreamed that I might actually have the chance. It's weird, but it felt so *right* to be doing that for him, licking and sucking on the hair under his arms. As much as I was enjoying that, I again felt anxious to feel his dick.

I pulled away from his arm and slowly laid down on my belly in front of him, my face above his crotch. I lightly caressed his heavy balls and mouthed his shaft through the bright white cotton, building up my own anticipation. I felt his left hand come down to gently rub the back of my neck. Soon I just had to see his cock. I tucked my fingers into the waistband of his underwear and pulled them all the way off of him.

As I started to get back into position for a closer look, Damon stopped me, "Eddy, get undressed, dude."

"Oh, um, it's okay. I don't mind keeping my clothes on."

"Naw Eddy, come on, that ain't right. I'm sittin' here naked and you still got your shirt on. Get undressed."

"Um, okay." I got off the bed and took my shirt off. I looked back at him, and he shook his dick in anticipation. He had an expectant look that told me I was to keep undressing.

I took off my pants and socks and started to get back on the bed when he interjected, "Underwear too."

"Do I have to?" I asked.

"Yeah man, why not? You'll enjoy it more."

Don't get me wrong. I don't think of myself as small or anything. I'm average, but compared to him, I'm tiny. Even worse, I was hard as a rock and dripping in my briefs, and I didn't want him to see that. "You won't laugh will you?"

He saw my apprehension and assured me again, "Eddy, I told you, you can trust me."

"Okay," I said, and took off my briefs, then quickly jumped between his legs on my stomach again so that he wouldn't get a good look. Sure I trusted him but I was still shy.

He let me get away with that, and I got up close to his dick again, this time letting my chin rest on the bed. I stared up at the beautiful monster that stood tall and strong above me. It was amazing. Slightly darker than the rest of his body, it had nearly bulging veins running up and down the shaft in twisting patterns. Yeah it was long, but I was most impressed by its thickness. It was at least as wide around as my wrist. It looked like a mighty beast standing victoriously over me, its conquered prey. I held it in my hand stroking him lightly. I was in awe of its power. It commanded to be served, and I was privileged to obey.

I looked up past the monolith to Damon's face, subtly asking for permission. He was still smiling and nodded. I reached my lips up to the base of the shaft and kissed lightly. I stopped, and pulled back a bit

to see its reaction. It jumped slightly, and I interpreted that as approval. I kissed the same spot again, and then started moving up and down, kissing and licking it on all sides. I was getting so turned on I started holding the length to my cheeks and rubbing it all over my face, feeling its heat and my own saliva everywhere.

Damon moaned softly. Feeling encouraged, I pulled back again and angled Damon's dick down so it looked straight at me. I kissed the head and then slipped my lips over it, sucking and tonguing gently. I took it to the back of my mouth and then pulled back slowly. While repeating this motion, I tried to remember to lick under the head as I sucked on the monster stretching my lips obscenely.

In my mind I was marveling at the fact that I was *actually* sucking my first dick. If that wasn't satisfying enough, it was *Damon's* dick, and I had it in *my* mouth. My tongue felt comfortably at home running around the gigantic head that tasted so good. I'd spent countless hours sucking dick in my mind, trying to imagine what it would be like, but I'd never done it. Now that I was finally sucking my first cock, it was so damn big I didn't know how to handle it. I only hoped that my enthusiasm and intense desire to please were enough to make up for my lack of experience.

I wanted to give this wonderful man as much pleasure as I possibly could, so I slipped the big head into my throat with only a slight gag. Damon gasped sharply in pleasure and probably surprise. I smiled on the inside, proud of myself. I pulled back so it was barely within my lips and then went down again still letting only the head in my throat.

I kept doing this for Damon until I felt I could take more. On the next stroke in I plunged as much of his shaft into my throat as I could and held it for just a second. Damon immediately gasped again, his now tensed arms shooting down his sides and grabbed the sheets, he pushed his body up off the bed as he thrust forward sharply and froze there. I paused my movements, letting him adjust. After a second he started breathing again, both panting and moaning, but he didn't move. His face was looking up at the ceiling and his eyes were shut tight. Looking forward, I saw there was still much of his length left outside of my mouth. I wondered if I'd ever get the chance to get all of it down. Another moment and he relaxed his arms and legs, letting his body come back down.

I started sucking, slowly again, now playing with his big meaty balls with my left and, and running the fingers on my right hand through his nicely trimmed pubes. After I thought he'd relaxed enough, I started taking him into my throat again every few strokes. I tried to take him in deeper and deeper whenever I could.

His moaning was really making me want to get him off now. I set up a rapid pace, taking it as far as I could each and every time, fucking my own throat on his dick. I know I was a bit sloppy but it seemed I was doing a good job because after just a few strokes, he moaned and squirmed.

I was so happy I was making him feel good, but suddenly he stopped me. He put his right hand on my forehead and pushed me off. I looked up at him, not understanding why he didn't want me to keep going. He kept his hand there and laid his head back, his chest heaving as he panted. I wanted to keep sucking him but he wouldn't let me, so I just kept looking up at him waiting for his reason or permission.

Eventually, Damon caught his breath and relaxed a moment, then looked down at my curious, worried face. I was afraid he wasn't going to let me get him off.

He said, "Eddy... there's no way. There's just no way you've never done this before. No one can take that much their first time without gagging."

A smile broke out on my face and I giggled, relieved that's why he'd stopped me. I looked up at him and rubbed my left cheek against his thigh affectionately. "I read online somewhere that you can almost neutralize your gag reflex by gently activating it everyday. I've been doing that for more than a year, every time I brush my teeth. I wanted to be prepared."

He laughed and smiled down at me in wonder, shaking his head. "Fuck, Eddy, that's some serious dedication!" He chuckled. "Damn, it feels so good." I could hear the pleasure in his voice.

I beamed at him, and absolutely reveled in his compliment. I was so proud that I could please him. "Well then let me finish," I said.

He stroked my cheek as I licked all around his cock again, and back to the head. I put my mouth around it gently just like before, and worked both of us up to where we left off. I sucked as hard as I could, ignoring my sore jaw, and loving the feeling of my lips forced to accommodate this demanding behemoth. I returned to our previous pace and I began to lose myself in the pleasure of taking him into my throat.

I have no idea how long Damon let me go on like this, but at the time, I was so entranced in this pleasure it seemed like it had only been a few seconds. I suddenly felt Damon's hand on my neck as it applied some pressure, taking control. I obeyed the instructions his hand was kindly giving me.

At first he just increased my speed, driving my head up and down much faster on his meat. It was hard for me to keep up with him, but I didn't want to let him down. I just did my best to keep breathing through my nose and suck on the fat cock stuffing my mouth.

His breathing intensified as his aggression grew. He took my head in both his huge hands and pulled me up on my elbows. Then he pulled my throat down just slightly past my limit and held me there for a couple seconds. Slowly, he pulled the head of his dick back to just my lips, and suddenly thrust in deep. Damon did this repeatedly, holding my head tightly in place. He was panting and grunting as he fucked my throat mercilessly and I obediently took whatever he gave me.

No longer having to focus as much on pleasing Damon, I became very aware of the intense pleasure I was receiving from Damon's fuck. My own boner was trapped under me and I buzzed on the feeling of being under Damon's control. I whimpered happily as Damon used my throat to get off. I looked back up at his body and face and saw that he was looking at my lips making his dick disappear over and over again.

I was again struck by his stunning beauty. I reached my hands up to feel his hard pecs, awesome shoulders and I rubbed and squeezed those two big strong biceps, thanking them for keeping me in my place.

Damon suddenly tensed up and his pace quickened, going even farther into my throat than before, causing me to choke a little bit. The muscles in his arms were bulging as he held me tighter. In a deep feral voice, he grunted, "Yeah Eddy! Fuck!... Suck it Eddy, suck it!... Oh, fuck yeah! You gonna swallow my cum boy?" Still squeezing his muscled arms in my small hands, I half-moaned, half-whimpered, showing my eagerness to take my dream man's cum.

Damon lifted up just slightly off the bed again and held still in my throat for a moment and began to cum. He pulled out slightly to let me breathe and, more importantly, taste his cum. I have no idea how much he shot out, but it certainly seemed like it was a lot more than would be normal, and way more than I've ever done. I kept trying to hold some in my mouth so I could let my tongue soak in the taste, but he just shot more and more, and I had to keep swallowing.

Finally he stopped and dropped back down. He slipped out of my mouth and I relished his sweet taste. I moved the cum around in my mouth for a bit and then let it slide down my throat. I felt sated, my stomach full of his cum. I opened my eyes and looked up at Damon's face. He was smiling brightly at me. I averted my eyes and blushed, feeling embarrassed after he'd watched me drink his cum like it was a fine wine.

He laughed and ruffled my hair like you would a little kid, then just sort of stroked it gently. I looked up at him again and returned a bashful smile.

"You like that?" he asked.

I giggled, "What part?"

"Anything. What was your favorite?"

I thought about it and said, "I dunno. I can't choose. It was all so amazing. I loved every bit of it."

"Yeah, I knew you would," he said. He was obviously very proud of himself.

"Well, um..." My shyness returned now that Damon had gotten off and we were done. "I guess we should get dressed now."

I moved to get up but he grabbed my arm and said, "Whoa, whoa. Don't you wanna cum too?"

"Aw, that's sweet of you, but it's okay, Damon. I can wait 'till later."

"What? Why? Aren't you hard under there?" he indicated my mid-section.

I turned even more red and answered, "Well, yeah of course, but it's okay. I—"

"Come here," he demanded playfully. He suddenly turned me over on my back, making my very rigid boner wave around. In a flash, he pulled me up by my shoulders right in between his knees and my back up against his hard muscled chest and stomach. I gasped quietly in surprise when I felt his still semi-hard cock on my butt. I tried to pull away, telling him I can wait until later on, but he just cut me off again, shushing me and telling me to be quiet. He wrapped his right arm around my chest so I couldn't get away, then nudged my chin telling me to rest my head back against his shoulder.

"All right now..." his deep bass voice in my ear gently soothed me. "I'll do all the work. You just sit there and be a good boy."

It was sweetly satisfying to hear him tell me to be a "good boy." I didn't expect to hear that, but I definitely enjoyed it. A rush of pleasure went through me just from that simple instruction. It made me

feel protected and that feeling brought me a sense of tranquility.

I bent my own legs at the knees and put my feet flat on the bed so that I was in the same position as he was. Both my hands held on to the arm holding me to him. I tensed again as his left hand reached forward to my own throbbing little hard on. I closed my eyes and relaxed again. When he started stroking me, I immediately began to moan completely involuntarily, surprised at how great it felt to have Damon's hand there, even better than I'd imagined.

He chuckled quietly. "Feel good?" he asked me.

"Yeah," I breathed. He squeezed my body.

I turned my head to look at his face. He was already looking at me, smiling. I moaned quietly again as we looked into each others' eyes.

I wanted so badly to kiss him. I wanted to show him the appreciation, affection, and even love I had for him. Looking into his eyes, I decided not to, thinking that a kiss on the lips might be too much for him. I was too worried he'd pull away and get grossed out.

I just sat there in his lap and stared at him for a moment. I surprised even myself when my impulses suddenly seized complete control over me. I closed my eyes and swiftly stretched my head up to kiss him right on the lips, and felt that scratchy facial hair again. It was more than just a peck of a kiss, but it only lasted a couple seconds. Still, I savored it and was grateful he let me do it. I knew I'd remember that short kiss forever.

After the kiss was over, I slid back down his chest to sit on the bed. He slowly blinked once, but didn't stop smiling or stroking me. I kept looking at him, my head still resting against his shoulder, our eyes still locked. I was surprised again when he bent his neck down and put his face right against mine. Our noses and foreheads touched lightly.

He stroked me faster now and I closed my eyes again. Soon I was writhing in pleasure under both his grips on me. I whimpered again and far, far too soon I was cumming on my own stomach. It was unquestionably the best orgasm I'd ever had.

Once that magical feeling passed, I opened my eyes, and Damon was just as I'd left him, staring at me, smiling wide and pressing his face to mine. I smiled back at him and giggled. He laughed as he got a couple tissues from the nightstand and cleaned up the cum on me.

He put his hands on my knees and rubbed them a little bit. I wanted to get up so that he wouldn't get too uncomfortable but by holding me like that, he was letting me know I didn't have to go anywhere. I decided I would stay there for as long as he let me.

"Feel good?" he asked me again.

"Yeah. That was amazing. Thank you so much Damon."

He shook his head, "No, no. Thank *you*, Eddy. That was easily the best head I ever got."

I beamed with pride and pleasure at his praise. "Anytime you want," I laughed.

“Wonderful. We will be doing that *a lot*.”

I laughed at first, thinking he was joking, but even though he was still smiling, his face told me he was absolutely serious. I stopped laughing. “Wait, you really mean it, don’t you?”

“You fuckin’ kiddin’ me? Blow jobs whenever I want? Fuck yeah I mean it.”

I grabbed his right arm with both hands and squeezed, urging him to not lead me on about this. “Wait, wait. You’re a hundred percent serious. You will *really* let me suck you again?” I almost got hard again just thinking about it.

He threw his head back and chuckled loudly at my excitement. He looked back down at me with a big grin and said, “Yeah, you’ll like that won’t you!” He stuck his right hand in my side and started to tickle me as he kept teasing, “You can’t wait to suck on my big hard on again, can you? You fuckin’ loved that dick in your mouth, didn’t you?!”

He continued to playfully mock me and he soon had me breathless and on my back from his torturous strokes on my skin. My head was right in front of his crotch, and without even thinking about it, I kept glancing at the resting beast. I just couldn’t help myself. Even though I couldn’t get turned on because I was deep in the throes of laughter, barely able to breathe, my eyes were drawn to it.

Damon noticed this and teased me more about it, saying I just couldn’t get enough, and he was right. I begged him to stop but he was clearly enjoying this too much. It wasn’t long before I couldn’t even get out my pleas for relief.

When he finally decided I’d had enough he pulled me up against him, this time with my right side against him, I let my head rest on his chest. My eyes were closed, and I was still laughing a little. I was stunned when I felt his arms wrap around me, and then his lips on mine, kissing me softly. I stopped laughing and looked in his eyes. His expression was dead serious now.

Pulling his lips away, he locked my eyes in his and softly began, “You are so full of joy Eddy, it’s amazing. Your sweet innocence, it’s so precious... I really do care about you Eddy. You know that? I care about you... so much. I think about you. You know that? I didn’t even realize it until tonight, but I do. Like, while I’m at work or something, I wonder how your day’s goin’ and shit like that.”

I didn’t know what brought about this change in tone, but whatever the reason, his tender words made me blush and brought a quiet, shy smile to my face. He was making me feel all mushy inside.

He continued, “You know, if I don’t see you all day, I start to worry about you... I’m just now figuring that out but it’s true. I’ve gone to sleep thinking about you, hoping you’re happy, and I never noticed it, because to me, it’s the most natural thing in the world for me to care about you.”

These words quickly brought tears to my eyes, and he wasn’t finished.

“Sometimes when I invite you over... it’s just ‘cause I wanna keep an eye on you. I never really thought about it that way. I didn’t know that’s what I was doing, but it was. I thought I was just being friendly, and I was doin’ that too, but... there was more to it than that. I was being protective. ‘Cause I really care about you. You know that? Do you know how much I care about you Eddy? More than

anything else, Eddy. More than *anything*.”

I could tell he meant it, and by this time, tears of happiness were streaming down my cheeks as I smiled and looked into his beautiful eyes. He just kept looking at me the whole time, now with a very slight smile. His right hand came to my cheek and he wiped away my tears as they kept coming. I held his arm with my left hand, and just stared back at him in wonder.

Eventually I regained my ability to speak. “I take it back. You’re not a nice guy... Look at you, making me cry... Big jerk,” I joked. After another minute or so, I was still speechless. “I don’t know what to say,” I told him.

He took a deep breath and said, “Eddy, I love you, babe.”

A feeling surged through my heart and I couldn’t stop myself from throwing both my arms around his neck and pulling myself up to kiss his lips. Damon quickly took control of the lip lock, grabbing the back of my neck with his right hand as his other arm wrapped around my lower back. He kissed back hard, covering my mouth with his. When his tongue demanded entry, I happily accepted it.

He brought me up by my butt so that I was on my knees facing him and then softly but urgently pushed me onto my back, never releasing my lips. He laid flat on top of me and caressed my body tenderly, kissing me sweetly all over my face, and always coming back to tongue my mouth. He kept at it for a long time, and I just couldn’t get enough.

His kisses were wonderful, but add to that his body weighing heavily on my own, I felt like I truly belonged. It wasn’t just the feeling that he possessed me. It was that I could feel every pound of his power enveloping me in his care. He made me feel safe and secure. I grabbed his back as tightly as I could to keep him on top of me so that I could bask in both his physical strength and warmth, and in his affectionate protectiveness.

He stopped kissing for a moment and held his head just barely above mine, still looking into my eyes. “I love you so much, Eddy.”

“I love you too, Damon.”

He kissed me again. “I wanna fuck you, babe.” Hearing him call me “babe” made me want to serve, please and obey him forever. I wanted to be his baby, his “babe”.

The thought of him fucking me, I admit, was scary. But I wanted it so bad. “Lemme get some lube.”

“Okay, babe,” he said, kissing me again before I got up.

I quickly writhed out from under him and ran to the bathroom to get the lube. I grabbed it out of the cabinet and caught my reflection in the mirror. I looked at myself, and that feeling I got when Damon told me he loved me welled up throughout my body and mind again. Its power was shocking.

As I walked back to the bedroom, a smile of sheer euphoria spread across my face. That gargantuan, vampiric burden of loneliness was finally lifted from my exhausted and grateful shoulders. My entire being was wracked with relief. I had a genuine sense of walking on air. I can tell you, it was a real feeling, not an exaggeration.

But it was so much more than that. It wasn't *just* relief. It wasn't *just* the greatest feeling of my entire life. It wasn't *just* the most incredible rush a human could ever hope to experience. I felt righteousness. I felt I was meant to be with Damon. A void of perception that I'd never even known existed was suddenly full. I hadn't yet understood it, but I now recognize that this was the beginning of the astonishingly adamant bond of love.