

CHECK ENGINE LIGHT

Daniel Bradford / dbwrites@dslextreme.com
Copyright 2008, all rights reserved

Day five. No wait! It's only day four: one day in Theodore Roosevelt National Park, two in the Black Hills, and this morning, the tour of the capitol in Pierre. It would be great to have all summer to make this trip, but this was an excellent start. I'd always wanted to see Mount Rushmore in the flesh as it were, especially since I grew up practically next door, in North Dakota. The family went on vacation to Yellowstone when I was a kid, which was awesome. We ended up at my uncle's place in Montana, which I'm sure was the original impetus for the trip, but whatever it takes, right? Other than that we never seemed to get very far from home; something always came up, like the summer I broke my arm or the third dry summer in a row, when dad thought he might actually lose the business. Agribusiness is always tricky. Not only do you have to worry about the market, but you have to worry about the weather too. And you worry about it *all the time*, here in the upper Great Plains. In my own experience, that seemed to make families closer and more interdependent. My father is just a part of the third generation to work for the Wallace family-owned, farming equipment and supply company. My great grandfather started the business in the late 1930s. I guess he thought the depression had to have just about run its course. Eventually my grandfather and great uncle, Robert took over and now my father, uncle and a couple of cousins, the first members of the fourth generation, are in charge. I've worked there every summer since my freshman year of high school. It was a great place to work because the customers and my family had the same kind of relationship that my great grandfather started off with. Despite tradition and family obligation, I knew I wanted to do something different; still I procrastinated in talking to my dad about it. (In my family there's just my older sister, Karen and I.) So before the start of senior year, I sat down with my parents to finally have *the talk*; it wasn't even an issue, as it turned out. Several of the men in dad's family had never gone beyond an associate degree, if they went to college at all, and my mom, being a school teacher was particularly excited at the prospect of college and a legitimate excuse to get me out of this one-horse town, even if it was for only four years. They were even more pleased when I was accepted into the architecture program at the University of Kansas, which is considered to be among the top 10 in the nation. I wondered if they'll be so enthusiastic when I tell them I'm gay?

I first got interested in architecture in the eighth grade, when we had a field trip to the State Capitol in Bismarck. I now know it isn't the most architecturally significant of the 50 dotting the map, but at 14, I was duly impressed. The visibility of government's power impressed me and the views from the 18th floor of the Skyscraper on the Prairie, as it is known, simply amazed me. But I hadn't gotten beyond Bismarck, so that's why I was in Pierre this morning and why I was traveling southeast on Highway 2, headed for Grand Island, Nebraska. I'd see how things went, but somehow, I didn't think I'd get to Lincoln on this trip.

The windows were down, creating a dull roar as the car rolled down the highway. The wind also tousled my hair, which was unusually long, since I was just too busy with school the last two months to do anything about it. Actually it looked pretty good, well, at

least I thought so, but it wouldn't allow me to roll out of bed in the morning without some attention, so it would be on the barber's floor before too much longer. Keep it simple, had become something of a mantra for me as I attempted to go to school and work at the same time. Dad has been very generous, but a college education is an expensive proposition as I learned some time ago. Radio reception was sketchy here in the middle of nowhere. Zzzzzzzzzzz, as Brandon Flowers and *The Killers*, vanished along with the signal. And yes, I'll admit it, I was singing along; I really like that song. Oh well, this wasn't the first time, so I hit the seek button. ... *keep a rollin' along, Deep in my heart there's a song, Here on the range I belong, Drifting along with a tumbling tumble weed...*[pause] ... *being called, in the name of Jesus! Hear his word, love his word, live his word! My brothers and sisters, let us now turn to ...*[pause] followed by two successive stations broadcasting in Spanish; Country, Christian and Spanish-language, nothing I'd consider as options, so I turned off the radio and popped a bud of my iPod into my ear. I knew you're not supposed to drive with both ears covered, even though I doubted there was anyone around to see me. But I was going to play it safe; I'm not much of a gambler, I guess. With just one ear bud, the sound wasn't great, but I didn't really mind. Life had been pretty good to me, and lately it had been great! I *finally* turned 21 this spring. I had a car for the first time in my life. And, I'd given myself six or seven days to make the drive, so I could do some sightseeing while I was headed back to Kansas for a *paid* summer internship with a young, very hip and progressive firm whose work I admired, before beginning my senior year. And the last thing to happen before I left my hometown was some amazing sex. I sort of wonder what you're thinking now.

Learning from three previous generations, I had come to expect some bad with the good. In my particular case, I was driving this car because my grandfather had died. I was very surprised when my grandmother offered it as a birthday gift; she didn't call or make a fuss, she just included a note in the birthday card she had sent me. I think my dad was relieved because her eyesight isn't so good. And I couldn't get too smug because it was a 1991, grey/blue metallic, four-door Oldsmobile Cutlass, with a vinyl roof; most definitely *not* the car to impress people. But it was freedom on four wheels and the price was perfect.

Due to the distance and the expense, I didn't go home with much frequency. My freshman year of college, I took the bus home for Christmas break. The cost was certainly reasonable, but I spent more time on the bus than I spent at home with my family. I promised myself never to do that again. So last week, after my last final, I was off to the airport and arrived in North Dakota several hours after take off. I planned to head south on Monday, giving myself four days at home. I had a great time. Mom, dad, gram and I had a computer video chat with Karen, who works as a nurse in Chicago. Monday morning, I tossed my single bag into the Cutlass. Mom, gram and I hugged for what seemed like hours, but I was so glad neither of them cried. From home, I headed down to the shop to say bye to my dad, who had left the house before I was out of the shower. I also planned to say hi and bye to my uncle and cousins. Dad and Uncle Ray were into some heavy political discussion with a client when I entered, but immediately I was introduced and then became the subject of conversation; it was gratifying and annoying at the same time. But there was no way I could possibly take umbrage; I knew dad and Ray were extremely proud of me and sort of wanted to show me off. But hell, they certainly knew how to embarrass a guy, even if they weren't trying! Ray told me that Andy wasn't working today, but that Reggie was out in the warehouse. I set out to find Reggie, while dad and Ray returned to their customer. The warehouse is fairly large, as our company acts as a distribution hub for much of the northwest section of the state

and beyond. Finally I spied Reggie counting some inventory down one of the aisles. He was concentrating on the task at hand when I slapped his muscular ass. He spun around looking angry until he saw it was I. Before I could tease or even respond, Reggie's strong arms had pulled me into a tight bear hug.

"Fuck, Mickey! Where the hell have you been?" He asked while he playfully slapped the side of my head.

I hated that nickname, and Reggie was the *only* person that I allowed to use it. "Sorry, I missed your graduation, but you know how it goes with school."

"I got it. We're cool. And you were represented since your folks made an appearance. I got the hugs, but I missed you!"

Reggie's my cousin and my very best friend. Fate has kept us at a reasonable distance from each other, or we might have ended up as a pair of incestuous cousins. Ha! For starters Reggie is one year older than me but even so, we were in different grade schools. The district only has one junior high, but by then, his family had moved to grandpa's farm so we seldom had time to share. My sophomore and junior years we played on the varsity baseball team, until he graduated, but still, we had limited interface outside baseball. Don't get me wrong; it wasn't like we were lusting after one another day and night. Well, maybe occasionally when our hormones got out of control. But that wasn't until the summer after my 16th birthday when I spent a week at the farm after their hired hand quit. *Man*, Uncle Ray, Reggie and I *busted our asses* until darkness called an end to the day's work, which is to say nearly 10 o'clock during the summer! I thought surely I would die before I left the farm. Andy joined us as soon as he could get away from the shop, as only he and my dad remained to run the business. Ray and Andy were quietly snickering at my condition, but by noon on Saturday, it was clear we were nearing completion. We finished early enough to sit down for dinner by 7:30, thank god! Later, Reggie and I were sitting side by side, thoroughly enjoying the competition of a video game. He was good, but was I better, despite being dead-tired. After being side by side with Reggie all week, I felt closer to him than ever.

"Reggie," I began and he looked up. "There's this thing that I've been wanting to tell *someone* for a really long time, but I don't know how to say it." I sighed. "But now I'm sort of thinking that you're the one I should tell. But you gotta swear you won't tell anyone else. Okay?"

Reggie looked directly into my face, which seemed to confirm our bond. "We're almost brothers, Mickey. I feel closer to you than either Andy or Doug. So just say what you gotta say. I swear; it won't leave this room." Even then, his hands were much larger than mine and he reached over and squeezed the back of my neck, rocking me gently from side to side. Though it felt good, it also reminded me that he could break me into pieces if he really wanted to.

"Well, um...I don't know any other way to say it other than to just say it. Um..." He just smiled at me. There was another strong squeeze of his hand on my neck. "God, Reggie. I just, um...it's just that..." I thought I might start crying. "Oh the hell with it!" I let a nervous chuckle pass my lips. "Reggie, I'm gay. I don't know what else to say. I hope you..."

"That's it?" Reggie said as if to stop me from saying anymore. "Dude, you're my very best bud. Do you think I'd be mad or even care? Hell, if anything, that means you're just one less guy I have to compete with for the small crop of cute girls at school," he

said with a big smile before he hugged me. "I love you, Mickey. Nothing's gonna change that. Then he snickered and asked. "Do you need to practice on someone or anything?" We both broke out laughing but before morning I had given and received my first blowjob. Reggie had never gone down on a guy before and with a sly grin revealed the fact that his size had deterred several girls from going down on him. He sounded convincing when he told me I gave the best head he'd ever had; somehow I was flattered.

Now almost five years later, his even larger, stronger paw was on my neck and pulled me around a corner and out of sight. His hands quickly unfastened the fly of my cargo shorts and the contents of the pockets drew them quickly to the floor. Almost simultaneously he settled onto a pallet of product while he lowered my boxers and engulfed my cock, which had instantaneously gotten rock hard. "Oh fuck!" I whispered in response to the warm, moist heat of his mouth. Somehow, I hadn't jerked off this morning, so my load arrived fairly quickly. "Fuck, Reggieeeeeeee. I'm cum..." my words devolved into a long moan.

When I returned to planet Earth, I locked lips with Reggie, who was now standing and we shuffled to exchange positions, since my shorts and boxers were still around my ankles. Even soft, my cousin had a generous package, but his chinos were further distended by this time. I quickly undid the belt and pants, revealing briefs like I'd only seen in magazines or on-line. The broad elastic band was pulled slightly away from his tight abdomen since even the generous pouch didn't seem to have enough fabric to contain his hardened prick. The short legs of the square cut briefs seemed to point to the straining bulge within the pouch and a small damp spot appeared where one might expect.

I groaned aloud and pushed my face into the tightly stretched fabric. It all smelled clean, yet uniquely Reggie. I was mouthing his pulsing erection through the taut fabric when he said. "I guess you like those, huh Mickey? I thought you might. Caitlin bought them 'cause she likes to see me in them."

With my cousin, it's not about excuses or rationalization; he's admittedly bisexual, primarily hetero, and I think I'm his only guy. "Reggie, it's just the proverbial icing on the cake. You're perfect without anything." I said as I pulled the pale blue shorts down his thighs and swallowed his magnificent piece. After three years of college, I'm still fairly inexperienced, but I've never seen a package that comes close to what Reggie packs in his pants, day after day. "You just might be the definition of perfection," I said as I caught my breath. He chuckled appreciatively.

I successfully brought Reggie to climax without missing a beat, or a drop! As his breathing settled, we both noticed that I was hard again. "Fuck Mickey, look at you." This was followed by a lascivious laugh. "I've got to get back to work!" he said. I wasn't sure if he was referring to inventory as I first thought, or cock sucking until his mouth welcomed my hard staff.

For my second round, Reggie had to work a bit harder but he was obviously up to the task, as a hand crawled beneath my shirt or stroked my balls or the sensitive space behind them. After a delectably longer period of time, my spasm unloaded a smaller load into Reggie's mouth. I bet Caitlin likes that tongue! I thought to myself as my breathing slowed to near normal. We adjusted our clothing and Reggie produced several mints from his pocket. I popped one in my mouth and hugged Reggie tightly. His stronger arms encircled me and squeezed even tighter.

"God, I love you Reggie. I hope you and Caitlin will be the happiest couple ever."

"Thanks," he replied. "And I hope you find your Romeo."

"Damn it, Reggie. How do you always manage to say the right thing?"

“I guess it’s because I love you, Mickey. Now get the hell out of here because I really do need to get back to work. And just so you know, I’m expecting you to graduate at the head of your class. I’ll be there to hug you or beat the shit out of you. Your choice!” He said with a huge smile.

One last, quick hug and I slipped out a back door; I got into my car and drove away.

When I stopped for gas in Grand Island, I decided not to continue on to Lincoln, since it already mid-afternoon; instead, I called my buddy, Charlie. Charles Parkhurst is his given name but I’ve always called him Charlie. We’ve been schoolmates and best friends since grade school. And along with Reggie, he’s the only other person, I’ve told about my being gay. Fortunately, he was just as cool with it as Reggie had been, and oddly enough, he’s attending Kansas State, in Manhattan, which is less than 100 miles from where I’m in school at the University of Kansas. It’s been almost eight months since our last visit; at that time he came to see my team lose their last home football game of the season. He sounded stoked, said he had some scheduling flexibility, though both he and Angela worked. I told him I’d call back when I got a bit closer and we’d make a plan. Charlie was such a sweet guy I knew he’d invite me to stay over, but I had no intention of doing that, since he and Angela were now engaged and had just moved in together. I paid for the gas, bought some water and munchies, and headed east on I-80 before turning south on 81. There were several campsites, (read free or low cost overnight accommodations) along the route to Manhattan.

Now that I had a decent signal, I cranked up the radio, occasionally singing along. That’s something else I like about Charlie, his voice. We were always in the school musicals, but with his beautiful Irish tenor, he’d get a leading role and I’d be in the chorus. I’m good enough to sing outside my own shower, but not too far outside it. One of my favorite songs came on and I turned up the volume even more as I sang along. The final verse was just starting when something caught my eye. With a glance at the dash, I saw an ominous red light telling me to check my engine. I almost laughed at how silly that seemed, since I was driving almost 65 miles per hour. Then a whole series of red lights flash intermittently like some pinball machine as the car started to slow. Dad had taught me a few things about engines since we sell and service equipment, but that hardly made me a mechanic. I pressed on the brake and got no response. I was momentarily freaking out until I realized the engine had cut out completely, so I knew the power assist for the brakes and steering was gone. One good thing about being in the middle of nowhere was that I didn’t have to worry about running into anything. It also meant it was unlikely that anyone would pass by to give me a lift into the nearest town, I thought as I popped the hood. There were no flames or steam, all the belts appeared to be in place, there was no oil or coolant visible and I had just filled the tank; that was about the extent of my automotive awareness. I turned on the emergency flashers but nothing happened. I knew that was a clue, but I couldn’t tell you what it meant, so I opened the hood once again, to make the car more visible just in case some else actually did come down this way. With food, water and iPod in my backpack, I locked the car and start walking. I realized I hadn’t been paying attention, so I had no idea where I was. I didn’t recall having passed any towns recently, so I gambled that the nearest town was in front of me rather than behind me. I put the buds in my ears and sang along as I walked down the road. A cluster of trees appeared on the horizon, which I hoped indicated a town. I’d been walking for approximately half an hour during which time not one vehicle has passed, when I saw a sign announcing: **Geneva/ Route 41 1 mi.** I laughed to myself thinking that they *obviously* didn’t mean Geneva, Switzerland. Wouldn’t that be cool?

I tend towards being anal about stuff, particularly schedules, appointments and the like, so I was surprised that I wasn't wearing my watch, nor did I know what time it was. And I was a bit concerned that the town would be closed if it were after 5:00. There were a few scattered houses and a sign announcing that I'd arrived at Geneva, population 2226. Then ahead on the right was a sign announcing gas and service. The place was like a time capsule! It must have dated from the 1920s or 30s. The cubic steel building, with steel sash windows, supported one end of a canopy that extended over an island with three gas pumps; the pumps looked like relics from the 50s or 60s. The place was obviously well cared for but definitely looked deserted. Beyond the office were the service bays, two of the three doors were open, but there were no signs of life. I glanced into the office as I walked by to confirm that it was empty and continued on to the garage; at least the lights were on. I didn't hear a sound.

"Hello," I quietly called out. No need to startle anyone in this deathly quiet shop I thought as I continued towards the front of a car. "Hey, is anyone here?" I called out more loudly this time. I heard what sounded like a wrench falling on concrete.

"Yeah, but don't pay any attention to the man under the car," a voice replied as I saw feet and ankles below the front bumper and then legs as a creeper rolled out from under the car. Black boots and striped overalls had me thinking this might be some hayseed mechanic, like the guys that work for my dad: good guys and hard workers but not much to look at or talk to. Or **NOT!** I now thought as his upper chest and face were revealed. His body was just like Reggie's, solid and muscular. He was wearing a soiled wife beater and I saw patches of dark hair in his pits that corresponded to the dark hair in a severe military cut on his head. His face was handsome in an earthy, honest way. I hoped my mouth was closed; I knew that it was dry, which had nothing to do with how far I had walked. "Hey there," he said as he got up and pulled a rag from his pocket and began wiping his hands. He was my height or perhaps a bit shorter but he looked huge compared with my trim physique.

I was disappointed and a bit nervous that he hadn't smiled. Maybe he was one of those small-town types that didn't readily take to strangers. I cleared my throat. "Sorry to bother you, but I've got some car trouble and need some help."

"Sure you do," he said with a chuckle, which I thought sounded a bit sarcastic, almost a taunt. "Is the car out front?" he asked and then extended his hand. "It's mostly clean," he said with another chuckle. "By the way, I'm Noah. Welcome to Geneva."

I grasped the large hand, which was firm, yet surprisingly soft. It was also very warm. "Um, thanks, no the car's not... a... Nice to meet you, Noah. I'm Mike." I was so damned embarrassed. Why did this always happen when I met a cute guy? I mean, I've been handling customers at the shop for six years without a problem, at least not much. Not like this! I usually hold my own during project presentations and I'm doing much better since one of my instructors recommended taking a speech or drama class. Noah released my hand then surprised me by putting his other hand on my neck, just like Reggie always did.

"Let's see what's the problem," he said as his hand steered me out the open door. He looked at the lot, which was vacant except for the cars that were already there when I arrived. While he was looking for my car, I was looking at him. Out here in the sun, he looked even better; a light sheen of sweat glistened in the sunlight, emphasizing the golden color of his skin. "Oh, that's right; you said the car wasn't here," he said with a chuckle, as if to cover his error. "So where did you abandon your problem?" I pointed in the direction from which I had come and he pointed to a GMC 3500 dualie, equipped with a tow rig. He stopped to lock the office door but didn't bother with the garage.

Thinking that the truck was locked, I stood by the passenger door when he called out. "Get in!"

He had had his head under the hood of the car for almost a half hour. Unfortunately the stool he had me sit on seldom provided an opportunity to look at his ass, but moving the stool might have looked suspicious. I wasn't sure I could have seen much anyway since his bib overalls fell loosely from the support of his broad shoulders, though this didn't prevent me from using my imagination. He was mostly silent as he examined the engine, hooked up several machines to run tests and tried to start the engine once or twice. He only spoke to ask me questions about the car's performance and behavior prior to the breakdown. Unfortunately, I wasn't much help.

He walked away from the car and washed his hands and face at a sink. He returned to where I sat and leaned against a bench. "I think you're going to be fine," he said and I wondered if he was talking about me or about the car. "The battery was drained, so I think it's just the alternator, and that's an easy enough fix. Fortunately there doesn't appear to be anything wrong with the engine except for the evap system and a new valve is pretty cheap. If I can get all the parts, I can get you back on the road by tomorrow afternoon." It was like being in the doctor's office being told I'd passed my physical and that little 'thing' would take care of itself. I felt relieved except for the fact that he didn't say anything about the cost. "Come on. Grab your stuff and let's get the hell out of here. It's getting late!" He was saying those last words as his big hand came around the back of my neck and propelled me towards his car.

I stood in the parking lot with my small suitcase feeling a bit like an orphan as he closed up the garage. I followed him to the office where he sat at the computer for several minutes, before locking the door and motioning me towards an older Chevy Suburban that was exactly the same color as my car.

"So if you could just drop me off at a motel or something, that would be great," I said as he pulled onto the road heading south.

"Sorry, but there's no motel in this town. Our only motel went up in flames several years ago and no one has bothered to replace it." I stared at him, wondering what that meant for me. "I thought you could just hang out with me, if you don't object to grease monkeys," he said, as one side of his mouth seemed to attempt a smile.

"Oh... well, I have my sleeping bag in the car. Should we go back and get it?" I asked nervously.

"Not necessary."

"You're sure?" I prodded.

"Sure I'm sure, Mike. Or do you prefer Michael?" He said as his right hand reached out and squeezed my neck. It almost made me shiver; it felt so good. "We're just simple folk, but we like to think of ourselves as helpful. It's how we get along in these out of the way places." He looked directly at me for a couple of seconds. He had a small, genuine smile and gave another gentle squeeze before he returned his eyes and his hand to the task of driving. *Finally a smile!* What he had just said seemed to resonate with me; my parents had often said similar things. He was just being a Good Samaritan so I could turn off the *Bates Hotel* sign, which had been flashing in the back of my head, right?

A mile or so outside of town, Noah turned onto a driveway that led to a small house: vernacular architecture, almost square, with four gables and a porch running the length of the front and back. It was white; fairly typical in this part of the country, except for several rows of pale green fish scale shingles on the gables, which matched the window sash. The trim was a dark gray and medium grey shingles covered the steep roof. I followed Noah to the back door, through the kitchen and into the living and dining

rooms that extended across the front of the house. My first impression was that the place was very spartan, almost empty, as though he had just moved in or would be leaving soon. My own aesthetic is modern and somewhat minimalist, so I found it pleasing. He told me to make myself at home as he pushed a button on the stereo and excused himself to shower. At the end of the living room, a pair of windows flanked the brick fireplace; another wall had a large window facing the porch and the fields beyond, and opposite that was an alcove where Noah had his stereo and books. There were hinges on both jambs. My best guess was that there might have been a Murphy bed in that space at one time. But now that I was standing there, I started to study the contents of the shelves. There was a rather unusual collection of books, mostly titles and authors that were totally foreign to me, though some seemed vaguely familiar from classes I had had earlier on in college. But music seemed to be the focus. I was particularly surprised to see a huge group of vinyl LPs; there must have been at *least* 100 of them, probably more. I'd only seen them in thrift stores or at yard sales; I didn't know anyone still played them, but I saw a turntable as well. There was an even more substantial collection of CDs. It was only then that I began to pay attention to the music that surrounded me. Only vaguely, if at all, did I recognize any of the music, yet it was pleasant to my ear. I'd begun to zone out with fatigue and the mellifluous sounds. His voice caused me to turn my head and I was suddenly wide-awake. Fresh from a shower, he was wearing a clean wife beater and some khaki-colored shorts; he smelled good and looked even better. Without the baggy overalls, I could see that he had a strong chest, taut stomach and muscular legs to match his meaty arms. In response to my question, he pointed out the bathroom and fresh towels. As he walked away, I took notice of the equally athletic butt. Despite the fact that I had perved on Noah just 15 minutes earlier, by the time I had showered and dressed in clean clothes, I felt ready for bed.

In the kitchen, Noah had dinner prepared, which is to say a gigantic sandwich that could put *any* deli to shame, with potato salad and fresh fruit. I looked at Noah, looked down at the plate and back up to my host. "I can't eat all that!" I said, slightly exasperated. Don't ask me why, but I thought of *Psycho* again, when I saw the huge knife Noah picked off the counter.

"That's okay," he said as he easily divided my sandwich into two tidy halves. "You can save some for tomorrow, but you gotta have some of *this*. Mrs. Ferguson brought it in yesterday when she picked up her car, and she makes the best potato salad in the county, if not the entire southeast corner of the state!"

I took a bite and had to agree; it was the best I'd ever tasted. Then after a couple bites of the sandwich I said. "Sorry if I seem unappreciative, but I really need to crash. Noah, could you point me in the general direction?"

"Sure, come on," he said and gently turned me around. We basically retraced my earlier path and I suddenly realized his house had only one bedroom. "I'm sort of a creature of habit, so if you sleep on that side, I'll be able to get to the alarm clock without any interference," indicating which side of the bed was intended for me. "I won't be up too much longer because that damned thing screams pretty early in the morning." "G' night, Mike. Sleep well." He rubbed my head and left the room. Outside, dusk was giving way to night so the room was still dimly lit as I pulled off my shorts and shirt and dropped onto the bed, without bothering to brush my teeth. Dressed only in my boxers, I think I was asleep the minute my head hit the pillow.

I never heard the alarm sound, but the smell of coffee brought me out of my slumber. There was a moment of anxiety and confusion as I realized I didn't know where I was, but the bed was so comfortable, that my eyes closed again. Noah interrupted my sleep.

“Hey, guy. You can stay here if you want, I really don’t mind, but I’ve got to go to work.” I opened my eyes to see Noah dressed exactly like the day before, except everything was clean.

“No, no it’s okay. I’ll get up and come with you,” I begrudgingly offered.

“Okay, you’ve got 20 minutes until the train leaves,” he said as he turned and walked away. Not even a kiss! I guess that means we didn’t have sex last night, I chuckled to myself. That’s good, ‘cause if the grease monkey ever decided to get friendly, I most definitely didn’t want to be sleeping! I tossed back the light blanket. Get a grip you fucking idiot! He’s gorgeous, but that doesn’t mean shit!

I found my discarded clothes and quickly dressed; if nothing else, I was responding to the siren’s song of coffee. Noah was cleaning up the kitchen and offered me a cup of coffee and cold cereal, my typical breakfast. I finished my breakfast, brushed my teeth, tossed one of Noah’s books into my pack and joined him in the Suburban. When we arrived he suggested I stay in the office, which was more comfortable and if I wanted to do so, I could respond to the occasional customer at the gas pump. I felt like the proverbial fifth wheel, but didn’t know what else to do. I would have liked to stare at Noah all day, but knowing I didn’t like people watching me work, I decided against it. There was a coffee pot in the office, so I made half a pot and sat down to read. There were several customers at the pumps, and each of them was curious when I appeared to handle their transaction. I gave the first guy a lengthy explanation but as the morning progressed, I honed my response to a couple short sentences. Finally Noah stopped for lunch just before 1:00. I hadn’t even thought about lunch, so I was pleasantly surprised when he produced the other half of last night’s sandwich. We were mostly silent as we ate, and the lunch break passed quickly. I announced that I was going to explore the town.

“See you in 20 minutes,” he said with a smile.

“Huh?” I sort of grunted.

“Town’s pretty small actually; not much to see. Have fun.”

I walked into town and quickly realized that Noah wasn’t joking about its size. The tiny cluster of shops and businesses featured the usual fare: the post office and a couple banks, a drug store, hardware and appliance store, a grocery, a Sears catalog outlet and more than a few antique shops, seemingly the last hope for so many small towns. I did notice a bakery and decided to stop in later. The surrounding residential streets looked similar my own hometown, though back home there are about 30,000 more people so there are a few more grand houses from the late 1800s and 1920s and considerably more homes that date from the last several decades. At one point I found myself staring at an apparent duplicate of my own home. Though this particular specimen had been clad in vinyl siding and had aluminum windows on the second floor, it was otherwise identical. The bastardization of this traditional foursquare house tempted me to knock on the door and accost the residents; instead I just laughed at my misplaced indignation.

“I’m glad you’re back. It got busy right after you left!” Noah announced from under a car on a lift that was being drained of its oil.

Having just witnessed the lack of people and activity in this little town, I thought he was teasing. “Yeah, like you had what, two customers?” I asked and held out the bag in my hand. “Have one; they’re really good!”

“No it wasn’t a stampede, maybe four or five people,” he said while pulling the rubber glove from his right hand. “It’s just that they seemed to come at really inconvenient intervals, so I couldn’t get anything done. Thanks,” he said while reaching

into the bag. "It looks like you found the bakery. Those people are great! Who took care of you Penny, Katie or David?"

"Katie *and* David. What a pair those two are; they finish each other's sentences! I've heard about twins bonding and all that but it would have been creepy except that they're so nice and so cute! And funny!" I said with a chuckle. Noah gave me a look that I couldn't quite read. "Of course, right away they knew I wasn't from around here so they wanted to know if I'd be in high school this fall, claiming they needed taller and cuter guys to play basketball."

Noah laughed with me. "That sounds like David."

"They seemed a bit disappointed when I told them the truth." Again I chuckled at the remembered encounter. "But David did invite me to go swimming tomorrow, so would it be okay if I take off for a couple hours tomorrow afternoon?" I really wanted to get in the water, but Noah's earlier comment about covering the office made me feel as though I should ask for permission.

He turned to me with one eyebrow raised. "I don't know why you're asking me," he said quietly.

"Well, it's just that you said it was busy here and I..."

"No, it's fine. It's nice to have you around since the others are gone, but I can handle it. Besides, it's usually pretty quiet on Saturday afternoons." He said sounding completely sincere. "Really, you should go and have fun, but be careful," he added with a smile and then returned to his work.

I glanced at the adjacent bay and noticed my car looked just as it had the evening before. "I guess the parts didn't arrive, huh?"

"No they didn't. Sorry bud. Apparently you're not the only one to have this problem. It's a fairly common item but this morning, my supplier couldn't seem to get his hands on one. When he finally found one, it was too late to ship out today. But UPS has the packages and he assures me they'll be here on Monday. Again, I'm sorry." He paused as if he were thinking, and said. "But if you have commitments and need to get somewhere, maybe we could swap cars or something."

"Hey, don't apologize. It's not your fault. If I had gotten here earlier in the day, we probably wouldn't have this problem," I said trying to smile. "And I'm cool with Monday. I don't have to be at work until Thursday, but even so, you shouldn't be doing things like offering to swap cars." Actually I was embarrassed by the intimacy implied by his trusting offer, and I sought to dismiss it. "You don't even know me! I might be smuggling guns or drugs across state lines!" Despite an attempt on my part to keep a straight face, I could feel a smile pulling at the corners of my mouth.

"You're right. I hadn't thought of that," he said, completely deadpan while he continued to work.

The next afternoon, just before 1:00 I approached the bakery and saw a sign hanging inside the door: *Sorry we missed you. Please stop by again.* I also saw David inside mopping the floor. "I'll be out in a few," he yelled through the glass. I was sitting on the curb, when he appeared, pushing two, almost matching bicycles. "Dude! Glad you could make it! Ready to roll?" I just looked up and nodded. He looked even cuter in a sleeveless t-shirt with the high school mascot, a dragon or griffin or something, and some baggy plaid shorts. "Here, you take my bike." He said as he pushed a bike towards me. "I think Katie's is too small for you."

"Cool," was all I said as we took off pedaling away from town.

Since there was no traffic, we rode abreast and David talked and joked most of the way. He reminded me of my grandpa and Reggie, who seemingly could talk to anyone, anywhere and be completely charming. Grandpa often said about my cousins, "those

boys could charm the skin off a snake!' It was an expression I found to be apt in David's case as well. He occasionally winked and frequently smiled at me, for no apparent reason, though I was quite sure he was openly flirting with me. And who was I to complain? The kid was only 16, but except for Reggie's surprise farewell gift, no one had given me this kind of attention, for a *very long* time.

When we arrived, it felt as though we had stepped into a Norman Rockwell painting; I had a similar feeling when I first spotted Noah's garage two days ago. Several trees shaded a portion of the pond and a simple dock extended into the water from the shore. Scrubby vegetation sprouted along the path of the small creek that drained from the pond, while fields stretched out for miles in every direction.

We left the bikes and our shirts near the trees. "Come on," he said and gestured toward the dock as I began to follow. "It's easier from the dock. You avoid all that muck at the edges."

David was already removing his shoes. "I don't have any trunks so I'm just going to wear my boxers," I said hoping to avoid any surprises.

"Fine, whatever. But we're in the country and this *is* Nebraska!" he said with dramatic emphasis. "Out here people go skinny dipping. I *never* wear anything unless girls are here!" And with that, he pulled off his remaining clothing, revealing a very toned, teenage body. Nothing to be ashamed of, I thought as his ass and then his feet disappeared off the end of the dock. I immediately stripped and followed him. There was some of the expected grab-ass and dunking but we also did some competitive swimming. Unfortunately for David, my longer and better-conditioned limbs allowed me to win every time, but it was all in fun and we had a good time.

After almost two hours of play, I declared. "I gotta get out of the sun man or I'll be fried."

"Nice ass," David commented as he slapped my exposed buttocks, while I climbed out of the water. "But it *is* brighter than the full moon!" We laughed as he joined me on the dock. We put our shoes on, grabbed our shorts and walked to the shaded area under the trees. David pulled a light blanket from his backpack and spread it out on the grass. The bike ride and swimming had made me feel lazy and the warm breeze felt good after being in the chilly water; the rustling leaves made their own music and my eyelids dropped.

"You are so fuckin' hot! So fuckin' sexy," David's breathy voice whispered into my ear. Then I felt a hand on my chest followed by his lips on mine. In the seconds before my mouth responded to his, I thought: I could *never* say something like that without laughing or being laughed at, yet the way he delivered those few words made me feel very sexy!

"Mmmmm," was the only sound I made.

We made out for quite some time. Like me, David liked to kiss and he was fairly accomplished, for a 16 year-old teen from a small town. Both of us were hard as we rolled around on the small blanket. There was a bit of slip and slide to our bodies, aided by sweat and generous pre cum, but our mouths never separated, until David, while on top, started kissing his way to my cock. I accepted this as his consent and shifted my body so we were in position to pleasure the other simultaneously. His mouth had talents not just for kissing I soon discovered, as we found our rhythm and sucked until we convulsed, shooting explosive loads that drained our balls, filled our throats and emptied our lungs.

Turning around, we kissed after having enjoyed the interlude of pure lust. At last I pulled away and headed for the water. "Not that way. Use the dock!" David encouraged me. This time I didn't bother with my shoes, but carefully hurried to the dock and jumped

into the bracing water. David was seconds behind me. He approached me with eager hands and mouth but I gently pushed him aside, indicating that playtime was over.

We dried ourselves and dressed. David entertained me with his talk as we rode, finally arriving at the bakery. He presented a white bag atop a pink box. "This is for you; it's just stuff we can't keep till Monday but I hope you'll like it," he said with one of his dazzling smiles.

"What? Are you trying to get me fat?" I laughingly asked.

He shook his head. "Nuh uh," he answered, sounding very much like a teen. "You're perfect just the way you are." He leaned in and kissed me on the cheek. "I can call my mom to give you a ride."

"Thanks but that's okay. It's not far and moms always work too hard."

"She wouldn't mind, really!" he prodded.

"Dude, it's fine! It was great to get in the water! Thanks for making it happen; you were lots of fun." With my free arm, I hugged his shoulder. "You really are something special. Please say hi to Katie for me and thank your mom for all this stuff. Okay?" He nodded and held the door, all the while smiling as I headed back.

I was feeling a bit guilty as the station came into view, though I didn't know why. Maybe because of all the fun I'd had with David. I sure hope Noah has a girlfriend that's at least half as fun; God knows he deserves it! I jumped on the hose to ring the bell and waited for Noah to look up; when he did, I waved before going into the office. There was only one call for gas the remainder of the afternoon. It was some sleazy salesman in a new Cadillac DTS wanting to know how to get to Omaha. I politely told him that he just needed to go back the way he had come, and catch I-80 east. He grunted rather than spoke and squealed his tires as he made a hasty u-turn and headed north. (I had no idea whether or not he was a salesman, but I imagined that he had been talking with some bimbo he'd hooked up with during a business call. Seriously, you don't just get off the freeway by accident!)

I think Noah closed shop a bit early that Saturday; we were headed out the door at 5:45. I offered to start the charcoal so he could get into the shower. I didn't know what else to do, so I started making a salad, since that seemed to be part of his routine. I was cleaning veggies at the sink, when his big hands lightly squeezed my shoulders. I felt blood in my face and cock, when his warm breath said, "Thanks for getting things started." He immediately turned to the task of preparing dinner as I worked silently at the sink.

I don't know, maybe every Saturday is party night at Noah's house, but he turned on some music and grabbed two huge steaks from the refrigerator. He hummed along with the music as he doctored some ready-made salsa and placed a bag of chips in a bowl. He made a pitcher of lemonade, added fruit, ice and liquor, maybe vodka or gin, I wasn't watching, before he instructed me to grab whatever he wasn't already carrying and follow him outside. He checked the charcoal and decided to wait before he placed the steaks and some potatoes on to cook. One thing that hadn't changed was the fact that Noah didn't say much. With that one exception, I was enjoying myself immensely. As a result of my afternoon with David, I wasn't crazy, out-of-my-mind lusting for Noah's body, and the alcohol-laced lemonade eased all my edges. Noah laughed, which was a joyous sound indeed. Eventually we ate and drank and ended up sitting side by side in two patio chairs. I assumed Noah felt as mellow as I did, when he began to ask me questions. They weren't deep probing questions, but he seemed genuinely interested in me and in my answers. After two days, I still knew nothing about him, but now at least one of us knew something about the other!

After some time, our glasses were empty, the music had stopped and I needed to piss something fierce. I excused myself and when I returned to the kitchen, Noah was picking up and putting things away.

"Hey guy," I said as I slapped a hand on his shoulder. "I know it's probably against the rules, but if everything is under control, how's about we call it a night. I'm offering a back rub as further inducement to leave this until tomorrow."

He rinsed and wiped his hands and turned off the light over the sink. "Okay," he said with a smile.

"Go lie on the bed. I'll be there in a minute." After closing the back door, I went into the bathroom to wash my hands and brush my teeth. Baby oil was the only thing I could find for the massage, so grabbed it and headed towards the bedroom.

The room was mostly dark; even so, Noah's body seemed to glow in the dim light. I stripped to my boxers and approached the bed only to discover that it was far too low for me to be comfortable. "Noah, I'm going to crawl over you, okay?" I half-whispered into his exposed ear.

"Yeah, sure," or something like that was muffled by the pillow. I think he was already partially asleep.

I began by rubbing his head. His short hair felt variously like velvet and sandpaper. It sort of tickled my fingers and definitely hardened my cock, which surprised me. Most of my experience with massage was related to relieving cramps in a swimmer's legs but I rubbed some of the baby oil into my hands and began to work on his neck and shoulders. His muscles were very tight, despite the bit of alcohol, so I rubbed and kneaded for possibly ten minutes. By concentrating on my task, my cock was able to deflate, lessening my chances of embarrassing Noah or myself. I scooted back on the bed so I could work on his back. My previously myopic view now widened to include his entire back; with my crotch just inches from his muscular butt, I boned up again. Willing myself to behave professionally, even if I wasn't a masseuse, prompted me to stop my hands at the top of his ass cheeks. He was silent as I rubbed down his back and returned to his upper back, by tracing his spine or his ribs. His soft, regular breathing suggested that he was sleeping, while I continued the massage. Almost 30 minutes after I had begun, I carefully crawled off the bed. I took the baby oil into the bathroom and beat off to the image of Noah's naked body. I quickly cleaned up my mess, pulled my boxers on again and quietly got into bed. At first I lay on my side and stared at the beautiful man beside me but I only got hard again. Staring at the wall was no improvement. Finally I rolled onto my back, where my right hand found his, upturned on the bedding; I carefully placed my smaller palm onto his larger one. Soon I was sleeping.

The smell of coffee made me smile until I opened my eyes to see 7:22 on the clock. I groaned loudly and rolled my face into the pillow. A bit later, he was gently pulling an exposed toe. "Didn't anyone tell you Sunday is a day of rest?" I whined as I rolled over, my foot still attached to his hand. Caravaggio, I thought as my sleepy eyes took in Noah's body: strong sunlight bathed one side while the other fell into soft shadow. I rubbed my eyes, wishing he'd be content to stand there all morning.

"It's just that I like to work in the garden before it gets too hot. Come on and get some breakfast. Then you can go back to bed if you want. You must have worked hard last night, because I feel great!" He smiled and rolled his shoulders in reference to the massage. The slow movement caused several muscle groups to respond as each one caught the morning light. My mouth watered and my cock went from 75% to 110% hardness.

“Okay. Gimme a minute,” I mumbled. He squeezed my toe and ran a finger up the sole of my foot. I’m a bit ticklish, but that was electric! In the bathroom I drained my balls in record time while I nabbed a quick shower. I saw my reflection in the mirror and bemoaned the fact that my hair gets really curly when it’s wet; it makes me look like such a dweeb.

Breakfast consisted of blueberry pancakes (from scratch) topped with warmed applesauce and a dollop of sour cream, plus OJ and coffee, simple yet delicious. I made a mental note to add cooking to the growing list of things that Noah did better than I. Over second or third cups of coffee, we split the single fruit tart that had been included in David’s pink box. I guess they both want to fatten me I thought and chuckled to myself.

I offered to clean up while Noah got started in the garden, since I needed time for some serious thinking, or at least my *cock* did. Fortunately the window above the sink faced the side yard, so I couldn’t see *him*. For a levelheaded, reasonably intelligent and normally sexed 21-year-old gay male, I felt like I was losing control. In less than 72 hours I had gone from body worship (that part still held) to psychotic fear of being murdered and buried in the garden, to straight up lust (no pun intended) and now something else, maybe love? And Noah had given me no indication that he wasn’t straight. Case in point: we’d slept in the same bed for three nights now and he hadn’t made a move *and* I’d *never seen him hard!* Well, if I were honest I’d have to admit that it had been either dark or I was asleep, when we were in bed together but *still, I’m always hard!* I was so distracted that I actually managed to wash the dishes twice. I bought additional time by drying the dishes and putting them away. I even swept the floor. But when all was done, I still had no answers or conclusions. Damn it!

Outside, Noah was shirtless so I tossed my shirt onto a patio chair and joined him. This early in the summer, leaf lettuce and some early peas were the only mature plants, mostly it was weeding, watering, staking or thinning plants like beets and carrots. Fortunately these simple tasks calmed me as I enjoyed working with just the sound of birds and the wind. The sun was warm enough to break a sweat, but not uncomfortable. At one point I picked up the hose to get a drink. Noah was walking my way and impulsively I sprayed him from head to toe. He laughed, probably because the cold water felt good. But the water made the fabric of his grey shorts turn translucent and it was clear he was naked underneath and that he was big. I immediately popped a rod. Noah was still laughing but he was now running directly toward me. I aimed the hose and blasted him again, but like a superhero, it rolled off. Just like when Reggie and I were kids, I dropped the hose and started to run. Noah grabbed the hose and opened fire. I turned at the first hit, slipped on the grass and fell. I was laughing so hard that my cock had pretty much softened, but Noah arrived and fully doused me, adding playful curses as I endured the cold shower. He stopped and rinsed himself with the water; the image belonged in a porn flick. I stayed on the ground to cover my now stiff rod, as he turned off the water. I was still watching as he walked toward a hammock and stopped; he surprised me when he pulled off his shorts and wrung out the excess water.

“Come here!” he yelled and motioned with his hand. “This is the best part of working in the garden early,” he said smiling. My cock wasn’t getting any softer so I remained sitting in the grass. “You might not like it if I have to come over there,” he said with a laugh. He was sitting on the edge of the hammock watching me; I could think of no other options.

Oh well, I thought as I stood up exposing myself. He never stopped smiling and halfway to the hammock I started to smile too. His welcoming face and kind demeanor made me feel comfortable and some of the blood left my face and cock.

“Get those things off and hop in. I’ll hold it for you.” Though I was still half hard, he didn’t stare and his voice was no different than when he announced breakfast. All the bare skin and the swaying motion made me giggle as we settled in. We maneuvered so my head would rest on his bicep and my shoulder nestled near his armpit, while the suspended fabric naturally turned us inward. The hand of his captive arm played with my wet hair and his other hand grabbed my arm and placed it across our chests. The leaves above fluttered in the soft breeze, dappling the sunlight; the world was amazingly quiet. All this was totally sensuous. I was surprised that my dick was completely flaccid.

I think Noah was sleeping and I wanted to sleep as well, but my inquisitive mind interrupted, demanding to know exactly what was going on here. I was more than a bit aggravated with myself for not being able to just go with the flow, but maybe that wasn’t my nature. That’s it! I thought after proposing and dismissing numerous explanations. He’s a Zen Buddhist or something like that. Sex isn’t just male/female, so us being naked together is okay. Fucking is only for the unenlightened, and Noah has probably surpassed that level. (Too bad, I heard my cock interjecting.) And the garden and nudity are just an expression of oneness with the physical world. It all makes sense now! I released a long sigh and turning my head toward Noah, smelled his scent mingled with grass. I closed my eyes and willed myself to sleep or at least relax and enjoy the ride.

That’s total bullshit! I thought as my eyes snapped open. You are so stupid, some kind of fucking lunatic! You don’t know Buddha from Krishna, with or without the Zen! Maybe he’s just a closet nudist. Unable to explain my current situation, I was confused. I’ve always done well in school and generally assumed that meant I was smart. Well maybe I am smart, but there’s a whole helluva lot of stuff I don’t even know I don’t know about! Plus so much stuff around me everyday that I don’t understand, like this naked man beside me. But god, he’s beautiful!

Finally I slept, during which time my body had apparently dismissed the Zen theory and had insinuated itself with Noah’s. My arm was in a snug embrace, a leg was nestled between the two of his, my face was tucked into his neck and my cock was fat and ready. I hadn’t heard anything but I felt a finger lightly tickle my ear and warm breath on my forehead as Noah spoke. “Hey, you awake? You wanna go for a ride?”

“Ummmm.” My arm pulled him tighter and my mouth landed several kisses on his neck before consciousness surfaced. My face flushed and my cock softened with the realization of what I had just done but Noah just hugged me and repeated his question.

“Hey Mike, you up for a little road trip?”

I pulled back to look at Noah, setting the hammock into motion. His smiling face looked calm and happy.

“Yeah?” I said, still not fully awake.

“Okay. Let’s see if we can get out of here without breaking a leg,” Noah chuckled as he carefully vacated the swing and assisted me.

We dressed, ate some fresh fruit along with cookies from the pink box and headed out the door. I didn’t really know what Noah had in mind but a simple drive turned into a pleasant afternoon. He described or identified whatever was beyond the end of his distended finger. I enjoyed listening to him; he talked more than he had during the previous three days. I was shown the location of a huge fire that had leveled a barn and destroyed over \$100,000 of farming equipment. We passed a farm where the four children, two girls and two boys, had all graduated as valedictorian of their respective high school class. Another farm had the honor of being the home of one of the few sets of triplets ever to be born in the county. Eventually we stopped at a small cemetery.

"That's where my mom's buried," he said quietly. "She and dad were married in that church," he said pointing to an aging clapboard structure with a graceful steeple. This was the first bit of family history I had been made aware of. The headstone revealed that she had been gone only four years and I was at a loss for words. I really did feel sorry for him, since I was fortunate enough to have spent time with my parents just days earlier.

"I'm sorry," was all I could think to say as I placed a hand on his shoulder. Once again I couldn't read his expression, but grief and possibly anger seemed to be contained in his gaze.

He pointed out addition points of local interest but only made one other stop. "This is where I grew up," he said as he stepped out the car, indicating a modest farmhouse, with tidy utilitarian structures surrounded by fields.

"Nice," I said admiring the simple beauty of the land. "I grew up in town, though my dad's business is all about farmers and ranchers."

"And that was my room, up on the right." I followed his finger to the dormer to our right. "I think Matthew's planning a small addition, but that's pretty much the way it's looked for as long as I can remember. He and dad swapped houses after mom died. I don't think dad liked being here without her and Matt's house is pretty nice. It's also easier for dad to handle; I don't know if he'll ever remarry." He paused with his own thoughts for a moment. "Matthew and his wife, Sarah, really seem to like it here. My uncle owns the adjacent property so he sort of runs both places. My brother likes the country but he doesn't want to be a farmer. I'd introduce you, but they've gone to visit her parents. I really would have liked for you to meet my nephew, Levi. He's only 17 months, but he's a real kick in the pants," Noah chuckled.

"And over there about 20 miles or so," he waved his hand towards the south as he was driving. "Is the old Oregon Trail. You'll probably drive over it on your way back to school."

"Wow! I tend to forget about time before highway, computers and cell phones." Immediately I regretted my comment.

"Yeah, lot's of things have changed." He was quiet for a while. He seemed to be scanning the horizon when he asked. "Do you ever feel like you have to run and get away from things, even for just a while?" I noticed he was intently looking at me. We were both quiet, so he continued. "I know I do! That's the main reason I have this big truck. Most of the time I'll just go somewhere to just walk or something and then campout over night. It's great to simply watch the stars and fireflies and listen to the crickets. It's pretty much like that at home, but it's not the same." Again I thought his mind was drifting. "But anyway, if it decided to rain or something, there's plenty of room to sleep. And if I had a dog, there'd be room for him too."

I suddenly felt very sad, mostly for Noah. "Yeah, I think I know what you mean. But when I need to escape I go to the pool and swim. Sometimes I'm there seven days a week!" I said with a chuckle. I was glad to see him smile when he turned to face me again.

"Yeah, I suppose college is tough, but you seem to like it."

"Yeah, I guess I do. I mean; I better! It's costing a chunk of change, and I haven't even begun grad school yet!"

"I'm sure you'll do just fine. I know you will!" He said as he tousled my messy hair.

He casually pointed out a few more points of interest, including his former high school and the burned out motel. "That's were my best friend, Tim lived," he said as he pointed to a group of buildings. I noticed a slightly weathered sign, with T. C. Construction prominently featured.

"What's the T.C. stand for?"

“Terrance Cunningham. Tim’s dad, a good guy, but not located in the most lucrative market. Tim took a job with his uncle right after high school, somewhere near Lincoln or Omaha. Last I heard; they had more work than they could handle. That’s a good position to be in, I guess.”

I just nodded, because I had the feeling that I’d missed something or Noah wasn’t telling me everything he was thinking. But that’s okay; I’m just a guy who happens to be a stranded, out-of-town motorist. It’s not like I’m his shrink. *That would be ludicrous, since I barely understand my own life!* Needless to say, I’m not even sure how I felt when we finally pulled up to his house. The weather was perfect, the countryside was beautiful and Noah talked more than during the three days previous, but some of his comments seem to have raised more questions than they answered.

“Man, you would have been perfect out on the range. Is there anything you can’t cook on that grill?” I teased when I learned that he planned to cook marinated salmon and some variation of scalloped potatoes in foil packets on the grill.

“Haven’t discovered what it might be; at least not yet,” he said with a grin. “It just gets too hot to cook in the kitchen when summer rolls around,” he said and turned with a bottle in his hand. “Here, try this Sauvignon Blanc. Thought it might be a good choice, but let me know if it doesn’t suit you.”

The food was delicious and Noah continued to be talkative, relatively speaking. Between his offerings during our drive and tonight, I knew that: he was a ‘big fish in a small pond,’ as he put it, excelling at sports, (football, basketball and baseball) and posting a 3.6 GPA. He was popular, enjoyed high school, dated, and participated in student government, etc. His best pal, Tim, (of T.C. Construction fame) was equally proficient in sports (cross country, wrestling and baseball) and academics. They frequently double dated and spent weekends together on class projects, student government or just hanging out. Tim was something of a genius with wood, while Noah excelled at metal work and mechanics. They’d been like brothers since junior high, but hadn’t been in touch since graduation. At that time, Noah decided to work full time at his dad’s garage to save money for college, while he lived at home and helped with the farm. After two years, his brother returned with his degree, allowing Noah to enter college. He dropped out of school early in his sophomore year to help his father after his mother became seriously ill until she died the following spring. Noah enlisted in the army and during a brief furlough following basic training, helped move his dad into Matthew’s house. Since the completion of his two-year service commitment, Noah had worked at the garage. Chronologically, it made perfect sense, but his story made very little sense to me.

Darkness was falling so Noah suggested we move indoors before the mosquitoes arrived. We carried the dishes inside but he chased me out of the kitchen. Noah eventually joined me but instead of sitting beside me on the floor, he eased onto the sofa with a knee on either side of my shoulders. He rubbed my neck and shoulders and played with my hair. I didn’t know if he knew it, but he had just made me his willing servant for whatever he had planned.

“Mike, accept my apologies if I dump on you. I don’t know why but... I feel like you get it, or get *me* or something, even though we just met and all. Just tell me if you’re uncomfortable or I get out of bounds. Okay?” His hands were squeezing my shoulders so firmly that he could have been leaving bruises.

“Easy there, guy. I’m willing to listen, but you’re about to break some bones.”

“Sorry.”

“Noah, I’ll call foul if need be, so just go for it.” I felt grateful for the opportunity to return a small portion of the generosity he had shown me during the past days.

“Thanks,” he said. “It’s just that...well there’s a serious omission in what I’ve told you about my army experience.” He released a big sigh before he continued. “Actually there are two parts. But I’ve never told anyone this before, so I’m a little nervous,” he said quietly.

“Take your time. Whenever you’re ready.” There was a lengthy pause before he continued.

“Well, first off, the whole thing about enlisting was kind of a freak accident. I knew it was very probable that I’d be sent to Iraq or Afghanistan, but I didn’t care; I just wanted someone to tell me what to do. And this is the scariest part, I halfway hoped I’d get killed.” He cleared his throat. “I was sort of looking for a way out I guess and I thought that at least that way, my father could be proud rather than ashamed.” When I tried to look at him, his handhold kept my head staring straight ahead.

“But why?” I asked as tears threatened to appear in my own eyes.

“I don’t really know,” he said; his voice wavered as if he might cry. “But when we put mom in the ground something changed; I just felt sort of...dead, myself. After basic I went back to base and was shipped off to California for some additional desert training. There I met Calvin, another green bean like me, fresh off the farm in Tennessee. We were like brothers from the moment we met. It was all sort of casual, you know, buddy stuff, but as our ship-out day approached, we got kinda serious, fast. I mean, I loved this guy and he loved me.” My head was still clamped in his grip. “Fortunately we weren’t assigned combat duty; I got the mechanics position I’d requested in the beginning and Calvin ended up as a driver. I thought the gods must have been smiling on us. We didn’t get much time together because of all the ‘Don’t ask, don’t tell,’ bullshit, but it was enough to keep us going in that hellhole. We were counting down our last 30 days, when his convoy was ambushed. His mom has his Purple Heart but he’s *never coming back!*” I heard a sorrowful moan filled with pain and quickly turned my head, now that Noah’s hands were covering his face.

Jumping up, I sat next to him, wrapped him in my arms. “God, Noah. I’m sorry, truly sorry. It is so unfair.” I paused a moment then added, “You know I love you.” His body seemed to have physically shrunk as he coiled into himself. As he cried, I gently rocked him, feeling rather worthless.

Eventually, he rose silently and walked into the bedroom. I thought I should accompany him but I didn’t move. In the bed, he was practically curled into a fetal position. That sight was as painful as his story had been. Lying near him, I gently rubbed his smooth back and occasionally let my hand rub his stubbly head; a few times I had to stop to wipe my eyes. Before attempting to sleep I spooned Noah’s body, with my arm carefully wrapped around him. I think he had a nightmare while we slept, as his thrashing body awakened me. I held on as tightly as I could and eventually he settled into my embrace.

Like every other day, I was greeted by the smell of coffee and an empty bed. Surprisingly, Noah appeared to be unaffected by yesterday’s revelations. It was a workday and as usual he was very business-like, and fairly quiet. I handled the gas pumps and cleaned the office in between. By 11:00 the office looked pretty good, except for a folder with lots of paperwork.

“Noah,” I said into an engine compartment, knowing he was below. “When you get to a stopping point, why don’t you show me what to do with all that paperwork on the desk? If your bookkeeping isn’t too complicated, I can get it into the computer or file it or whatever.”

I was startled when a wrench lightly tapped my foot. "You don't need to do that. It ain't going anywhere."

"Obviously! But it looks like it's been reproducing while we're not here."

He chuckled before we discussed my idea off and on for nearly ten minutes. "Okay. All right already. You win! Go back to your room and I'll be there in a few." He sounded a bit annoyed, but I think he was glad for the offer of help.

It only took me about 90 minutes to process the paperwork; if I'd been familiar with their system I would have finished in 25 or 30 minutes - 40 tops! Regardless, I was anxious for more customers and the brown UPS truck to make an appearance once lunch break ended.

The bell rang and I noticed a newer Ford F150 stop in front of the office. The passenger door was on my side and it opened to reveal a woman in jeans and sleeveless blouse. She pulled a basket from behind the seat, as a man, also wearing jeans and a John Deere cap approached the door. They made a handsome couple, probably early 40s, with tanned faces, which led me to assume they farmed somewhere in the area. He held the door for her as they entered.

"Good afternoon," I said from behind the desk.

"Well, good afternoon to you," they seemed to say together. "Are you working for the Rathburns now?" the woman asked.

"No, not quite. I'm just waiting to get my car repaired," I said with a smile.

"Well, you're in the right place. If you have at least two tires and an axle, these guys can make it run. The old man's pretty good, but I think Noah's some kind of mechanical genius." The man said as the woman nodded in agreement. "Actually we're her to pick up Molly's car if it's ready. Oh, I'm sorry, didn't mean to be rude. I'm Kent Simpson and this is my wife Molly," he said extending his hand.

"Nice to meet you both. I'm Mike. So which car is yours? I'll go see if it's ready."

"It's the red T-bird," Molly replied.

"Cute car!"

"That it is, but it's not very practical. Fortunately we have the truck if I need more than two bags of groceries," she said with a chuckle. "But I really do like it. Kent bought it for me last year as a sort of 25th anniversary and empty-nest present; our youngest left for college last fall. So it's special in a lot of ways," she said still smiling. Kent had gone outside to talk with Noah. "But the guys here are really special too, so I brought these," she said indicating the basket. There won't be any fresh peaches around here for awhile yet, so these will have to do," she said while placing Mason jars of canned peaches onto the desk. "There's two each, but I'll let them fight about who takes what home," she giggled.

"That's really kind of you, Mrs. Simpson. I'm sure they'll appreciate them."

Noah stuck his head in the door and exchanged greetings with Mrs. Simpson. "Say Mike, the paperwork is in that folder beside the desk. And it's okay if they pay by check. Kent's seldom bounce," he said with a grin and gave Kent a wink. "Thanks folks; I gotta get back to work."

God, Nebraska must have more cute guys per capita than any other state in the Union, I thought as a man dressed in brown pushed a dolly towards the office. As he passed his clipboard for a signature, I could see that his face was rather plain, and he wore a ring on his left hand. However his shorts and shirt displayed a very fit body.

"I don't actually work here, so let me check with the boss. I'll be right back," I said before heading for the garage.

"If the number of packages match what's on the ticket, just go ahead and sign it. Johnny doesn't screw things up. And it's perfect timing; I'll be done with this in 10 or 15 minutes," Noah said, all the while working on the car overhead.

"Is all that stuff for my car?" I asked with surprise and concern.

"Yeah, probably. I don't know; some of it might be replacement stock or a backorder."

I was glad that my car would be up and running soon. I still had two more days to get to my internship, but I certainly never expected to spend four days in a crummy gas station. I guess I might miss Noah but I wasn't so sure about that. He finally acknowledged which team he played on, but he seemed like a lot of work, sort of like damaged goods; *not at all* the sex fantasy that rolled out from under a car last week! I guess that's why it was a fantasy.

I told Noah I was leaving for a bit and hurried down to the bakery. I didn't want to leave him to deal with the pumps but I wanted to get him something special as a gesture of thanks. I had no idea what he might like, and I didn't have money to spare, especially with the car, so I settled on food.

"Hey, Katie! What's the best thing you've got?" I started speaking before the door had closed behind me. "It's gotta be something everybody likes!"

She stopped a moment thinking, her brow furrowed as a dimple appeared on each cheek. She really is cute, I thought to myself.

"I'd have to say the apple pie. For real, who doesn't like apple pie? I mean it's like, well, like baseball, mom and apple pie!" she giggled. "And my mom made it, so there you have it." She tilted her head to one side and smiled as if there could be no other answer.

"You sold me. Katie could box one up for me?"

"Oh, now that I got you all excited, I hope we still have one," she said with concern as she walked to another display case. "Last one!" she announced over her shoulder.

"Cool."

Katie was boxing the pie, when David walked in from the back. "Hey Mike, great to see you!" he enthused and displayed his killer smile while walking around the counter to stand next to me. "What are you up to?"

"Just hangin'; good to see you too, David." I said and shot him a smile in return. If it was possible, his smile got larger and he batted his lashes. So damn cute! I thought as I pulled money out to pay Katie. "Actually my car is *finally* getting fixed so I got to run." I said as I tossed a dollar bill into the tip jar. "Sorry I can't stay and play, but you know...and thanks again for Saturday. That was a lot of fun!" I winked at him as I said that. He returned the wink. "Okay, gotta go. Thanks guys for everything!" Then I hurried back to the station.

I didn't want to bother Noah, so I stayed in the office. There was a long stretch without anyone at the pumps, which I hoped meant that Noah hadn't been interrupted during my brief absence. My eyes were looking directly at one of the pumps, but I was seeing David instead: his smile, his body, his cock. I guess I happily zoned out for some time, when I was startled by the sound of an engine turning over. Before I even got out of the chair, Noah drove up and yelled through the door. "I'm going out for a test drive. Be back in a few." He smiled and waved and then he was gone.

That brief moment of seeing Noah smile obliterated any thoughts of David. Maybe I'm too fickle; I pondered for a moment, but glanced down at the pink box and smiled.

Noah wasn't gone for any length of time, but I noticed it was already 6:10 when he pulled my car into the garage. He had the hood up and was working again when I

walked into the bay. “Almost there. Just a couple of minor adjustments and you’ll be ready to roll.” I noticed that all but two or three of the boxes that had been delivered were open; some had grungy looking auto parts in them. “Get in and start it up.” I did what I was told. “Thanks Mike. Shut it down.” I was feeling something uncomfortable in my belly, sort of like being nervous, but not quite. “Hey Mike, once more, please.” After a minute, “That’s great. Thanks. I think we got it.” Mike’s head was still under the hood so I sat a moment longer before I joined him.

Noah straightened up and turned toward me. He was wearing another beautiful smile. I quickly looked into the engine compartment and back to his face. My stomach started to hurt. He was cleaning his hands with a towel. “Better than new!” he said proudly, then with a mixture of modesty and humor, he added, “Well, almost!” as a soft chuckle joined his smile.

“Great,” I said without any conviction. “But Noah, did you replace all those parts too?” I asked while pointing to the obviously new belts and hoses and the discarded parts that were strewn around.

“Sure did. It’s pretty rare to find a car that’s almost 16 years old and has barely 60,000 miles, but some things, particularly rubber products deteriorate with time, not just miles.” He had been smiling but his face got a bit more sober when he said. “You should consider yourself lucky that you didn’t have more trouble on your trip. This car should never have been out on the highway in that condition. But like I said, it’s good to go now,” he said with a smile that indicated pride of workmanship.

“But Noah, we only talked about the alternator and some valve thingy. *Not all this!*” Already my voice was rising and Noah’s smile was gone. “How am I supposed to pay for this? I can’t afford all this shit!” I said waving my hands toward the car. “Christ, Noah! You could have told me or asked me or something!” I was yelling as loud as I could. “Jeez, you go and like, charge me for parts after you’ve, like, already installed them? That’s extortion! That’s bullshit! You... you... you...” I was so angry I was stuttering. “You can’t make me pay for this! I...I...I never *signed anything*. And FUCK YOU TOO, NOAH!” I was blind with rage; Noah could have been threatening me but I neither heard nor saw anything. It was surprising that I was actually able to run out the door without falling.

I ran until I saw a large expanse of green and fell onto the grass, bawling my eyes out. When I finally stopped, I sat up and wiped my eyes on my shirtsleeve. I was relieved to see that no one was around. I paused to blow my nose and then had to clean my hand on the grass; god I’m gross! But it was nothing compared to my recent tirade. I flashed on the moment that Noah’s face changed from smiling to one of what? Disappointment sounds too mild, but revulsion seems to be about right. Anger - somehow I think I consumed all the anger in that space; but hate - that’s a likely option. I’m going with *hate*. I *so hate myself*, right now. Whatever he was feeling, he looked crushed, and that’s just wrong. I started to cry again. Tears were streaming down my face. Then they just stopped! I felt completely empty and really, really stupid.

Noah was working on yet another car when I eventually returned to the garage. I don’t think he would have heard me, but he looked up at the exact moment I entered. He looked sad; I wasn’t even going to try to figure out what his expression really meant.

“Mike...”

I held up a hand to silence him. “Noah, I am so embarrassed and really sorry for acting the way I did. My behavior was completely inappropriate and inexcusable. You did all that for me and I...I don’t know...” I was stuttering again as new tears blurred my vision. Up until that moment I had been watching Noah’s eyes; I saw nothing but kindness.

“Mike, I should have told you up front. I’m sorry.”

We stood there looking at each other, each having just forgiven the other. I still hated myself, and I seriously doubted that Noah or I would ever forget my crime, but it was as though he had already moved on.” I wiped my eyes and said, “But seriously we do need to do something about getting you paid.”

“To be honest Mike, I haven’t even worked up the bill yet. And since I’m partly in the wrong, I’ll sell you the parts at cost. And then maybe we can work out something on the labor end of things.”

“I really don’t have a lot of money,” I said trying not to sound like I was whining.

“Oh, I think you made that pretty clear a little while ago,” he said without recrimination. “And I remember being in college, when a \$65 textbook was the equivalent of a month’s groceries.” I thought I saw his eyes drop to my crotch before he added. “Maybe I could take it in trade?”

“What?” I screamed incredulously, my anger returning instantly. “You what, like expect me to drop my pants like...like...like some two-bit hustler? Just so you can....”

“Whoa, Mike wait! Just hold on a minute.” His hands were raised as he tried to quiet me. “No, no, nothing like that,” he said with a calm, steady voice. I was still angry, but I waited for him to finish. “Because first off,” he continued. “If you ever put that ass on the street, I couldn’t afford it today, tomorrow or in a million years!” He released a small snicker as he watched me for a response; my face took on a crooked smile.

“So what exactly did you have in mind?” I asked, but this time it was I who snickered.

“It’s quite simple,” he said. “We’re way behind on doing an inventory here. We need it both for tax and insurance purposes, but it’s kind of boring, so it’s easy to procrastinate. When dad and I do it, it takes forever. And with Matthew, we always end up arguing.” He rolled his eyes in frustration. “After this morning, it’s clear you can manage the computer, and I know what needs to be done. Together we can whip it out in no time. You know I’ll make things right with your bill and you’ll be on the road by mid-afternoon.” He stood there waiting for an answer, and given today’s events I’m sure he didn’t know what to expect from me.

I walked up to him and threw my arms around him. “I love you, Noah.” Then I kissed a very surprised mechanic.

Being late, dinner was sandwiches and leftovers. Katie was right about the pie, but it seemed more like a peace offering than the reward I originally intended and therefore not quite as sweet. Without words we both gravitated to either edge of the mattress when we got into bed.

Instead of the smell of coffee, it was the sensation of touch that awoke me the next morning. Soft lips nuzzled my neck, a strong chest and firm belly warmed my back and what I could only assume to be Noah’s stiff prick, was nestled between my ass cheeks. “Mmmmm,” sounded from within as I arched my back to stretch. Noah’s arm was around my waist and his hand teased my belly and chest. I grabbed Noah’s hand and forced it into my boxers as I turned my face to meet his and we kissed while Noah stroked my bone. His hand and our kissing got more aggressive. “Uh...uh...ummmmmmm,” were the only sounds from me, muffled my Noah’s mouth, which was clamped over mine, while I tossed my first load of the day. I felt like I was suffocating, so I turned my head away and gulped in air. Turning back, his smiling face was still there. Now I was smiling as well, and giggled a bit when his hand appeared, partially covered with cum. However, I moaned when he licked up some of it before offering his hand to me, sending an erotic charge through me.

After more kisses, his mouth landed on my stomach; where his tongue tickled my navel. His free hand was pulling at my waistband, so I lifted my hips and my sodden shorts hit the floor. His mouth took a pleasurable eternity to return to my mouth, where we made out for some time before I rolled him over to return the favors he had shown me. I slowly worked the length of his torso until I arrived at his very stiff cock. It was longer but not as thick as Reggie's, in other words it was perfectly proportioned and absolutely beautiful, like the rest of Noah's body. I licked the tip, kissed the head and languidly dragged my tongue along its length en route to his balls, which I gave my full attention by kissing, licking and occasionally sucking one or the other into my mouth. Sensing his building urgency, I finally moved to take his cock into my mouth. He gasped, then sighed and a few minutes later guided us into a perfect 69. I followed his lead and his sounds, so that we were able to prolong the moment. Talk about fireworks! With curled toes, tightened muscles and a hand pushing my mouth into his thrusting crotch, Noah was the first to cum. Seemingly he shot gallons, and it felt as though I might actually drown, but I couldn't stop to consider that possibility as I shot the first of several volleys into his voracious mouth. I had *never* exploded like that before. I pulled my face out of his crotch long enough to fill my lungs. That moment caused me to take a blast to the side of my face, while some of his load slipped out of my mouth. We continued to tease our spent cocks until they began to soften.

Before I was even aware of it, Noah had moved around so his face was next to my blissful one. He laughed when he saw his cock snot on my face, but licked it off before he coaxed me into another round of kissing. He crawled on top of me, supporting his upper body on his elbows; his heavier body lay upon me like a sensual blanket. My body settled into the mattress while my hands explored his back and ass and occasionally reached around to tweak his nipples. When eventually we rolled over, we were both hard and I started to slowly thrust my cock against his.

"Unless you intend to pay your entire repair bill in bed, we better get to work!" He chuckled and smiled, and then outright laughed when he saw my face appeared to be serious deliberating his implied proposition. With a final kiss, he slapped my naked butt with a resounding smack, rolled me off of him and headed for the bathroom.

As I scanned the room for any stray items, I noticed the alarm clock: 7:39. I bet this is the first time Noah's ever been late to work! I laughed out loud and walked out the door, my suitcase in hand.

Despite our late start, we finished the inventory before 3:00, leaving me time to get to Manhattan at a reasonable hour. I moved my stuff from the Suburban to my car, while Noah worked on my bill. I stood near the desk, while the printer whirred and I noticed the stack of invoices lying there. Noah turned back from the printer and placed the pages down on the desk.

"Well, after we pay the governor, the total comes to \$587.93. That's the best I can do Mike."

I glanced at the pages mostly as a courtesy, because I didn't really understand what I was looking at. The parts alone cost over \$300; only the rebuilt alternator was expensive, but there sure were a lot of parts, which suggested he had done a lot of work. An invoice of double or even triple that amount would not have been unreasonable.

"You sure that's it? I mean for all the repairs and for putting me up and food and everything?" I flashed on my tirade and felt like a complete jackass.

"Oh, well there is one other thing..."

I sort of regretted questioning him, even though he was being more than fair. "Oh?"

"You owe me a big hug and another kiss," he said with a huge grin as he stood and pulled me into his arms.

“Not a problem, Mr. Rathburn. That kiss led to another and we began making out in the middle of the office. My hands slid down his back and into the open sides of his overalls, seeking his amazing ass. I gasped when I felt naked flesh. A finger tripped on a narrow band of elastic and I realized he was wearing a jock strap! Since high school, I’d had a thing for Speedos and jock straps. My cock was instantly hard again. I borrowed one of David’s lines and breathed, “So fuckin’ hot,” into his ear with a husky whisper. I continued to play with his ass and the elastic that hugged it, while my cock rubbed his and our mouths meshed.

“Fuck!” I yelled as the service bell sounded. “Bout scared the shit out of me,” I gasped as I tried to pull away. Noah’s arms didn’t budge.

His gaze returned from the pumps and saw the worried look on my face. “It’s okay,” he said then kissed me. My eyes must have been huge! “It’s just Mac; he’ll be busy with his truck for at *least* 10 or 15 minutes. My back was turned to the pumps, so I didn’t know what Noah was seeing, but I figured, sure, why not? Noah must know what he’s talking about and he was pretty damned hard to resist. The ringing of the bell had softened my dick, so we enjoyed several minutes of slow, gentle kisses. Then I realized that this was also goodbye.

Noah pulled back slowly. “One of us has to have our pants on straight, so Mac can pay for his 10 or 12 dollars of gas,” he said calmly with a smile and walked out the door.

I turned to see Noah talking with the older man near a navy blue pick-up. They must have talked, or at least Noah listened for nearly 10 minutes, during that time I pulled out my wallet. Four nights at Noah’s house had saved most of my travel money. I pulled out five 20s and my credit card and put the wallet into my pocket.

“Mac’s a great ole guy!” Noah said upon entering. “Says he won that truck during the Bicentennial. I don’t know if that’s true but it is a 1976 model. Dad rebuilt the engine and I’ve replaced the transmission. It’s probably good for another 40 or 50 thousand miles, though I don’t think Mac is. He has slowed down quite a bit these last years, especially since his wife died.” He glanced back where the truck had been parked. “So where were we?” he asked; then answered himself by kissing my cheek, before he moved behind the desk. We just smiled at each other for several moments.

“I want to pay 100 bucks in cash and put the rest on this card,” I said, indicating the cash and card on the desk. “That’ll keep the card total under 500. I’ve sort of forgotten what the limit is; it’s one of those student cards, but I think it’s cool. They’ll probably make you call or something.” I was getting anxious about leaving and was talking way too much. “But let’s just run it and see...Okay?” Noah just smiled.

“You shouldn’t have any more problems, but do be careful. Oh, and Mike, would you call me just to let me know you got home all right?” Noah took a step back from the car.

“Yeah, sure, and thanks for everything,” I said with forced pleasantries; I didn’t want to start crying. “You really...did a...great job and everything.”

Mike was still smiling at me, as beautiful as ever. “Hey man, there’s a 90-day warranty on the parts, so come back if you have any problems.” His smile became a huge grin.

“Good to know,” I said with a snicker. I think we both relaxed a bit with my laugh. “But come ‘ere.” He leaned toward the window and I pulled his head near. “I love you, Noah,” I whispered into his ear. He tousled my hair as he stepped back.

“I love you, too.”

Fortunately the drive to Manhattan went without incident and I arrived in time to shower before Charlie, Angela and I went out to dinner. The place was casual and

cheap, something we all appreciated, but it also featured Karaoke several nights; this happened to be one of them. Charlie got a standing ovation for his performance of *Mack the Knife*, a la Sinatra, but I balked. After refusals, negotiation and a second round of drinks, Angela agreed to join me on stage, in a last ditch effort to make me embarrass myself in front of this college-town crowd. We got almost as much response as Charlie, but of a different sort! She's 5-10, so I got on my knees in order to play Sonny to her Cher as we performed *I Got You, Babe*. We were also able to embarrass Charlie, at least a little bit, by pointing to him when we sang: 'I got you babe'. Since it was Angela who offered, I accepted an invitation to stay with them. I couldn't quite fit on their sofa, so I unrolled my sleeping bag on the living room floor. Wednesday morning Charlie and I had breakfast before I headed for Lawrence.

I called my folks to let them know I had arrived safely; I didn't mention the breakdown in Nebraska. Next I called Noah before going for a swim. I did a lot of swimming the first couple of weeks to take my mind off Noah, David and Reggie.

The internship was way better than I ever would have imagined. Some of the work was rather mundane, but the people were great! They frequently challenged me and often invited me to participate. Though time constraints seldom allowed it, the principals were always willing to discuss the projects and their design solutions. For me, one of the best things was watching the architect/client interaction; I felt pretty good about my design sense, but I had a long way to go with the whole interpersonal/self-presentation thing.

My sister was in Kansas City at the end of July for some nursing-related conference. I drove over for the weekend and we had a chance to hang out. I thought perhaps I'd work up my courage and hit a couple of the gay bars while I was in the city, but it was fairly easy to talk myself out of it as evenings were the only time Karen was available. But I did get to see the new addition that Steven Holl had created for the Nelson-Atkins Museum. It was more incredible than the pictures could ever express. Seeing work like that gets me so excited about school and career, since that's exactly what I want to do. The weekend was one of those times when having a car was so handy. To tell the truth, most of the time it sits in the parking lot. I never got accustomed to having one and most of what I need is here on campus.

Noah and I talked occasionally, but I was beginning to wonder if ours wasn't one of those strictly physical attractions, as we didn't seem to have much to talk about on the phone. Of course he never did say much and I mostly said stupid things. But then, if I considered how he acted and how he treated me, it seemed like I could learn a lot from him. Hmm... don't know.

Football practice started just before the fall term began, but I had my own scrimmage to worry about: by the end of the first week of classes I was already scrambling with projects, class schedules and my work-study job. But seeing those big guys reminded me of Noah. A couple of times I'd thought to invite him down for a game, but it was a long way to travel for a ball game. And my single dorm room was so small, that I couldn't really offer him a place to stay, unless one of us slept on the floor, and that would only lead to a very unsatisfactory *discussion* concerning who slept where. And as far as college ball goes, he'd probably rather watch the Corn Huskers, him being from Nebraska and all.

By the end of September, the weather had started to change; fall had definitely made an appearance and the campus looked all the better for it. Most of this didn't concern me because when I was not in class, it seemed I was in the studio; the library to study, versus the library for my work-study job; my room or the pool. Actually, studio was great because you could always float an idea, get an opinion, argue or just bullshit with some very talented and super cool people. Obviously, being creative individuals we didn't always see eye to eye and some of the group were very out spoken. Still, we were all in the same boat, so we generally tried to respect our peers, especially since there were no slackers in the program. But, ultimately we were responsible for ourselves alone, so I was feeling a bit harried as the mid-term approached. I guess the good news was that my last exam was on Wednesday, which meant I wouldn't be tortured *all week!*

It was Sunday morning before my first test. I had worked at the library until 10:00 p.m. and then studied well past midnight. "Yes?" I hoarsely said into my phone.

"Hey, Morning Mike. I hope I didn't wake you."

I squinted at the clock with sleep-filled eyes: 6:59. "Well, yeah Noah, you did; I was studying past midnight."

"Oh, sorry. I guess I wasn't really paying any attention to the time. Do you want me to call back later?"

"No, it's fine. It's probably a good thing you did wake me 'cause I don't think I set the alarm and I probably would have slept until noon." My eyes were still half closed until I realized that it had been nearly two months since we last spoke. Suddenly I was awake and more than a bit concerned "So Noah, what's up? Are you okay?"

"Thanks, I'm well. Life is good..."

"Are you sure? Is everything alright?" I interrupted.

"Yes, Mike. I'm sure," he chuckled. "I'm well, though you sound a bit edgy."

"I'll be better after I get some coffee, but I'm good. It's really good to hear your voice, too." I stretched and rubbed my eyes.

"I was really hoping we could get together. Like maybe next weekend."

As was often the case with Noah, his voice didn't give me any clues as to his mood or his motives. Regardless I was suddenly hesitant. "Well I'm pretty busy and I've got mid-terms starting tomorrow."

"Okay, I understand that. So when's your last one?"

"Wednesday afternoon," I said with sigh, already tired from the exams. Hey, maybe getting out of town for a weekend wasn't such a bad idea, I thought to myself.

"So you *could* come for a weekend," Noah replied, his voice a bit hopeful. "We could meet somewhere in the middle so you won't have to drive too far. But tell you what, I know you're still half asleep so I'll email you and you can think about it after you've had your coffee. How's that?"

"Sure..."

"I hope this'll work out. I miss you, Mike." He breathed a small sigh. "But I really *do* want to talk with you," he said with an undertone of pleading.

Noah, *wanting to talk?* I was worried for him. "Yeah, go ahead and email me; I'll get back to you as soon as I can. Noah, I don't mean to be rude, but I gotta piss real bad. Sorry." I chuckled nervously. "Seriously though, thanks for thinking about me. I miss you too."

"Yeah, sure. I better let you go, but please give it some thought. Bye, Mike."

"Okay, Noah. Later."

The blue Suburban was easy to spot, and Noah's feet rested on the lowered tailgate. When I sat near them he looked up from the book he was reading and smiled as

if this was something we did everyday. Without a word, his presence calmed me. I had gotten increasingly nervous during the drive, partly because I suspected Noah was going to drop a bomb, but mostly because we were going to be seen together in public and sharing a room in the B and B Noah had booked. I felt like the word, 'fag' had been branded on my forehead. I'd never had a serious boyfriend and hadn't gotten to the 'out and proud' part of my life yet.

Noah had scooted along side of me and wrapped me in a strong hug. We didn't kiss, and at that point no words had been spoken. I sighed as I breathed in his scent. When he finally pulled back I released a surprised, "Hey," and reached up to touch his head.

"Winter's coming," is all he said to explain that he now had a head covered with wavy black hair. His stubble, which had tickled my hands felt like stiff velvet, but this was soft as silk.

At Noah's suggestion, we rode together and arrived at our accommodations in my car, where the parking lot contained a Subaru wagon with an empty, roof-mounted, bike rack, a silver Cadillac SRX and a modest motor home. "Doesn't look so gay-friendly," I said.

"Do you know the owners of these cars?"

"Well, no but..."

"It'll be fine, Mike, as long as we keep our hands to ourselves in public," he said to reassure me as his hand rubbed my head. "I miss those long locks, but it looks good on you," he said, smiling at me.

"Well, you know, school and all." I enjoyed the feel of his hand on my scalp and rather wished we could just stay in the car; I smiled, enjoying the moment.

We met our hosts, Madelyn and Phillip Eikenberry and dropped our bags. Madelyn gave us a quick tour, before Noah had us headed out on a walk.

"Unless you climb over the fence, you can't get lost," Mrs. Eikenberry assured us. "We only have about 20 acres, so I doubt you'll lose sight of the house. Just watch your step and enjoy yourselves."

We'd barely walked 100 feet, when Noah wrapped an arm around my shoulders. I followed his lead and wrapped my arm around his waist, his warmth felt good in the crisp air of late afternoon. We were approaching a small cluster of trees, and remembering his claim about wanting to talk, I finally spoke. "You don't talk very much."

"No one to talk to," he replied. "Sorry, I didn't mean..."

"It's okay. I think I understand," I said as I squeezed his waist.

Soon thereafter, Noah instructed me to sit between his legs as he sat at the base of a tree. I settled into the space he had created, which felt like a comfortable chair. I wrapped my arms around his thighs and leaned into his chest.

"I'd just want to hold you," he said as his arms closed around my chest and his face nuzzled my neck. "I really did miss you," he quietly added, as one of his hands found a home under my sweater; that hand lazily rubbed my belly through my tee. He occasionally hummed or sang bits of songs, most of which I did not recognize. By then I almost hoped he wouldn't talk.

"Mmmmm, this is so nice Noah; I feel like a puppy all snuggled up in your arms."

His whispered, "Good," tickled my ear and I felt a shiver run up my spine.

Time passed until he said. "Guess we should go," as the sun dropped below the horizon. Again his voice tickled my ear.

As we stood, I spotted watercress growing in the small pool nearby. Immediately I reached into the water to retrieve some. "Fuck, it's freezing!" I cursed. Noah laughed but I was determined and collected several handfuls. "I don't suppose you have a grocery bag stuck in one of your pockets like a good scout would, do you?"

"No," he laughed. Then he pulled off his sweater. "Here use this," he said handing it to me.

"But won't you get cold?"

"It's not that far, Mike! And besides, I'll have you to keep me warm."

I loosely wrapped the greens in his sweater and we started back, with my arm around him, as dusk rapidly deepened, bringing a chill.

Half an hour later we were sitting down to dinner. I had nicknamed the other guests, based on their vehicles as we were only now going to meet for the first time. Phillip made the introductions while Madelyn brought our plates to the table. Mr. and Mrs. Snowbird (in the motor home); sat across from the Bikers, (the Subaru with the roof rack); the City Slickers (Cadillac SRX); were seated across from Noah and myself, with Mr. and Mrs. Eikenberry at either end of the table. I took an instant dislike to the City Slickers; they were rather pretentious, especially considering the fact that they lived in Salina. More to the point, I felt like I was getting the evil eye from the Mrs., maybe it had something to do with the three letters branded on my forehead and the handsome man sitting beside me. Fortunately, Noah proved himself to be a charming conversationalist, (don't think that I wasn't surprised!) so I let him do most of the talking. The meal was excellent: marinated chicken breast was served with baked vegetables: potatoes, parsnips, carrots and beets, all from the garden, and topped with spiced fruit chutney. The green salad included some of the harvested watercress and was accompanied by pumpkin/zucchini bread. Dessert involved caramelized apples, raisins, nuts and puff pastry. The conversation seemed to end with the last cup of coffee. Madelyn declined my offer to help with clearing the table, so we went to our room.

Noah started a fire, but even dressed in t-shirts and jeans the room became too warm so we opened the window. It was incredibly romantic. We sat in the settee at the foot of the bed, watching the fire, when Noah said. "Hey I want to show you something." He walked to his backpack and removed a manila envelope and returned to his seat. Without context, I couldn't decide what the first photograph was; it looked like curls and squiggles on weathered plywood. The next photo was better illuminated and I now saw that the squiggles were in fact metal, which had been worked into sensuous, organic, vine-like curves. It was vaguely reminiscent of the wrought iron work of the Paris Metro. In a still wider shot, the metal was framed by wood, apparently a panel or screen and a man in jeans and a knit cap stood off to the side, with a woodworking tool in his hand. "That's Tim," Noah announced. The next image featured two panels with Tim and a man in shirtsleeves and a tie. "And that's the designer," Noah said in reference to the other man. He then pulled a piece of grid paper out of the envelope with a rough sketch, which I immediately recognized as an elevation of the panels I had just seen. For the first time, I knew what I was looking at and reviewed photo images.

"It's beautiful, but..."

"Tim is working on a wine room for a new restaurant in Omaha. He asked me to do the metal work." Noah shyly smiled.

"You did that?" I asked incredulously.

"Yeah, but I'd procrastinated for over a month and didn't do anything really until after you left. Tim sent that sketch, way back the end of April or early May. I was really

excited at first, so I called and told him yes. I did a few samples and then it just sat. I guess you inspired me,” he said with a smile.

“Forget me! You actually created that from nothing but a sketch? I thought you fixed cars!” I gave him a hug in admiration of his talent. “It is so incredibly beautiful. I mean it’s like something Tiffany might have done if he worked in metal instead of glass.”

“You’re good,” he said with a smile and pulled several color images of Tiffany glass panels from the envelope. “The designer sent these along with the sketch.”

“God, Noah. Is there anything you can’t do?” I asked with a mixture of admiration and awe.

“Lots!” he said modestly. “But look at these.” He showed a couple more images, showing the progression of the installation. The candid shots taken at the job site also included Tim and other tradesmen. “That’s Tim and his wife, Katherine, and their daughter Hannah,” he said describing the last photo.

Hannah was adorable, while both adults were pleasant if not a bit plain looking. Katherine’s hair and smile caught my attention while Tim’s eyes, dimpled chin and square, plump lips were, in my estimation, the outstanding features on his face. However, it was unmistakable, even in this photo that they loved their daughter and each other. “Handsome group,” I said. “I think Hannah’s a lucky girl,” I added as I returned the photos to Noah.

“I think you’re right about that,” he said and nodded his head. “And this is the finished product,” he proudly said, holding out another image that appeared to have been professionally photographed. “Tim emailed this last Friday. The restaurant is going to use this in their advertising.” I looked at Noah and he seemed to glow. “He also sent me another check, sort of a bonus, since they all liked it so much.” He looked so cute being proud and modest at the same time.

“Whatever they paid you, it wasn’t enough,” I said before I hugged him. His arms returned the hug.

“I should give part of it to you, since you got me going again.”

“You’ve given me so much already,” I said and looked at his face. His expression had become more solemn.

“But it really is kind of strange that I hear from Tim after all these years, and then you show up.” His brow wrinkled as if he was deep in thought. “He is one of the things I wanted to talk to you about this weekend.”

“Really, Noah? Seems like he’s a great guy and a good friend. Are you guys going to work together again?”

“Don’t know. I think I’d like too, but that’s what I wanted to tell you, he was the first guy I ever loved...and maybe I still do,” Noah sighed.

“Okay, but you don’t have to tell me about that,” I said trying to reassure him, while at the same time possibly feeling a bit jealous.

“No, Mike. I really do need to tell you, because... I care about you. Also, I made a mistake with Tim that I hope never to repeat. Would you do me a favor and hear me out? I’ll stop if you want me too.” I nodded my consent. “Thanks,” he said and smiled. “It really hurt to talk about Caleb, but it felt so good to *finally* be able to tell someone. You did me a huge favor that night. I’m not sure I even thanked you.” His eyes watered, on the verge of tears.

“You did, Noah,” I said hoping to convince him as I squeezed his shoulder “So don’t worry about that even for a minute. Okay?”

He nodded. “Mike, at times it seems your understanding far exceeds your years. Perhaps you can help me understand what I’ve been thinking about. Or maybe just putting it into words will help me to understand.”

“Noah, I think you flatter me and underestimate yourself, but I’ll listen to whatever you want to share with me.”

“I already told you that Tim and I were best buddies.” A small smile conveyed that he remembered Tim fondly. “In our senior year during a football game, something happened, which I’ll never forget.” He paused before continuing. “I’d taken a hit after picking up 20 yards and was returning to the lineup. I turned toward the bleachers, and amidst all those shouting, cheering kids, I saw *him*. And I thought; I love that guy! And it wasn’t just a thought in my head, my whole body felt like it was smiling or something; it was unlike anything I’d ever known before.” I noticed Noah was no longer looking at me but staring into the fire. “I never told him, but I kept telling myself that he knew.” Noah sighed and shook his head. “Nothing really changed, other than me knowing what I knew.” He shrugged his shoulders as if to say, *what can I say?*

I smiled at him and said. “I know the feeling.”

“We both played baseball, so when the season started I got to see him every day at practice and I started to think that he *did* know what I hadn’t bothered to tell him. I felt some kind of vibe every time our eyes met, but instead of moving on my intuition I used it as a rationalization not to say anything. You know, it would just be redundant, since he obviously knew, right? And *I didn’t even want sex!* I just wanted to be near him and hold him. Weird huh?” Noah chuckled at his own observation.

Not at all,” I said seriously. “It sounds very loving actually.” Noah’s face seemed to soften as he considered my assessment.

“Hmmm, I never thought of it in those terms.” He smiled briefly before he continued. “I wish I could have been a bit more brave.” His face sobered and I nodded. We gazed at each other for a moment as if to acknowledge each other for our respective missed opportunities.

“Yeah, what if?” he smirked. “Anyway, a couple of days after graduation Tim called and said he had something for me that he wanted to drop off. It was perfect, because I had something for him too, though I hadn’t told him. If he hadn’t called, I might still be holding onto it.” Noah smiled at his own foible. “Tim had been to my house a million times, so he came right upstairs to my room. He told me I couldn’t open his package until after he left, which made it easy for me to propose the same conditions. But when he told me he was moving away to go work with his uncle; I thought I’d cry. We pulled each other into a hug so at least my face was hidden. My hand was rubbing his back and I remember I gasped, when my hand accidentally slipped under his shirt and I felt his skin. He didn’t move and I didn’t remove my hand. Mike, I swear, that moment was electric; it was magic. It was like I finally understood that moment on the football field.” Noah paused and shook his head. “I couldn’t think a single reason not to tell him, but even with my mouth was just inches from his ear; I said nothing. We shared our standard good-bye and when he left, I cried... for a long time.”

A while earlier I had grasped Noah’s hand; now I squeezed it. I was opening my mouth to say ‘I’m sorry’, when he spoke.

“Mike, in all the years I’ve known Tim, I never said the words, ‘I love you’ to his face. But you said it *three times*, when you were in Geneva. It wasn’t until you were pulling away that I finally said it. I’m sorry Mike, because I really do... love you.” He pulled me into a hug and fought back his tears.

“It’s okay, Noah,” I said hugging him in return. “I never assumed anything, so it is nice to actually hear the words. Thanks.”

The hug lasted for a long time. We were silent as we readied for bed until Noah repeated his request from earlier that evening. “Mike, I just want to hold you.” I kissed his cheek and settled into his arms.

We spent a good portion of the next day at the festival in town. As Madelyn promised, there was excellent food and some respectable art in the juried show. I was most impressed with the hand-worked items such as sweaters and cloth, created with wool that the artisans had harvested from their own sheep and quilts that boggled the imagination, as well as items of wood, silver and clay. Even though I was born and raised in North Dakota, I'm mostly familiar with products that include numerous chemicals and were largely produced overseas. Our biggest surprise was discovering a small booth promoting Tim Cunningham's WoodWORKS. The young woman attending the booth explained that she was an apprentice, and part of her time was devoted to the summer crafts circuit. She confessed that she was glad that this was her final appearance in this capacity. I noticed the elegantly handsome wrought iron 'TC' mounted on a block of solid, oiled and hand rubbed wood. While driving back to the B and B, Noah explained that the metal work had been his graduation gift to Tim. In response to my question, Noah told me that from a solid piece of wood, Tim had carved an anvil with an 'N', as if being wrought from metal by a hammer and tongs. "It's been packed away since I went into the army, but I know exactly where it is," he said.

Before darkness fell we returned to our spot under the trees. Noah spread a blanket and with his head supported on his hand, he watched me answer his numerous questions, while I lay on my back.

"Well, either M.I.T. or Yale, or maybe SCI-Arc, in California. But no matter what, I'm going to one coast or the other. I gotta get out of the Midwest!" I said in response to a question about my plans for grad school. "Don't get me wrong. There's some beautiful country around here. I don't regret growing up in the country and I wouldn't change my past for anything, but there's a whole world I've never seen." Noah nodded his appreciation and understanding. "After that, I don't suppose I'd object to returning, if I could get meaningful work. I think it's crucial that architects foster and support green design." I sat up to emphasize my position. "Don't you think it's rather odd that most of the people in this region derive their livelihood from the earth, yet no one thinks twice about dumping chemicals, in the form of herbicides and pesticides, in their own back yard? And contemporary building practices are just as bad or worse! Acres of trees, tons of petrochemicals and mountains of waste, just so people can live and work in something clean and new. And look at all the free solar and wind energy around us that we don't bother to harvest!" I gesticulated to indicate the entire world and almost hit Noah, my very patient and attentive audience of one. "Sorry. I'll get down off my soap box," I said, with some embarrassment.

"Don't apologize. It's admirable that you have such conviction in what you believe. I hope school and life don't take that away from you." He urged me to lie down again before he kissed me. "Mike, I love you," he said as another kiss silenced any comment I might have made.

Dinner was great. The City Slickers were not at the table and Phillip opened several bottles of wine. As it had been the previous evening, the meal was excellent. After dinner the Snowbirds shared some blackberry brandy that some of their friends had produced. Everyone moved to the living room to enjoy the fire while our hosts served the brandy, accompanied with pleasant conversation.

Upstairs, Noah lit the fire in our room and we sat side by side on the floor with our backs against the settee. The fire and Noah were pleasantly warm and I felt myself

drifting towards sleep. His arm on my shoulder pulled me closer and I felt his breath on my face. "Mike, I didn't finish last night; may I continue?"

"Mmmm," I mumbled.

"Mike, I'm so glad you're here." I snuggled into him; it was deliciously warm and secretly, I wished for him to be silent. "I haven't...I haven't been with anyone since Caleb..."

"Noah!" I quietly protested and turned to face him. How could that be? I asked myself, somehow feeling angry at the world. He now looked tired and saddened, which made me want to cry. I eased him onto the rug, where I wrapped him with my arms and repeatedly kissed his face. My kisses didn't stop his tears.

"I love you, Noah," I said hoping to provide some solace.

We didn't move until the fire had died down. I coaxed Noah up off the floor. He spoke in a voice just above a whisper. "Please just stay and hold me?" We settled into the bed and fell asleep wrapped in each other's arms.

The next morning I awoke and through half opened eyes, saw Noah's perfect ass flex, and the cheeks momentarily part, revealing his heavy ballsac as he lifted a leg to slip into his jeans. I moaned and he turned to face me and zip his fly. It was only then, that I realized that I was naked beneath the sheets, which surprised me. Eventually he coaxed me out of the warm bed and I slipped on jeans and a tee, before we went downstairs for breakfast.

I was particularly pleased to see that Madelyn was bidding the City Slickers goodbye as we walked down the stairs. Phillip offered coffee as we served ourselves from the generous breakfast offerings. Madelyn came in to bid us good morning but was immediately interrupted by the Bikers, who were also leaving. With her permission, we took refilled mugs of coffee upstairs. Noah stoked the fire and we sat on the floor with our feet near the hearth and our bodies leaning against one another. I slowly slid down his torso and lay on the floor with my head in his lap. Again, I felt like a puppy as he occasionally rubbed my head and belly. I felt safe and loved and warm all over.

Except for the occasional crackle from the fire and the music playing softly, the room was silent. The coffee didn't seem to have lessened my urge sleep.

"Listen to this," Noah said as he used the remote to raise the volume.

The instrumental intro had segued into a singing male voice. "Sinatra?" I said, feeling like a kid who had been surprised by a teacher's question.

"That's correct, but just listen."

*...worth the yearning for,
So swell to keep every home fire burning for.
And we would be so grand at the game
Carefree together that it does seem a shame
That you can't see your future with me
'cause you'd be, oh, so easy to love.
You'd be so easy to love,
So easy to idolize, all others above,
So sweet to waken with,
So nice to sit down to the eggs and bacon with.
We'd be so grand at the game,
So carefree together that it does seem a shame
That you can't see you future with me
'cause you'd be, oh, so easy to love.
Easy to love*

“Easy to love.” Noah sang along on the last refrain and then lowered the volume. I opened my eyes to find Noah smiling down at me.

“I love you, Mike. And when grad school starts, I want to be with you, wherever that happens to be. If you want me there.”

If this was the bomb I’d worried about all weekend, it was the very last thing I would ever have imagined. It sounded like a dream come true except I flashed on Tim and Caleb. The idea of being Noah’s third strike scared me shitless! “But Noah!” I replied while raising myself off his lap. “That’s the...the sweetest thing anyone has ever said to me, but...but you don’t even know me!”

“I know I love you and that’s enough for me,” he said calmly with a gentle smile on his face.

“Yeah, sure, I guess. But it doesn’t seem fair to you. I mean, I’ve never even had a boyfriend, or a girlfriend for that matter.” I felt a little desperate. Mike’s expression told me that that fact didn’t matter to him. “Okay, look,” I said trying to be rational. “Even if we forget about that for the moment. Compared to you, I’m just a kid; I don’t know *anything!* I mean you’re smart and talented and pretty cool, right?” He just smiled at me. “It’s kind of embarrassing, but earlier this year when I turned 21, I actually thought I had finally grown up. You know, I was an adult: I could drink and sign contracts and all that stuff. I was feeling all *Master and Commander* when I left home in my very first car, which as you know, turned out to be a piece of crap.” I smiled in spite of myself. “But after those four days with you, it seemed like all I could think about was how stupid I am and how kind and generous you had been. And that hurt!” I said with a sniffle. “It was good in a way, I guess, because it was sort of a reality check, but still...it hurt.” I dropped my head and wiped my wet eyes to fight off tears. “And the fact that I thought maybe I loved you, didn’t seem to help.” Wow! That was about 10 years worth of angst, I thought as more tears formed.

“Mike, I know this is a big deal. I waited until now to say anything because I was afraid of messing up our weekend. And until now, it has been perfect.” He gently lifted my chin. “So let me say this, I heard all of what you just said, but the very fact that you’re concerned about me, says you’re *not* a kid. And one of the things that is so appealing about you is that you still have a young person’s zeal and sense of adventure. I sort of put that aside when I got out of high school and started working for my dad. I want to find that again before it’s too late. You know you’re not stupid and I hope you know that I love you.” I returned his smile with a small one of my own. “Just think about it, please?” he said as his hand left my chin and rubbed my head. I nodded and noticed that the room was very quiet. It was a long, awkward silence, as neither one of us moved or spoke for some time. “Maybe we should think about getting out of here,” Noah said flatly, as he stood and entered the bathroom.

I remained seated on the floor in silent thought. I heard the spray of water in the shower and finally picked myself up and stripped off my clothes. Noah was silent, but stepped aside to make room for me when I opened the shower door. “Noah?”

“Ssssh.” He pulled me close. “I’m sorry I upset you.”

I pushed into him and we stood there under the warm spray. Before long my hands began to wander over his body and then I kissed him. He returned the affection and we began to make out in a slow, deliberate and sensual way. My mind wondered how or why I could ever turn this man away, but my mind was distracted by my approaching climax as my body rubbed against Noah’s. I could only moan when a load exploded from my stiff cock, since my mouth and Noah’s were completely engaged. I

dropped my head onto Noah's shoulder and refilled my lungs with the warm, moist air. Water was just starting to gently wash away my juices, when I noticed that Noah's dick was hard and throbbing; apparently he had abandoned his own pursuit of pleasure when I nutted. Ignoring whatever intentions he may have had, I massaged his ample prick and full balls with both hands until he too, shot an impressive load.

As we rode back to his car, Noah suggested that we get together again, to explore further the idea of pairing up next fall. Noah's desires were clear, though the final decision was mine. We kissed before he opened the passenger door. Recalling our room in the B and B, I asked, "Does the fireplace in your house work?" as he retrieved his bag from the rear seat.

"Sure does," he said with his beautiful smile. "And a cord of wood was delivered last month."

"Good to know." I replied, thinking of our next meeting, likely during winter break. Sitting before a warm, crackling fire might not be the most objective place from which to consider a possible future with Noah, but it certainly was an appealing one.

We shared a final brief kiss before we separated. As I drove toward campus I ran various scenarios through my head. They weren't all great, but none was terrible. I remembered being naked in the hammock with Noah and imagined us cuddling before a fire. I checked the rear view mirror and realized that thinking about Noah had brought a smile to my face. My smile became a chuckle as I considered the fact that if things worked out with Noah, I'd have to come out my parents. That's necessarily a bad thing I admitted to myself as I cranked up the radio and began to sing along.

