

Lost and Found

Part 4

By Douglas Fox

Chapter 31

It was a little after one o'clock when I parked my car in front of my house back in Paradise. I headed inside with just my overnight bag. The Christmas presents could sit in my car until after I had lunch. I was starved.

I announced, "I'm home." Immediately I heard the sound of two pairs of small feet pattering as the twins ran for the front door. My nephews met me in the hallway halfway to the kitchen

"Unka Ky!" "Unka Ky!" the boys chirped. "Plane!" "Plane!"

"Noah, you're first," I said. I watched which twin looked up when I said his name. I thought to myself – Noah, red shirt. Connor – purple shirt. Thank God Mom and Andy didn't dress the boys identically.

I lifted Noah up for my head and flew him down the hallway towards the kitchen. I set Noah down in the kitchen. "Hey Mom," I said in greeting. I picked Connor up and flew him around the table.

"Do you have anything to eat? I'm starved," I said to Mom. "I didn't have lunch."

"Sure. Soup is in the cupboard. Bread is in the bread drawer. Lunch meat is in the fridge," Mom said.

I quickly assembled a sandwich while soup heated up in the microwave. Mom continued working on cookies, assisted by her two grandkids. Hunter was in his playpen in one corner of the kitchen sitting and watching everything that was going on. He babbled and cooed as he observed his world. Mom said she expected Hunter to be talking soon.

Mom said Andy was working this afternoon and evening. The restaurant had quite a few groups coming in for holiday parties. Liz had gone to a basketball tournament with her boyfriend Alex. They weren't going to be back until later in the evening.

I brought my Christmas presents inside and put them under the tree in the living room. I went down to the local video store and grabbed a couple movies. I spent the rest of the

afternoon chilling out in the family room, watching movies and reading a book I borrowed from Pattee Library about West Point's class of 1846.

I found the book fascinating. The experiences of the cadets in 1846 were very similar to the experiences of John Randolph and Randolph Luther nine years earlier. My paper seemed to stand up well against the author's far more extensive research.

Connor and Noah came in later to play with their toys while I watched my movies. In the middle of the afternoon both boys wore out. They joined me on the couch, cuddling one on each side of me. Mom found them asleep with me when she came to get them for their naps. She thought they looked so precious that she insisted on getting a photo of them with me before we took them upstairs for the rest of their nap.

Supper was interesting. It was Mom, Dad, me and three small kids. Mom didn't make anything fancy that night – macaroni and cheese, hot dogs and peas. Mom fed Hunter his rice cereal. Dad took Connor and I took Noah. Dad and I had to dice up the hot dogs into toddler bite sized pieces and then try to coax them to eat. The hot dogs were easy, both boys loved them. Connor liked his mac and cheese. Noah was stubborn. I got him to eat more than he wore.

The peas were a disaster. Peas ended up on the floor, on the high chair tray, on the table, in Noah's hair and two peas down my shirt. I even got him to eat a few. Connor giggled and laughed at our struggle. Little Hunter watched and laughed too. I was relieved when we finally washed the kids up and turned them free.

"Welcome to my world Kyle," Mom commented.

"I'm waiting a long, long time before I have kids," I replied as I pulled my shirt tail out to remove the peas that fell inside my shirt.

Dad and Mom just laughed and teased me some more. While we were doing that Noah returned to the scene, tugged on Mom's jeans and said, "Mom-mom... inky"

"On that note, I'm outa' here," I said as I departed. "I definitely DO NOT do diapers. That's not in an uncle's job description."

"Coward!" Mom teased as I retreated to the safety of the family room. I flipped to the news on the TV and went back to my book. Connor and Noah wandered back to join me ten or fifteen minutes later. They played with their blocks and trucks on the floor while I relaxed.

Liz joined me around seven o'clock. She and Alex had enough for the day. They had left to watch the basketball tournament at eight in the morning. She settled in and watched the movie with me. Mom rounded up the twins for their bath around 8:15. The boys returned dressed in their jammies around a quarter to nine.

Connor came over to me and asked hopefully, “Unka Ky? Book?” Noah stood behind him, waiting expectantly.

I took the book, ‘The Cat in the Hat’, of course. “Come on guys,” I directed. “Off to bed if you want a story.” Noah and Connor obediently led me upstairs to their bedroom. The boys gathered on Connor’s bed while I read to them. The boys were asleep before the cat had finished demolishing the house in the story. I moved Noah to his own bed and tucked both boys in for the night. Each twin got a good night kiss on the forehead before I left the room. This part of being an uncle was cool.

Andy arrived home from work a few minutes after I came downstairs. He checked in on his sons and pronounced my work to be acceptable. The whole family gathered in the living room to exchange my presents – mine to each of them and theirs to me. This was the best our family could do this year.

I hated getting clothing as a present when I was little. Now that I had to pay for my own clothes (sort of eventually), it was cool to receive clothing. Liz bought me a nice pair of leather driving gloves. They’d be handy on the cold State College winter mornings. Andy got me a Penn State Rose Bowl sweatshirt. Mom bought me a couple dress shirts and two ties. Dad bought me a new pair of sneakers.

I had purchased a University of Delaware sweatshirt for Andy. It nearly killed me to do it, but I did it anyway.

“You do realize that you can exchange it between now and February if you don’t like it,” I suggested as he tried it on. “I know I can get you a Penn State one if you want it.” Andy chuckled. “That sweatshirt comes with a four year scholarship to Penn State.” I gave Andy a wink.

“Thanks bro, but I think this Delaware one is perfect,” Andy answered. Both of us chuckled about my suggestion. The hurt wasn’t quite as bad any more at the thought of Andy going to college elsewhere.

I headed downstairs to my bedroom after we finished exchanging presents. I read for awhile before I went to bed.

Mom did pancakes and sausage on Sunday morning to celebrate of my visit. I headed to church with my family. I was surprised that Zack wasn’t there. I assumed he went to Leigh Ann’s church that day. I surprised Reverend Hollinger after the service when I told him that Zack and Leigh Ann were engaged. He wished Zack and me luck at the Rose Bowl before I left church.

I grabbed some lunch at home before I headed back to State College. I stopped off in Manheim on the way and picked up Christian. He was a good travel companion. The drive up was uneventful and the weather was decent. I arrived back at my room around

4:30 in the afternoon. I left my car in the parking lot near Hartranft Hall. The college wasn't enforcing parking regulations while everyone on semester break.

Damian stayed on campus all weekend. He thought that was a smart thing to do after his experience coming back from Thanksgiving vacation. We gathered up our friends from our floor and headed across the deserted quad for dinner. Pollock Commons was empty and quiet when we went through to the Training Table. Things were hopping when we arrived there.

The dining hall staff had decorated the room in a Rose theme to honor our destination. The team and coaching staff, numbering nearly 130, filed through the line and found seats in this oasis of activity in an otherwise dead building. It was good to be back to my away-from-home family.

Coach Burton kept the announcements short after dinner. We would have a full pads practice at 1:30 pm tomorrow. Tuesday afternoon we would have a scrimmage, the Blue team (first string offense and second string defense) versus the White team (second string offense and first string defense). Coach Schroeder would coach the Blue team against Coach Czarwinski and the White team.

Coach announced that the freshmen would have a 10:00 am communications seminar Monday and Tuesday mornings to prepare them to face the press for the first time. I asked Coach Burton if I could sit in on the seminar. He said that would be fine. I wanted to hear the talk again. I figured I'd be reminded of some useful things now that I had actually done interviews.

Coach Burton saved the best news for last. "President Ron Jaworski of the Maxwell Football Club announced that the winner of the Maxwell Award for the College Player of the Year is..." Coach paused dramatically. "... our own Zachary Hayes." We cheered loud and long for our friend and leader. No one deserved this honor more than him.

Zack, Evan, Jake and Karol went over the team's plans for Christmas. They drew names from a hat for Christmas gifts. Each team member was responsible for getting a gift for the person whose name he drew. I ended up with Mitch Jackson's name. Mitch was a fellow sophomore and our backup punter.

Many of the team members headed over to the player's lounge after dinner to relax and watch Sunday night football. The late afternoon game was the Carolina Panthers versus the Tampa Bay Buccaneers. Carolina had already clinched the division title. The Bucs were fighting for their playoff lives. They needed to win that night and the following week when they played New Orleans to have any chance of a wild card berth.

Motivation proved to be the key to the game. The Panthers didn't care all that much and the Bucs did. The Bucs went up 34-20 with a score to start the fourth quarter. Coach Gruden sent the second string in to play out the game. We cheered as we watched our friend and former teammate Pete Klein get playing time and experience.

We switched the channel over to NBC when the Fox game ended. My favorite NFL team, the Philadelphia Eagles, was matched up against the hated Dallas Cowboys. The Nittany Lions team was about one third Eagles fans and one third Steelers fans. A few of the remainder rooted for Baltimore or Washington. The rest of the guys didn't have much of a rooting interest except for Hassan Jackson.

The normally quiet and reserved senior was an extremely vocal Cowboys fan. Nearly everyone enjoyed teasing Hassan, especially as the game progressed and the Eagles pounded on the 'Boys. I brought my McNabb jersey from home especially for watching that game.

DeSean Jackson, the excellent young receiver leading the Eagles in receptions made a brilliant catch against Terrence Newman. I cheered as I watched him race into the end zone to put the Eagles' lead to 28-13. I wondered, 'Could I do something like that? DeSean made it look easy. Would that be me in three years?' That was something to contemplate.

Trevor teased, "Where did you get this old rag?" as he tugged at the left sleeve. "Did mommy have to sew it back together after you and your brother got too rough?"

"No, actually Strahan did it," I answered.

Trevor rolled his eyes. "Right, Michael Strahan tore your jersey."

I grinned and asked, "You want to make a bet?"

Trevor's face got serious immediately. "No," he said decisively. "I do not wish to make a bet." He stared at me for a few seconds. "Are you saying that this is a real jersey that Donovan McNabb wore?"

"Yep," I confirmed. "Zack's brother Sam helped my ex-girlfriend get it when he was with the Eagles." I pulled out the shirt tail and showed him where Don had signed his name. Trevor glanced over towards for confirmation. Zack nodded yes in agreement with my story.

"Michael Strahan tore this sleeve?" Trevor asked.

"The one and the same," I confirmed. "He was trying to detach Don's arm from his body at the time. You know how defensive ends can get sometimes."

The other guys around me joined in teasing Trevor. He was smart enough to accept it, keep his mouth shut and watch the game. I'd learned that lesson the hard way too.

We guys on the team were close. We had to be given all the time we spent together studying, training, playing, eating, and relaxing together. Trevor and I were close friends

even though we constantly tried to get one up on the other guy. That was the nature of our relationship. Metaphorically I'd go to war with Trevor. I knew he had my back just as I had his in a tough spot.

The Eagles beat the Cowboys decisively, 35-17, to clinch at least a wild card berth in the playoffs. Dallas faced another long tempestuous off season while they rebuilt their team.

I enjoyed Monday morning's public relations session. It was good for me to review the principles they taught us last year. I had been asked for progressively more interviews as the season had gone on. I had to skip out early to make my meeting with Dr. Brennan.

Dr. Brennan returned my final exam to me when the meeting started. I had gotten another A+ on it. We talked for forty-five minutes about careers as a historian and about the required education. She explained that I'd need to get my masters degree and the go for my doctorate. I could do the masters here at Penn State but I would need to go to another school for the doctor's degree.

I thanked her for meeting with me to talk. I didn't tell Dr. Brennan but the chances were slim that I'd go for four or five more years of schooling. Where would I get money to pay for that? Maybe I'd think about it if I got hurt and couldn't play football anymore.

If it came down to it and I didn't make it in the NFL, maybe Coach Burton would take me on as a grad assistant like he had with Ryan Reynolds and Antony Rizzo. Tony was the defensive grad assistant that helped Coach C. I could study history and prepare for a career as a coach too.

It felt good to go full tilt again in football practice. The two hours seemed to fly by as we prepared for our meeting with the Ducks. Coach Schroeder had a brief meeting with the Blue Team to discuss our game plan for tomorrow's scrimmage.

I used my free time after practice to go downtown to finish shopping for Christmas. I needed to get my gift for Mitch Jackson. I found the perfect gift in one of the T-shirt shops on College Avenue. I bought him two T-shirts. The first one had a big green clover on it and it said, 'I'm not Irish, but I hope to get lucky tonight.' The second one said, 'Got Beer?' They were perfect for Mitch. He enjoyed his beer on Saturday nights almost as much as I did.

On the way back I stopped at the bookstore and got books for my next semester. My expenses set a new record for me - \$610.77. Thankfully the university covered my expenses.

I attended the PR seminar again Tuesday morning. I found the review to be useful. After lunch everyone headed over to the Lasch Building to suit up for the day's scrimmage.

Cold Canadian weather had settled in. It was 22 degrees outside so we played in Holuba Hall.

The Blue team got the ball first. We dominated, by and large. We spread the White defense out with our passing and then shoved Shawn O'Connor up the gut of their line. We had difficulty containing Trevor and Jake on the ends of the line. We had to cut some plays short to keep them off Zack's back.

Chip Brinton and Glenn Korbel did a nice job running the second team offense. Damian certainly tested the Blue (second string) defensive line and linebackers. Christian repeatedly beat his roommate GJ deep. Tanner Riggs did good work across the middle of the field, pulling in some passes. He paid the penalty for it too, Jarrell Cook and Joe Ricci, both linebackers, could hit hard. Blue ended up winning 28-20 over White that afternoon.

The dining hall staff at the Training Table went out of their way to give us a good supper to send us off to Los Angeles and our bowl game. They served us turkey and stuffing, ham, candied sweet potatoes, mixed vegetables and their delicious corn bread for dinner. They put out an ice cream bar where we could make our own sundaes. It was a great.

Coach Burton warned us to get our bags packed that evening and to get a good night's sleep. Tomorrow would be a long hard day between travel and dealing with the time change on our way to the west coast.

Damian and I packed our bags after dinner. I sent off e-mails to Ed, Jeremy, Hal, Drew McCormick and Brady Rasmussen wishing all of them good games in their bowls. I sent an e-mail to Jay too, wishing him a good holiday. I told him I wished he was going west with us and that I was looking forward to seeing him in January. I sent off a long e-mail to Kelly telling her about my day and wishing her a Merry Christmas. I didn't know when I would be able to send my next e-mail.

Six am came much too early the next morning. The bathroom was crowded with football players all trying to shower, brush their teeth and shave before our mandatory seven am breakfast. Every football player on the fourth floor headed for the Training Table together, hauling our luggage with us. The luggage was stacked at one end of the dining hall before we went through the line for our food. The staff gave us a hearty breakfast since we weren't sure what the quality of our lunch would be. That was going to be served to us on the plane.

The coaches hurried everyone off to the Lasch Building after breakfast. Our personal bags were piled under the buses. We went inside to make sure all our football equipment made it aboard the truck heading the airport and our plane. Everyone was loaded aboard the buses by eight o'clock.

The buses hauled the 102 players over the State College Airport. In addition to Aidan Nagy, Max Rosen and Alex Majerowicz, who were suspended, we lost two more team

members. Jabari Walker, our little used #4 tailback, came down with a severe ear infection on Monday. He wasn't allowed to fly. One of our freshmen had failed a course this fall and was academically ineligible for the bowl game. He was sent home Tuesday morning after Coach Burton got the word.

I read a lot and listened to my MP3 player on the flight out. We were lucky the Training Table staff fed us a good breakfast. We got a sandwich, chips and a cookie for lunch around noon. How was that supposed to satisfy us? Poor Joe Cleveland, an offensive tackle, and Mike Pollard, a defensive tackle, each topped the scales at over 320 pounds. They probably could have polished off half a dozen of the lunches.

I overheard Coach Burton up front chewing out the travel secretary a few minutes after lunch. The flight attendants appeared a few minutes later handing out bags of pretzels and peanuts to everyone.

By our watches, we touched down in LA around 3:45pm. Unfortunately it was 12:45 Pacific time. We managed to gather our personal luggage and get it loaded on the buses by 2:00 pm. Our bus driver announced that it was 13 and half miles to our hotel. The university was putting us up in the Hyatt Regency Century Plaza in Hollywood this year. Just like last year the traffic was horrible. Our buses pulled into the front of the hotel after three o'clock. The hotel staff was well organized at check in but it was four o'clock before Damian and I could get into our rooms. Thankfully our dinner was scheduled for 5:00 pm.

Damian and I wandered down the hall after we moved in so we could find the vending machines. We found a crowd of Penn State players, all intent on getting sustenance to hold them over until dinner time.

Most everyone on the team showed up early for dinner. The hotel staff was ready for us and let us start eating five minutes ahead of schedule. They also were prepared for a horde of hungry football players. Dinner was Italian themed. They had salad, antipasto, stuffed shells, spaghetti, lasagna, garlic bread, penne bolognase and more. We devoured everything they put out. It was excellent.

Coach Burton had a team meeting after dinner. He reviewed our schedule for the next ten days. He reviewed the ground rules and expected behavior by team members during our stay in Los Angeles. Coach Burton introduced Zack Hayes to speak next.

Zack began, "I want every one of you to remember why you are sitting here in Hollywood tonight. We are here to play football. Everything else that happens while we are here is secondary to playing and winning the Rose Bowl. If anyone has a problem with that, there is the door." Zack pointed where any slackers could leave the room. "Good! Our priorities are as follows:

Win the Rose Bowl

Prepare to play our best football of the season with the nation watching us.

Bring pride to our university by the way we present ourselves to the public.
Have some fun with our friends while we have free time.

“You guys notice that have some fun is the LAST priority for our team. We will have wasted our time here if we do not accomplish the first three priorities. I believe we have the best football team in the country. We need to show that to the nation. Let’s do our best for Coach Burton and Penn State.”

We cheered for our captain when he finished talking. I knew I believed what Zack preached. I scanned around the room and thought my teammates believed too.

Coach Burton dismissed everyone. He warned us that we would have bed checks to go with our eleven o’clock curfew. I doubted curfew would be a problem tonight. Most of us had been up for sixteen and half hours already.

My closest friends gathered in my room for some poker before we turned in. Our game broke up around ten pm. Damian and I slept through the bed check at eleven.

Coach Burton had mercy on us. Our first scheduled team activity was brunch at 11:30 on Thursday morning. Damian and I both took advantage of this to catch up on our sleep and to acclimate our bodies to west coast and the Pacific Time Zone. After lunch the team loaded up on buses and rode over to the Beverly Hills High School, a whole three minutes away.

I assume we rode the buses that day so we could move our equipment over to the high school for the duration of our stay in LA. The team certainly was capable of walking the long block between us and the high school in the future. It was about the same distance as our walk from the Training Table in Pollock Commons to the Lasch Building back on campus.

School was still in session that day. We would work out without pads on their field. We would move our things into their locker room tomorrow when school vacation started.

The coaches put us through a two hour practice, longer than usual but not as intense. We worked on perfecting our routes and reads of the defense. I assumed we would work up to speed and add hitting tomorrow or after Christmas. We loaded our bags back on the buses and rode back to the hotel.

We had a couple hours of free time until dinner. Trevor, Damian, Christian, GJ, Tony, Shawn Byrd and me decided to get a workout in the hotel gym and then a swim before dinner. We had a little extra time after we cleaned up, so we hit the hotel arcade too.

The buses hauled us to a comedy club after dinner for the show. Four comics performed while we were at the club. One of them called our team captains up to “help.” Zack,

Evan and Jake weren't terribly comfortable on stage fielding jokes. Karol, with his quick wit and fiery temperament, was a natural. Karol and the comic riffed off each other for nearly five minutes. It was hilarious. I think everyone enjoyed the evening. We got back to the hotel around ten o'clock.

Friday morning, the 24th, the coaches scheduled breakfast for nine o'clock. We had an hour and half of position meetings after breakfast. We receivers reviewed how Oregon liked to play defense against the pass with Coach Adams. Lunch was at noon. The buses hauled us over to the high school after lunch.

We were assigned lockers in locker room for the duration of our stay in Beverly Hills. We practiced in pads at half speed for a couple hours with generous breaks. We showered at the school and then headed back to the hotel. The buses were available to drive us back. About half the team took advantage of them. The rest of us walked the short distance back to the hotel.

We were headquartered right in the middle of a section of Beverly Hills called Century City. The hospital was beside the high school. Century Towers, two matching triangular office buildings were across the street. We headed west on Olympic Boulevard, a massive six lane street. To the south you could see "Nakatomi Plaza," actually Fox Plaza. It was the tower used in filming Die Hard, one of my favorite movies.

The ten minute walk perfectly illustrated what I had heard about Los Angeles. This was a city built for cars. We passed a hospital, an office tower and another office building during the walk. All the buildings were remote from you and didn't seem inviting. In State College the same walk down College Avenue would take you past thirty to forty shops. They were within a few feet of the sidewalk. They invited you inside. Hell, the one café literally spilled out onto the sidewalk. State College was made for pedestrians.

We had dinner back at the hotel. Coach Burton passed sign-up sheets around for bus rides to nearby churches for Christmas Eve church services. We had a choice of Catholic, Presbyterian, Methodist, Episcopal and Lutheran services.

Trevor and I, both good Presbyterians, signed up for a ride to a church of our denomination. Shawn Byrd and Damian signed up for the Methodist services. I was surprised when Christian signed up to go to Catholic service with GJ that night. His Mennonite forebears were probably rolling in their graves. About 40% of the team signed up to go to the late services.

I called home after dinner and talked with Dad. The letter with my grades arrived from Penn State the previous afternoon. Dad read off my grades to me after I authorized him to open the letter. History 20 – A+, Econ 4 – B, Political Science 3 – A-, English 134 – B+, Math 111 – A- and Introduction to Scuba – A+. My grade point average was 3.61. I made Dean's List again. I let out a whoop when Dad announced that, which drew a funny look from Damian.

I talked with Mom, Andy and Liz. I wished everyone a Merry Christmas. Mom made me promise to call again tomorrow afternoon.

Anders' dad stopped by before dinner to pick up Anders. The Voight clan was gathering for the holidays at Uncle Jonnie's. Coach Burton gave Anders permission to spend Christmas day with his family. He was required to be back in time for our Christmas dinner tomorrow night.

Most of the team gathered in one of our meeting rooms. Some guys brought board games. More of us broke out the cards. We killed time in the evening until it was time to leave for the services.

The buses arrived around ten o'clock. One bus took the Episcopalian northeast to their services. The Catholics, Methodists and Presbyterians loaded onto the second bus. It hauled us a couple miles over to an area called Westwood. A dozen Methodists climbed off at the Westwood Methodist Church. Then we continued on west on Wilshire Boulevard.

Zack Hayes, Evan Foster, David McCall, Mitch Jackson, Chip, Trevor and I got out in front of the Westwood Presbyterian Church. It was an older building dwarfed by the tall modern buildings surrounding it. We followed the worshipers inside. One of the ushers greeted us as we found a pew to sit in.

"You're Zack Hayes, aren't you?" he asked as he seated us. "Are all of you Penn State players?"

"You're right," Zack asked. "How'd you recognize us out here? This isn't exactly a Penn State's normal fan base."

The usher chuckled. He stuck his hand out to Zack. "William Young, Class of '83, THE Pennsylvania State University. I moved out here after graduation." Every freshmen English class taught you that 'the' was part of the university's name.

"It's good to meet you Mr. Young," Zack replied as he shook the usher's hand.

"Enjoy the services gentlemen," Mr. Young said. He leaned in close and added quietly, "Make sure you guys beat Oregon next Saturday."

"We'll do our best sir," Zack answered. The rest of us in the pew seconded our leader's sentiments.

We settled in to enjoy the candlelight services. The church was narrow compared to my church back home, but with a high ceiling and beautiful exposed wooden arch beams. The stained glass windows were wonderful. The candles lighting the sanctuary added to the atmosphere.

The minister, Pastor Orr, began the service with “O, Come All Ye Faithful,” one of my favorite Yule hymns. He asked everyone to share greetings with those nearby. The parishioners nearby greeted the seven of us warmly, making us feel welcome in their house.

Apparently Mr. Young had spoken with Pastor Orr before the start of the service. The pastor smiled and looked our way after the congregation got quiet after the greetings. “I want to welcome the gentlemen from my home state, members of the Penn State Football team, who are here to praise God as we celebrate the birth of our Christ.” We smiled and nodded as members of the congregation turned and looked at us.

The pastor continued on with the service by reading from Mark. We sang more Christmas hymns after that. Pastor Orr gave a moving sermon. The choir performed “Angels We Have Heard on High” for us. The ushers collected the offering. The entire congregation sang “Hark the Herald Angels Sing” and then concluded with “Silent Night.”

Pastor Orr greeted me and my teammates warmly as we filed out of the sanctuary. He and his congregation made the seven of us feel comfortable on Christmas Eve even though we were twenty-five hundred miles from our homes.

The seven of us had to wait outside for about fifteen minutes before the bus came by to pick us up. We headed over to the St. Apostles Catholic Church to pick up GJ, Christian, Shawn O’Conner, Cuch Cuchiella and half a dozen other team members.

We got back to the hotel a little after midnight. Everyone went straight their rooms and went to bed.

Damian and I got up a little after eleven on Christmas morning. The team brunch wasn’t scheduled until noon. I called home while Damian took his shower. I talked with Mom, Dad, Liz and then Andy.

“Hey bro,” Andy greeted me. “How’s your Christmas so far?”

“So far?” I replied. “So far all I’ve done is wait my turn for a shower. I just got up.”

“Got up? It’s 2:30 in the afternoon!” Andy said.

“Eastern Time Zone,” I answered. “I’m three hours behind you. A bunch of us went to midnight services, so we got to bed late this morning.”

“We went to late services too,” Andy said. “I didn’t get to sleep late. Noah and Connor understand about Christmas this year. They woke me up at 6:30 this morning asking if Santa came last night.”

“Are they enjoying the day?” I asked.

“Ask them yourself. Here’s Connor,” Andy suggested. I could hear him tell Connor, “Say hi to Uncle Kyle.”

“Hi?” Connor said very quietly.

“Hi Connor,” I replied. “It’s Uncle Kyle. Merry Christmas.” I waited for a response. Nothing. “Connor?”

After a few seconds more silence, my nephew almost shouted, “Unka Ky!”

Andy took the phone back. “Connor doesn’t quite understand phones yet. He’s running around now looking for Uncle Kyle.” I heard Andy explain to Noah that I was far away and wanted to talk to him.

“Unka Ky?” Noah asked tentatively.

“Hi Noah,” I responded. “Are you having a nice Christmas?”

“Unka Ky!” my young nephew answered.

“He’s off too,” Andy said as he got back on the phone. “They can hear you. They’re certain since they can hear you that they’ll find you somewhere so you can play with them.”

“Oh well, at least they know I’m thinking of them,” I said. “I’ll see you Sunday a week.”

“See you Kyle,” Andy replied. “Have a good game.”

I called Will and Abby in Illinois to wish them a Merry Christmas too. They were at Abby’s grandparent’s house with Abby’s parents for the holidays.

Damian and I headed for brunch with the rest of the team. The team had the afternoon off, mostly. Coach Burton invited anyone interested to join the group going to the children’s ward at the local hospital to visit and hand out presents.

Last Christmas I suspected from the large percentage of “stars” who participated that visiting the hospital wasn’t entirely voluntary. This year I was one of the name players that Coach Burton wanted to participate in the visit. I didn’t mind having him twist my arm, I planned to go anyway.

Chip Brinton volunteered to go too. I was pleased at that. Chip was taking to heart my advice to pay close attention to Zack Hayes and to do things exactly the way Zack did. It was going to pay off for Chip when he got his turn to be the starter, when Jay was done.

Mike Pollard, our big second string defensive tackle agreed to play Santa Claus for the kids. Normally the job of being Santa falls to one of the senior linemen, but no one else quite fit the image and personality for the job. Fortunately a 6'-8", 340 pound lineman dressed in a red suit, hat, wig and long white beard didn't frighten the kids we visited. My fellow sophomore's easy going, friendly manner helped a lot.

The kids at the hospital seemed to enjoy the visit. Zack Hayes was the best known of us and signed quite a few autographs. A couple kids who were sports nuts knew who I was. Fifteen of us wore pointy green hats and acted as Santa's elves and handed out presents for Mike. I was glad our team made this a part of our Christmas tradition and that I was allowed to help bring a little comfort to kids who really needed it.

Zack, Chip and I decided to relax in the Jacuzzi for awhile when we got back to the hotel. Not surprisingly the main topic of conversation was football. The three of us talked about what made our team tick – our offensive and defensive philosophies and how the parts fit together.

I could see Zack subtly changing his perspective. I had seen it five years ago when he transitioned his outlook from being a Wolverine to a Nittany Lion when he was a senior in high school. Zack had seven days left where his focus was on the Lions. After that he was heading for the NFL as an almost certain first round pick for some fortunate team.

Zack was having this talk with Chip and me to ensure that we understood how the team worked so we would be able to continue our winning ways. This is exactly what he had done with Ed, Jeremy, Greg and me before he graduated from high school. Zack was going to be a fantastic coach someday when he finished playing football.

The three of us headed back to our rooms after forty-five minutes in the Jacuzzi, after turning ourselves into shriveled prunes. I dressed and headed downstairs with Damian and a few other friends.

The hotel put out a nice dinner for us including turkey and stuffing, ham, mashed potatoes, corn, peas, and cranberry sauce. Friends and teammates made a decent substitute for the family all of us were missing. The freshmen seemed to be OK with being away from home at Christmas time. We had pie and ice cream for dessert.

Jake Washington and Shawn O'Conner called for quiet after the tables were cleared. The other captains along with Christian and GJ went from table to table, lighting the centerpiece candles. When all were lit, the house lights were turned down leaving us in candlelight.

Jake Washington called for quiet. Shawn read the Gospel Christmas story from Luke 2, verses 1-20. It was very moving.

Santa (Mike Pollard again) came in after the lights were turned on again. He pulled in a big cart loaded with presents which he then handed out. One by one my teammates opened their gag Christmas gifts.

There was the usual assortment of inside jokes and other oddities. The first really hilarious gag gift was given to Evan Foster by Angus Pitts. Angus bought Evan a Penn State toilet seat. The seat and lid were white with a blue stripe down the middle of the lid, exactly the same as our helmets. Everyone howled with laughter when Angus prompted Evan to lift the seat. The toilet seat played the Penn State Fight Song!

Karol Zizka received a new clock for his apartment called the Whatever Clock. It was a normal clock except that all the numbers were piled up in the bottom of the clock. It fit him. Karol was notorious for being late for things.

Zack Hayes opened his box and found a Zip-Loc bag of straw. It had a big sign on the side: "Straw Hat – Some Assembly Required."

The box Mike handed me looked suspiciously like the one with T-shirts that I bought for Mitch Jackson. I opened it and found two T-shirts. I held up the first one and read the caption. "Money Can't Buy You Happiness." The room erupted in laughter. I turned the shirt around and saw why. The back said, "But It'll Buy You A Six Pack."

The second T-shirt was perfect for me. It said, "Don't hate yourself in the morning. Sleep 'til noon." The guys laughed along with me. The box had a note on the bottom that said the gift was from Bill Daugherty.

"Thanks Bill," I said. "This is perfect."

Damian nudged me in the side and added, "He nailed you dead on."

"It takes one to know one," I countered. "Sleepy head."

Santa continued handing out gifts to my teammates. Mitch Jackson seemed to appreciate the T-shirts I got for him. Quite a few guys had the same idea as Bill and I. The most suitable T-shirt ended up being the one Matt Frye gave to Bruce MacCauley. Bruce's shirt proudly said, "I don't have A.D.D. It's just... Hey, Look! It's a squirrel." Bruce was a promising freshman wide receiver, but his attention did seem to wander at times.

Coach Burton stood when Mike handed out the last of the gifts. "Thanks for coming tonight Santa. You've been very generous to our team ..."

Zack hopped up and interrupted the planned end of our Christmas gift exchange. He gave Mike a wink and announced, "I think Santa has a couple more gifts to give out."

Coach gave Mike a look and saw his grin. Coach accepted the inevitable with good grace since he knew he wasn't going to stop whatever Zack had in mind.

“Santa missed two gifts,” Zack announced. He pulled a present from Santa’s bag and walked across the room to the table where Chip was sitting. “I’ll admit the first one is being recycled. I think it makes a good tradition that I would like to see continue.”

Zack handed the package to Chip. Chip tore open the gift wrap, opened the box and pulled out two latex fake breasts. He laughed and set them on the table for everyone to see.

“I am passing these on to you Chip,” Zack explained, stifling the urge to laugh. “Actually I’m passing them on to next season’s starting quarterback, whoever he may be. You are listed as #2 on the depth chart right now, so you’ll be their keeper until next August.”

“Um... OK,” Chip replied. “Why do I need them?”

“They’re to help relieve stress,” Zack explained. He reached down and gave each boob a good squeeze. “As starting quarterback you’ll find certain times when Coach Burton just gets on your last nerve. Take these out and give them a good feel. It will help you get through the stresses of the season.”

Chip thanked Zack and gave the boobs a couple squeezes to the delight of the rest of the team. Coach Burton did his best not laugh. He let Zack continue.

Zack retrieved a box and opened. He pulled out a T-shirt and held it up so all of us could see it. “This seems to have been a T-shirt Christmas, so we had to get you the perfect shirt.”

The T-shirt said, “Don’t play stupid with me. I’m better at it.” The team hooted and cheered. Coach Burton just shook his head.

Zack looked at the front of the T-shirt and pretended to be shocked. “That’s not the right one.” He pulled a second one out and held it up for the crowd to see. Coach Burton looked at it. This T-shirt said: “Because I’m the coach, that’s why.”

Coach Burton smiled this time. “That’s the right T-shirt,” Zack confirmed as we cheered our coach again.

“Thank you,” Coach Burton said. As he put the T-shirt on he added, “Thank you very much. I’ll treasure this.”

Coach Burton wrapped up our Christmas celebration with announcements. We had free time the rest of the evening. The team arranged to get a couple movies set up for us here in the ball room. The hotel would be providing popcorn, nachos and sodas for everyone.

Breakfast tomorrow morning was at 8:00 am and was optional. Buses would be available to give us rides to Sunday services after breakfast. They would drop us off and pick us up at the same churches as yesterday. We would have an afternoon practice tomorrow and then switch over to morning practices for the rest of the week.

Anders Voight was in a great mood after his day with his extended family. His dad had driven Anders' car down from his home outside San Francisco when he came down to his brother's house for the holidays. Anders had use of his car for the next week. His dad and mother were staying with Uncle Jon until after the Rose Bowl.

I angled to go along when Anders asked if anyone wanted to come along when he went out that evening. Zack, Shawn O'Conner, Evan and Hassan got the invitation. They decided to head out to a local bar. Nineteen year olds weren't invited.

I joined my underage friends for the movies. The travel people got us a couple almost first run movies that weren't out on video yet. It was a fun evening.

Damian and I both decided to be heathens on Sunday morning. We slept until 11:30 am, showered and headed down for our 12:30 lunch. We went over to the high school and practiced until three o'clock.

The coaches increased the speed and intensity of our practice from Christmas Eve. I thought the team was loose and did a good job practicing. The coaches didn't need to do a lot of yelling to keep practice focused.

Buses took us over to Santa Monica after we cleaned up from practice. We had an hour to wander around the Santa Monica Pier and the beach area. The team had dinner in a banquet room at The Lobster, a beachfront seafood restaurant.

We had a choice of jumbo lump crab cakes, sockeye salmon and Hawaiian big eye tuna. I chose the crab cakes. The food was excellent.

One bus picked up any team members who wanted to go back to the hotel after dinner. Most of the team stayed at the beach or on the pier for a couple hours. I hung with Damian, Trevor, Shawn Byrd, Christian, GJ, Chip, Matt Frye, Jared Cantrell and Dave McCall joined us. We did some rides at the amusement park. We watched sunset from the end of the pier. Buses picked us up around 9:00 pm and took us back to the hotel.

Preparations for the Rose Bowl began in earnest Monday morning. We had a mandatory 8:00 am team breakfast followed by two hours of practice. Practice was fast paced, but without a lot of hard hitting. We went back to the hotel for lunch.

December 27th was media day at the Rose Bowl. The athletic department PR staff circulated a list of twenty-six players that were expected to attend the event at the Rose

Bowl. Of course Zack, Trevor and I were on the list. I was pleased to see Damian, Christian and Chip on the list too. They deserved recognition.

The Rose Bowl officials organized media day similar to last year. Penn State players were scattered around the perimeter of the field on the south half of the field. Oregon's players were scattered around the northern side of the field.

I did twenty-two interviews over the course of the two hours. ABC, who was televising the game, ESPN, Fox, CBS, our four local TV stations back home, Sport Illustrated, USA Today, the LA Times, Philadelphia Inquirer and the local newspapers at home all showed up to talk with me.

Mr. Montgomery from the Lancaster morning paper lined Zack, Christian and me up to do our interview with him together. He liked to get as much Lancaster County color as possible in his coverage.

Somehow the beat reporter for the Philadelphia Inquirer found out that I was a regular reader. Probably Trevor or Chip clued him in. Mr. McMillan was out in California for the whole week. He had a column this week about us and the Rose Bowl to help fill space while some of the other sports reporters were on vacation.

His interview was longer and more in depth than I was used to. It was fun anyway. I would have to remember to e-mail Andy and ask him to save the papers for me. I wanted to read them next week when I got home.

Our bus dropped us off at our hotel before the rest of the team returned from visiting the Museum of Contemporary Art and the Natural History Museum. Most of the guys at media day ended up relaxing and catching some rays by the pool and Jacuzzi until the dinner time.

The lobby of the hotel was buzzing as we came back inside. The Blue Band had arrived from Pennsylvania along with first of many plane loads of Penn State alumni and fans. Things were supposed to get crazier tomorrow when the alumni association's tour groups arrived. We were going to fill the hotel with fans.

Word was the group had booked something like 22,000 spots around LA for our fans. Hopefully our fans wouldn't be outnumbered by Oregon fans the way they were last year by USC fans. A truly neutral stadium would be nice this year.

Coach Burton had a general team meeting after dinner and then position meetings. We finished up with our meetings around 8:30 pm. Anders grabbed me as the meeting was finishing.

"What do you say?" he asked. "How about a first team skill player's night out?"

"Sure, what did you have in mind?" I replied.

“We could cruise around town a bit and take in the sights,” Anders said. “Maybe hit an In and Out Burger. You in?”

“Sure, why not,” I answered.

Anders and I grabbed Hassan at our meeting and then tracked down Shawn O’Conner, Zack, and Evan. The six of us headed out to Anders’ car and tried to squeeze in. Anders had a small Honda Accord. We decided the three big guys, Shawn, Evan and me, would get in back. We were all 210-220 pounds. The “small guys,” Zack, Anders and Hassan took the front. Zack and Anders are both 6’-2” tall and go about 200 pounds. Hassan was stuck in the middle after Anders put the arm rest up. He perched his 5’-11”, 185 pound body between the two front seats.

It wasn’t comfortable, but Anders’ car represented freedom and a chance to get away from the hotel for an hour or so. We cruised around the streets of Hollywood for a half hour, enjoying the sights. We stopped in at the first In and Out Burger we found. They had a reputation as having excellent food, so we wanted to find out if they deserved their reputation.

Each of us grabbed a burger, fries and a milk shake and found tables near the back. We spent the rest of the night watching the sights (i.e. girls) in the restaurant while we enjoyed our food. We bumped into a few Penn State fans at the restaurant and had a nice visit with them. Anders got us back to the hotel around 10:45, with plenty of time to spare before bed check.

Coaches put extra emphasis on special teams play at Tuesday morning’s practice. The one play we didn’t reveal to the small crowd watching us that morning was the reverse. Dave McCall and I practiced back on campus in Holuba Hall. I would start my kick return like I was going up the left sideline. Once the opposition had committed themselves to that side, Dave would run past me and I’d hand him the ball. He’d streak across the field and run up the right sideline while I continued up the left side, cradling the fake “ball” as I went.

Dave and I had high expectations for the play. Other teams didn’t know about Dave’s speed since he had little opportunity on special teams to show how fast he was. I knew my speed and return ability scared a lot of our opponents. I was perfectly content to let Dave have the spotlight if I could draw most of the cover team to the wrong side of the field. If Dave scored a touchdown, the entire team got the points. We won as a team and we lost as a team. Individual performance only mattered as it helped all 102 of us win.

We spent fifteen minutes of the practice working on variations of the reverse/option play that morning. We ran it like we usually did with me lined up outside on the weak side and running around the backfield to hit Hassan deep on the strong side. We also

practiced a new variation that started with me in the slot on the strong side, running around back and hitting Anders deep on the weak side. Coach Burton planned to run both variations at the Ducks next Saturday.

We headed back to the hotel to clean up and eat lunch. Today's afternoon destination was Disneyland. It was Penn State day at the park. The Oregon Ducks and their fans were coming tomorrow. My friends and I were looking forward to a fun afternoon scaring ourselves silly on the roller coasters and other thrill rides.

Unfortunately the Rose bowl required some team members and the coaches to be available to the media at Disneyland. Of course I was one of the dozen players required to talk with the media. The questions hadn't changed much from the previous day. I guess I was a little pissed off about missing fun with my friends. Zack pulled me aside after my third interview.

"What the hell is wrong with you?" Zack demanded when we were away from the reporters. "Get your head together!"

"They're asking the exact same questions I answered ten times yesterday," I whined. "I'd rather be out there going on rides with my friends."

"Tough shit," Zack countered. "The reporters want to talk to you because they consider you a star on the team. The reporters talk to us because the fans are interested. The fans' interest generates ratings for TV and sells tickets to fill the stadium. The fans supply the money that makes it possible for us to play football, have a free college education, and enjoy trips like this one."

"Yeah, I guess," I acknowledged reluctantly.

"Smile, answer their questions politely and stop whining," Zack said. "The fact that you're here doing interviews today confirms you as one of the stars on our team. Take all of this as a compliment for all the hard work you've done and everything you've accomplished. It's an honor to do these interviews."

"How do you have the patience to do this?" I asked.

"It's just part of my job," Zack explained. "Do you enjoy working out on the weight machines? Wouldn't you rather have an extra hour or two each day to spend with Kelly?" He knew full well it was one of my least favorite things to do at the Lasch Building.

"I'd much rather spend the time with Kelly," I responded. "...but I have to work out to get ready to play football."

"Exactly," Zack said. "Dealing with the press is just one more task you have to do to be a top notch football player. Daryl Clark and Phil DiStefano both drummed that into me.

Next year you'll pass this lesson on to the younger guys. That's how we keep this program on top. Do you understand?"

"Yeah, I do," I agreed. "It's just that..."

"No buts! Paste a smile on your face and go do your job," Zack commanded.

I let out a big sigh, pasted a smile on my face and agreed, "You're the boss." I went back to answering questions, doing my best to be agreeable and helpful to the reporters. I knew I needed to follow the advice I freely gave others. 'Pay attention to how Zack does things and follow his example. It'll make you a better player.'

We answered questions for another half hour before Coach Burton released us to go join our friends. Zack, Evan, Shawn O'Conner, Jake, JT and I ended up hanging out together that afternoon. I never quite caught up with my usual friends from the dorm. We did all the big rides – Splash Mountain, Indiana Jones, Space Mountain and Star Tours.

In many ways the six of us acted like any bunch of kids, enjoying the rides and having fun. We'd laugh and scream as the cars dropped down the steep inclines. Other times while we were in line waiting for our next ride the rest of the guys discussed their futures. They speculated on where they would end up in a few months after graduation, where would they live, and Zack and Jake talked about marrying their fiancées.

All six of my friends harbored expectations or hopes of being drafted and playing in the NFL in the fall. Zack, Evan and Jake were locks. No one doubted they would be in the league in September. Zack would certainly be a first round pick. Evan was expected to be a late first round or early second round pick. Jake was expected to be an early to middle round draft pick. Fast passing rushing defensive ends are always in demand. JT was expected to go early in draft too. His Rimington Award guaranteed that.

Shawn O'Conner was the question mark in the group. He was a good running back, but not the best in the country. Probably some team would take him in the middle to late rounds and give him a shot. They'd get lucky with the pick too. Shawn was an excellent blocker, good runner and could catch a pass out of the backfield. Shawn wasn't outstanding at any one skill, he was just good at every skill.

My friends' talk made me a bit introspective. Saturday would mark the mid-point of my college football career. The past two seasons seemed to fly by in the blink of an eye. Would I be pondering my future two years from now like these guys? Would I end up in the NFL too? One reporter asked me yesterday if I planned to put my name in for the draft in the spring. I laughed the question off, explaining that I wasn't eligible yet. I was only nineteen.

I felt after making All-American twice, I probably would be in demand now if I were eligible for the draft. Could I duplicate the record setting season I just had two more

times and keep NFL teams interested in me two years from now? Jay was going to have to play awfully well next season for me to match my receptions this season.

The question of injury still remained. Could I remain healthy through two more years of the Big Ten and the bowl games? My primary plan for my life would remain to become a high school teacher and coach football on the side. I knew that I would be happy doing it and find fulfillment with Kelly that way. If an NFL career happened, so be it. If not, well, I would be happy anyway.

“Hey, little buddy,” JT interjected into my reverie.

“Huh?” I mumbled as I focused on the here and now.

“We’re at the ride,” JT said. “You coming along?”

“Yeah, I’m coming,” I agreed as I climbed into the car beside my big friend.

“You were a million miles away there,” JT commented as the car started up the hill.

“I was just thinking about how the game on Saturday marks the middle of my college career,” I replied. “This goes by fast, doesn’t it?”

“You got it little buddy,” JT said. “Enjoy the ride. It goes by real fast.”

I knew JT was giving good advice. I’d certainly do my best to enjoy the next two seasons.

The buses picked us up from the park at five o’clock. We had to travel across town to Lawry’s Prime Rib Restaurant for dinner that evening. Lawry’s had hosted each Rose Bowl team for a prime rib dinner for over fifty years. It was our turn that night.

Traffic though LA was horrible that evening. We had needed fifty minutes to get from our hotel to Disneyland after lunch. It took us an hour and a half to get back to Century City to the restaurant. The restaurant was only a couple blocks from our hotel.

Lawry’s served us immense prime ribs. They were nicely seasoned, cooked to the perfect pink and oh so tender and juicy. We were allowed to have seconds, which I hungrily ordered when I finished my first piece of meat. A competition developed to see who could eat the most. I was stuffed after I finished my second. Half a dozen guys ordered thirds. Jake and Trevor finished theirs and were ready to order fourths when Coach Burton put a stop to the proceedings.

The travel staff dismissed our buses when they dropped us off at the restaurant that evening. We walked the two and half blocks back to our hotel. My usual group of friends gathered in Trevor and Tony’s room this evening to talk and play cards until curfew.

At Wednesday's breakfast Coach Burton announced that we would have a scrimmage on Thursday morning when we practiced. He teased the White Team about their defeat a week and a half ago back in State College. The Blue Team happily assisted Coach in firing up our White Team teammates about their defeat by teasing them.

Practice went well. Everyone seemed fired up about the idea of the scrimmage the next day. It would relieve some of the tedium that was setting in after our long layoff from real games. We cleaned up and headed back to the hotel for lunch.

Our afternoon excursion was to visit Warner Brother's Studio. After watching a movie about the history of Warner Brothers, we divided into groups of twelve and boarded large golf carts to tour the studio. Our guide took the residents of fourth floor Hartranft all over the studio lot. We saw half a dozen big stars on the tour. My friends and I enjoyed this tour a lot more than last year's tour of Paramount.

It was another long drive back to the hotel through brutal LA traffic. We passed buses unloading the Oregon Ducks team at Lawry's just before we turned onto the Avenue of the Stars to get to our hotel.

Our hotel was crawling with activity that evening. The remainder of the alumni association's tour group arrived from Pennsylvania that evening. Somewhere around 22,000 of our fans were expected at our game.

The travel staff set up that night as a free night for everyone. Dinner was available at the hotel. You could get a taxi or take a walk and eat at one of the many restaurants in our area.

I had arranged with Coach Ferguson to take the special teams players from our punt and kick return teams to dinner the same as I did last year. Before we left State College I made arrangements with Da Vinci Ristorante near where we were staying to accommodate us that evening.

Coach Ferguson and Ryan Reynolds drove the university's rental vans to haul the eighteen of us over to the restaurant. I invited Damian to come along even though he wasn't playing on special teams this season. He had to share a room with me all year so he earned the dinner.

Da Vinci's was a classic Italian restaurant and a known haunt for celebrities. We didn't find any there when we came in. The restaurant seated us in a private room. GJ DeLuca and Joe Ricci helped us decipher the Italian menus. Damian, though not able to speak Italian, also helped us understand the appetizers. In addition to be a "foodie" he also worked extensively in his father's restaurants.

We were perusing the menus for our entrées when Damian nudged me in the ribs. "They have Osso Buco. You have to try that."

"What is it?" I asked.

"It's a braised veal shank served with a saffron risotto," Damian explained. "It's a fantastic northern Italian dish. You'll love it."

I took Damian's advice and ordered the Osso Buco. The rest of the group placed their orders with translation assistance from Joe, GJ and Damian. We ended up sampling appetizers while we waited for our entrees to come.

We enjoyed each other's company along with some fine food. Damian's recommendation of Osso Buco was spot on. It was excellent. The others enjoyed their meals too. The full meal I ordered for our group included dessert. Half a dozen of us opted for the crepes flambé. The crepes looked spectacular and were delicious.

I thanked the special teams members for all the help they gave me this season. I told them each of them was responsible for my being named All-American and that I felt they should share in the honor. They made it possible for me to achieve distinction. On Saturday we would have to play our best so we could put our offense in good position to win the Rose Bowl.

Bill Daugherty, the emotional leader of our special teams, thanked me for treating the group to dinner and spoke movingly of the need for each special teams member to contribute to our team's chances for victory.

Coach Ferguson and Ryan Reynolds drove us back to our hotel. Damian and I couldn't find most of our usual group of friends. We settled down in our room and flipped on ESPN and watched Rutgers play Wake Forest in the Meineke Car Care Bowl.

Hal Long didn't play in the game. Rutgers' regular kicker was healthy again. It was a close, well fought game. Rutgers came back in the fourth quarter to win the game 27-24. I sent off a congratulatory e-mail to Hal as the final seconds ticked off the clock at the end of the game.

The coaches really played up the rivalry between the White Team and the Blue Team before Thursday's scrimmage. We played the equivalent of thirty minutes of game during the morning. It was fun to play competitively instead of simply practicing. My Blue Team earned bragging rights by beating the White Team 21-17.

I got to run my reverse option play twice, once completing a deep pass to Anders, the other time being forced to run with the ball. I gained 27 yards on the play. Zack's passing was crisp and on target. Our White defense, our first team defense, played better

than they did back in State College when we scrimmaged earlier in the month. They looked ready to go against Oregon too.

We had lunch at the hotel and then loaded onto the buses to head for Burbank. We sat in on the taping of Jay Leno's show. We were hanging out outside the studio waiting to go in when Jay Leno and a camera crew came out to visit. Jay was filming his man-on-the-street interviews.

I was one of Jay's interviewees. He asked me five history and geography questions. I was too smart for my own good. I answered all the questions correctly. Of course Jay wanted outlandishly wrong answers for everyone to laugh at when he showed them during the show. Jay thanked me for talking with him but told me they wouldn't be using any of the tape they shot of me.

Jerry Whitfield, one of our sophomore defensive tackles, did make it on the air for that segment. Jerry incorrectly identified New York City as the site of the Continental Congress in 1776, said the capitol of Pennsylvania was Philadelphia, couldn't name the president of the US during the Civil War and couldn't name whether Teddy or FDR was the first Roosevelt to be president. Jerry was going to get a lot of teasing about this.

The taping was fun. Jay Leno's opening monolog was great. Jay recognized the team during the opening, to the delight of the partisan audience he had that day. Quite a few Penn State alumni joined us for the taping. Jay went into the audience to interview Zack Hayes during the opening. Zack did well talking with Jay.

We had a late dinner back at the hotel. Coach Burton had a team meeting after dinner. The coaches arranged another movie for a diversion for the team after the meeting was over.

The offense concentrated on our scripted first fifteen plays at Friday morning's practice. We executed them properly. I thought our team was mentally and physically ready for tomorrow's game. We packed up all our equipment after practice and took it back to the hotel.

We ate at the hotel and then had position meetings. We receivers spent ninety minutes studying how Oregon liked to defend the pass. Coach Adams preached that mental preparation was just as important as physical preparation.

Buses took us over to the Beverly Hill High School field for a pep rally at 3:30 pm. Our fans, all dressed in white filled the stands to capacity and then filled the standing room along both sidelines. The Blue Band, the cheerleaders and Nittany Lion entertained the huge crowd. Coach Paterno spoke to the crowd. Coach Burton spoke last, firing up the crowd for tomorrow's game.

A Beverly Hills Cuban restaurant catered our dinner back at the hotel. They served delicious spicy roast pork with black beans and rice. The caterer served flan for dessert. That was something new to me and also quite tasty.

Shawn Byrd, Trevor, Tony, GJ, Christian, Damian and I headed up to Trevor and Tony's room. The seven of us caught the end of the Chick-Fil-A Bowl. We were in time to see Virginia Tech drive in for the winning touchdown with a couple minutes to go in the game. VT beat Auburn 28-24.

Most of us called home or called our girlfriends to wish them a Happy New Year when the game ended. It was around 11:30 pm on the east coast. Kelly was happy to hear from me. We talked for a few minutes until Kelly's dad called her for something with the rest of her family. We exchanged 'I love you,' and hung up the phone. We teased Shawn about how long he talked with his girlfriend. Trevor surprised all of us when he called his girlfriend. None of us knew he was dating anyone regularly. Trev was tight lipped about who the lucky girl was.

We watched some TV and played some poker to kill time until 11:30 that evening. Our team was having a New Year's Eve party downstairs in the team meeting room. The hotel put out snacks and sodas for us to enjoy while we watched the ball drop in New York City. The entire team toasted in the New Year with sparkling apple cider, sang Auld Lang Syne and then headed for bed.

We had the team breakfast at 8:30 on Saturday morning. We went back to our rooms after breakfast and packed our game day bag. We needed to pack our dress clothes for the luncheon and to pack clothes for warm-ups and the game. Forty or fifty early rising fans cheered us as we boarded the buses for the drive to the stadium.

The ride over to the stadium went fast, by LA standards. They dropped us off at the stadium about fifty minutes later. We carried our bags inside the locker room and then went out to check out the field conditions. The field was in good shape. No one played football on it since the USC/UCLA game a month earlier.

The temperature was around 68 degrees when we went out. The weatherman reported that the high temperature for the day would be around 75 degrees. There was no wind in the stadium. Our team has been blessed all season with weather tailor made for our spread offense. There wouldn't be any lucky Ducks today. Oregon was going to see exactly what our offense was capable of.

We headed back inside the locker room and changed into our coats and ties. The team walked across the parking lot to the big tent for the Kick-Off Luncheon. The Rose Bowl Queen and her court presided over the banquet. Our pep band and the Oregon pep band played during lunch. The Nittany Lion and Donald, the Oregon Duck mascot entertained the crowd.

The queen mugged for the cameras with Zack and Terrence Collins, Oregon's starting quarterback. We enjoyed the meal as the entertainment went on around us. The luncheon concluded with the induction ceremony for the Rose Bowl Hall of Fame. An old guy who worked on the Rose Bowl Committee for years was inducted along with a sportscaster from years ago, before I was born. The third inductee was one I had heard of, Ron Dayne. Ron was twice the MVP in 1999 and 2000 when he played for Wisconsin.

We hurried back to the locker room after the luncheon and changed into our uniforms. The stadium was nearly filled with spectators when we came out for warm-ups. Our team went to work efficiently and quickly. The Rose Bowl Committee had a lot of pre-game festivities planned so we only had a half hour to get ready.

I caught a few passes with Zack to help him get ready. I fielded some punts from Steve Cobb.

Our team was allowed five field passes for guests of the team. Coach Burton had numerous requests from former players for the passes. The first two went to last year's captains Aaron Morano and Antwaan Booker. Past stars Mike Robinson, Bobby Engram, and Curt Warner received the other three.

I greeted Aaron and Antwaan warmly when I finished warming up. We spent a few minutes talking about their seasons while the rest of the team finished their preparations. I thanked Bobby Engram for his help earlier in the season. His suggestions and help in contacting Joe Jurevicius had allowed me to break the Penn State season reception record.

Bobby introduced me to Mike Robinson and Curt Warner. Mike had helped sell Zack Hayes on attending Penn State when Zack was in high school. It was an honor to meet the man responsible for our team's 2005 Rose Bowl win. Curt was one of the leaders on the 1982 national championship team. All three told us to go out and have a good game and kick some Duck butt.

Coach Burton gave a brief but stirring address to the team when we went back inside. We were fired up when we took the field. The Penn State fans, all dressed in white, greeted us with wild cheers as we ran onto the field and over to our sideline.

Zack and I stood by each other as the national anthem was sung. I looked down inside the upside down helmet I was holding and stared at the ragged piece of duct tape marked "#82 Greg Harrison".

"This one is for you Greg," I said quietly.

"Amen to that," Zack added as he stared into his helmet and remembered our high school teammate. The two of us silently said a prayer for our friend and his family back in

Pennsylvania, completing the ritual the two of us had done for the past two seasons. We turned our attention back to immediate concerns after our silent prayer.

Oregon won the coin toss and took the ball first. Andrew Perkins booted the kickoff into the end zone, so the Ducks started on their 20 yard lane. The first two plays weren't a surprise, a couple runs that netted five yards. Their third play hurt. It was a quarterback delay draw. Unfortunately we were blitzing Karol Zizka. Karol got blocked out of the hole where the QB ran. Tyler Madden came rushing up to stop the ball carrier. Collins, their QB, squirmed loose from the tackle and kept going. Shawn Byrd finally brought him down after a 31 yard gain.

Our defense regrouped after the play and managed to hold. The Ducks used six more plays to advance the ball twelve yards. They settled for a 50 yard field goal. Score: 3-0 Ducks.

I took the short kickoff at the 9 yard line. The Ducks' coverage was excellent. I made it through a gap my wedge made but got tangled up with a couple Ducks' tacklers after that. Our offense started at our 43 yard line.

Zack and the rest of our offense weren't bothered at all by Oregon taking an early lead. We went straight to work. Shawn O'Conner picked up five yards on an off tackle run to start our possession. Coach Burton sent me deep on the next play as a reminder, if needed, that the Ducks had better defend the whole field in the game. I beat the cornerback by a couple steps, catching a 34 yard pass down the sideline by out jumping the free safety. Our 22,000 white-clad fans cheered wildly.

Zack handed the ball off twice to Shawn to push us up to Oregon's 10 yard line. Zack was to hit me in the corner of the end zone on the next play on a fade route. Three Ducks crowded me so Zack fired the ball to Evan as he crossed over the middle a couple yards in front of the end zone. The strong safety hit Evan immediately, but wasn't able to prevent Evan from bulling his way into the end zone. Andrew Perkins demonstrated why he won his Groza award by continuing his perfect streak with his seventy-third successful PAT in a row. Score: 7-3 Lions

I'm sure the Ducks fans would like me to report that their team responded with a touchdown drive of their own. They didn't. Coach C adjusted our defense to keep Cuch close to the line for run support. We didn't call any blitzes this series. They gained 15 yards on six downs before they were forced to punt the ball back to us. They punted the ball out of bounds, so I didn't get a return.

Our six week layoff from football games didn't harm our offense at all. Zack led us on another efficient, balanced eight play scoring drive. We tested the Ducks deep on the third play. The cornerback covering me didn't give me more cushion than on the first drive. Zack and I burnt him with a 38 yard pass because he didn't have the speed to stay with me. A screen pass to Anders, a couple more runs by Shawn and a strike to Hassan put us in the red zone.

Coach Burton called for the fade pattern to me immediately. The Ducks only dropped two guys with me this time so they could watch Evan better in the middle. Zack didn't hesitate to throw the ball to me. I leaped and caught the ball over the heads of the cornerback and nickel back.

A roar went up from the highly partisan crowd at this end of the stadium. Most of Penn State's fans were seated in the northern and western sides of the stadium, where I caught the TD. I tossed the ball to the referee and trotted off the field. The Lion gave me a high five and a hug as I passed him. Andrew Perkins booted the PAT to continue his season long perfect streak. Score: 14-3 Lions.

Oregon tried, but was unable to sustain a drive. Eight men in the box controlled their running game. Jake, Trevor and the rest of the defensive line got too much pressure for the Ducks to consistently be successful passing. They were forced to punt the ball back to us.

Our offense ran nearly perfectly in the first half, suffering only two penalties and three missed passes on the next three drives. I caught a 51 yard touchdown pass when the Ducks blew the coverage when I ran a slant from the slot position.

Oregon finally backed their cornerback off the line so he had more of a cushion. They let me have short routes but protected themselves deep. I caught a couple passes on the twelve play drive as Zack patiently worked us down the field. Anders caught the TD to cap the drive. Andrew hit the PAT to put us up 28-3 with about two and half minutes to go in the first half.

Andrew booted the ball into the end zone on the kickoff. The Ducks' returner decided to run the ball out anyway. It proved to be a good decision. His blockers opened a hole for him and he shot ahead. Charlie Taylor finally tackled him around our 45 yard line. The Ducks went into their two minute drill and managed to get the ball down the field. They scored their first touchdown with 32 seconds left in the half. Coach Burton was satisfied to have Zack kneel down and run the clock out with our lead at 28-10.

At half time Coach Schroder said we would stick with our game plan for the second half. He reviewed possible adjustments we would make on offense if needed.

I sought out Coach Ferguson during the break. "Are we going to run of the reverse for the second half kickoff?"

Coach Ferguson smiled and chuckled. "No, I don't think so," he replied. "We will keep play tucked in our bag of tricks for awhile." Coach gave me a wink and added, "Maybe we'll let Ohio State or Michigan see the unveiling next season. Do you think we need any extra tricks to win this game?"

"No, I think you have it right," I replied. "We can beat these guys playing it straight up."

Coach Burton called everyone together when we had about three minutes left in the half time. He reminded us to keep our focus on the game in the second half. He predicted that the only way we lose is if we got sloppy and gave the game to the Ducks.

As Coach Burton wrapped up Zack asked, "When is Chip and the second string going in?"

"Second string?" Coach Burton responded. "It's your final game Hayes. You play as long as you want. You've earned that over the last five years."

Zack scanned the faces of his final year offensive teammates. All nodded in agreement to his unspoken question. "If it's all the same to you," Zack answered. "I think we should do this just like we did against Michigan State. Let the second string have some fun. We'll play clean up for the final possession."

"OK, you heard the man Brinton," Coach Burton said. "Get yourself ready. It looks like you're going to play this afternoon. Second string will go in when we increase our lead with another score."

Zack and Karol circled our team and led a cheer before we took the field. We were walking out the tunnel to the field when Chip nudged me with his elbow.

"Somebody pinch me. I must be dreaming," Chip said in wonder. "Twelve months ago I was at home watching this game on the TV. Today I'm going to play in it. How'd this happen so fast?"

"I know the feeling Chip," I replied. "You're finding out how I felt last year."

We headed out the tunnel and took the field as the Blue Band was marching off. I was happy for Chip. Chip was getting introduced to playing Division I-A football without any of the pressure to produce. All he had to do was take the snap, drop back and pivot and then hand the ball to Damian. It was easy to play quarterback when you have a four touchdown lead. It was quite a contrast to the way Ed Fritz was introduced to playing college ball in Death Valley against LSU in September.

Our return team took the field to accept the second half kickoff from the Ducks. I settled in on our 5 yard line. The kicker booted the ball deep so I drifted back five or six yards, knowing I was probably in the end zone. I watched the ball into my arms and waited for Shawn Byrd to give me the call telling me whether to run the ball out or accept the touchback.

"Go Kyle!" Shawn yelled as he watched the blocking form up.

I nestled the ball into my body after I caught it and then turned my attention to the field again. Shawn had made the right call. My blockers had all the Ducks covered. I run in

behind the blocking wedge and waited for a hole to open. The best crack was between Wes Kennedy and Joe Ricci, so I shot though. I gained another eight yards before the second layer of defenders caught me and put me down to the ground hard. I made it to out to our 41 yard line.

Zack and the rest of the first string offense joined me on the field. We didn't waste time. Zack hit me on a twelve yard hitch on the first play. Shawn gained seven yards running up the middle on the next play. Evan gained seven yards on a curl and then Shawn gashed them for six more yards off tackle.

Anders lined up wide in the slot on my side of the field on the next play. I went in motion across the field before the snap, ending up being the slot receiver on the strong side between Evan and Hassan just before the snap.

The Ducks defenders didn't adjust quickly enough before Zack took the snap. I raced down the field against single coverage on a flag route. Hassan ran a slant across the middle, pulling the free safety and a corner back with him. Zack fired the ball to me when I got a couple steps from the hapless nickel back trying to cover me. I raced into the end zone pursued by the out of position Ducks defenders.

Hassan, Anders and Zack mobbed me in the end zone to help me celebrate the score.

“Sweet!” Zack exclaimed as he gave me a bear hug. “That's going to be a beautiful play to remember to finish my college career.” Zack was a little misty and choked up.

“You made the perfect read and throw,” I replied. “As always.”

We jogged off the field, pausing to give the Nittany Lion high fives as we passed him on the side of the field. This day was Gary Stapleton's final football game in the Lion suit.

Andrew Perkins came onto the field and booted the PAT to increase our lead to 35-10. Coach Burton announced the first team offense could take the bench. Coach Adams huddled with Chip Brinton to review plans for the next drive.

Uncharacteristically, Zack relaxed away from the action. Aaron Morano joined Zack and me. The three of us dissected Oregon's offense as they tried to work against our fired up defense. Our big lead forced Oregon to pass on most downs. Freed from run responsibilities, Jake and Trevor teed off on the quarterback every down. They harassed, hurried and knocked around the QB on every down. The Ducks made one first down before they had to punt.

Chip and the second string offense were efficient and effective moving the ball in the next series. Chip handed off to Damian most plays. He made a few play action passes to keep the defense honest. The second team worked the ball down the field until Damian bulled his way into the end zone for a score.

Zack, Aaron and I enjoyed talking and joking as we watched the game proceed from the side line. Chip led another scoring drive before the Ducks finally managed another touchdown to narrow the score to 49-17 Lion's favor.

It was near the end of the third quarter when Chip started the next drive. Chip handed the ball off to Damian or Wyatt Smith on most plays. The offense was at mid-field when we tried another play action pass. Chip rifled the ball to Bruce MacCauley on a short five yard pattern. Bruce had a couple yards separation on the cornerback when he caught the ball so he ran downfield. Bruce faked the free safety out of position and kept sprinting for the end zone, scoring another TD for our team.

"#85?" Aaron said as he pinched me. "I had to make sure you're still here. That kid wearing #85 looked like you from last year out on the field."

"MacCauley has some potential," Zack agreed. "Maybe you'll have competition for your starting spot next year."

"I'll start next season," I replied to my friend's teasing. "You can count on it."

My friends were right about Bruce. He had made great strides in the second half of the season. Christian, Tanner Riggs and Jared Cantrell were going to have play excellently in spring and summer practice to keep Bruce from taking a starting slot.

Coach C relaxed the blitzing a little on the next possession since we had a 56-17 lead. The Ducks managed to string together a few good plays and a first down. Joe Ricci missed a tackle on a quarterback draw, letting the QB pickup 24 yards. Our defense clamped down again. The Ducks settled for a field goal after three straight incomplete passes. Score: 56-20 Lions.

The clock showed 10:03 remaining in the game when the Ducks kicked their field goal. Zack left Aaron and me and trotted over to Coach Burton and conferred. Coach Burton yelled, "First team, you're on the field."

Coach Ferguson waved me off the field and sent Tanner Riggs in to take Oregon's kickoff. Tanner did a good job, giving the offense the ball at our 34 yard line. We grabbed our helmets from under the benches and jogged out onto the field. Zack huddled us up and called the first play – an off tackle run.

"Gentlemen, make your blocks count," Zack commanded. "This is going to be our last drive together. We're going to run all the time off the clock. The Ducks don't get another shot! Understood?"

"Yes!" the ten of us answered in unison.

"On two, BREAK!" Zack growled.

We proceeded to push our way down the field against the dispirited Ducks. Shawn O'Conner carried most of the load. Damian came in for a couple carries to give Shawn a break. Vlad Lazlo, our little used senior fullback, was given a couple carries. I came off the field, yielding my position to Anders when Vlad was in.

We picked up six or seven yards on every play against the demoralized Ducks, in spite of the entire stadium knowing that we would be running on every play. Eleven plays later we were in the red zone, down on Oregon's 12 yard line. We lined up for a simple blast up the middle of the line. Our guards blocked the defensive tackles away from the center of the line. JT blew through the hole and pancaked the middle linebacker on his ass. Shawn followed JT through, broke free of the strong safety's arm tackle and blasted into the end zone.

The 22,000 Penn Staters, as well as most of the Californians in the stands, temporarily Penn State fans, stood and cheered us. The offense mobbed Shawn and celebrated our success, not minding the 2:38 we left on the clock. Andrew Perkins came in and booted the PAT, finishing his season a perfect 80 of 80. Score: 62-20 Lions.

The first string offense and defense were in party mode as Andrew Perkins kicked off to the Ducks. I hung out with Zack, Evan, Anders and Shawn along the sideline. Aaron Morano joined our group. We watched and celebrated as the Ducks futilely worked against our second team's prevent defense.

About a minute and a half remained when Zack headed back to the drink table. I followed along, hoping to get involved in what I knew was coming. Zack grabbed a drink cooler of ice water. I grabbed the other handle to help my buddy douse our coach to celebrate our win.

"Sorry Kyle, you can't be part of this," Zack said. "This will bring too much heat. You have to play for Coach next season."

I let Evan take the cooler handle from me. "Coach Burton blew a cork when the seniors did this two years ago at the championship game," Evan explained. "You better watch from a safe distance."

I watched from a few feet away as Evan, Zack, Anders and JT snuck up behind Coach Burton as he watched the action on the field. The plotters didn't go unobserved. Coach Adams stepped between them and Coach Burton.

"I've been given strict instructions to make sure that Coach stays dry today," Coach Adams said. He faced Zack, Evan and Anders for a few seconds. "What the hell? It's seventy-five degrees," Coach Adams said, winking. "BRINTON, I need to talk with you." Coach Adams smiled and headed down the sideline to find Chip.

Zack and his co-conspirators didn't waste any time. They immediately doused Coach Burton with five gallons of ice water.

“AAAAaeehhh!” Coach shrieked in shock. “What the fu....” He gasped as he spun around to confront the plotters. “YOU!”

Zack left Evan and Anders holding the cooler and hugged his soaked coach. “Thanks for everything you’ve done for me over the last five years Coach,” Zack exclaimed. “I owe it all to you.”

“You’ve made my job so easy Zack,” Coach Burton replied as he returned the hug. “Thanks for everything you’ve done for our team.” His momentary anger passed as the two hugged.

Coach Burton indulged Zack Hayes more than any other player on the team. The two men had forged a strong relationship over the past five years. Coach Burton was in his first year as quarterbacks coach when Zack committed to play for Penn State. He had been Zack’s tutor and mentor, first as quarterbacks coach and then as offensive coordinator.

Zack’s first game as starting quarterback last year marked Coach Burton’s debut as head coach. The success of the two men had been tied closely together. No one on the Nittany Lions team worked or studied harder than Zack. I guess my friend had earned his coach’s indulgence.

The two stood side by side and watched as the Ducks gamely tried to move the ball down the field. Thirty-two seconds remained when Cuch Cuchiella fielded a mishandled pass to the tight end. Cuch weaved and dodged, trying to pick up some yards after his interception. A couple lineman tackled him after he gained about a dozen yards.

“First String! On the field.” Coach Burton shouted.

Zack led us out one last play. We lined up in the victory formation. Zack took the snap and kneeled down to start the clock and run the last seconds off the clock. We were already celebrating as the clock ticked down to 0:00 and the game officially ended.

The rest of the team flooded onto the field to celebrate with us in front of our cheering fans. We cheered along with the fans in the stadium and hugged each other as we celebrated our near perfect season.

I did more interviews after the game than I had ever done in my life. CBS, ABC/ESPN, and Sport Illustrated were among the national outlets that talked with me. Mr. Montgomery from Lancaster, Mr. Hartwell from Philadelphia and another dozen papers interviewed me. The ESPN reporter, at my third interview, clued me in on why I was so popular.

I knew I had a good day receiving but was surprised when he told me that I had set multiple game and career reception records for the Rose Bowl that afternoon. My ten catches for 222 yards beat Keyshawn Johnson's game receiving record from 1996. My three touchdown receptions tied Braylon Edwards performance in 2005.

Adding in my statistics from last year's Rose Bowl, I had beaten Braylon Edwards and Mario Bailey's record for most career touchdown receptions in the Rose Bowl. I shattered John McKay's thirty-five year old career receiving yardage. My 352 yards beat McKay by almost the length of the football field!

I reminded every reporter that Zack Hayes was responsible for my success. One of the reporters filled me in on Zack's stats. I knew he only missed on five passes during the day but hadn't kept track of his overall statistics. The ESPN reporter told me Zack had completed 19 of 24 pass attempts for 357 yards and five touchdowns. Zack set game records for accuracy and most touchdown passes. He set career marks for most yards passing and most touchdown passes at the Rose Bowl. No reporter disagreed with my assessment of Zack's performance.

I was starving by the time I finally got back into the locker room after the interviews and the ceremony awarding us the trophy for our Rose Bowl win. Thankfully the athletic department had platters of sandwiches and bottles of Gatorade out for us to enjoy while we cleaned up and changed into regular clothes.

I called home from the locker room and talked with Dad, Liz and then Andy. Mom was upstairs giving the twins the bath before bedtime.

"It was so cool," Andy said. "The twins watched part of the game with us. They finally understood what we meant when we told them Uncle Kyle was far away. We explained that #87 was you but they didn't understand until after your coach pulled the first string. They recognized you standing on the sideline with Zack Hayes after you took your helmet off. They started running around the coffee table screaming 'Unka Ky! Unka Ky!' It was so much fun to see the twins enjoy the game." After a pause Andy added, "By the way, you did great today bro."

"Thanks," I replied. "It was a fun game."

"I could see that," Andy replied. "It almost made me want to come to Penn State next year. You have a hell of a team right now."

"We do," I agreed. "Right now I think we have the best offense in the country. You'd fit in great here."

"You're losing a lot of seniors aren't you?" Andy asked.

"Eight," I confirmed.

“You guys won’t look like you did tonight when you play next year,” Andy said.
“Delaware will be a good fit for me. I’ll stick with them.”

“The buses are loading now so I have to go,” I replied. “Tell Mom I’ll be home after dinner tomorrow, probably around eight or nine o’clock.”

“I’ll tell her,” Andy agreed. “Have a safe flight home. Bye.”

I hung up the call and hurried out to the buses with my travel bag. Our delay for interviews, the ceremony and to clean up and change gave the Rose Bowl traffic time to clear out before we headed back to Beverly Hills. The buses dropped us off in front of our hotel fifty minutes later.

I called Kelly on the ride back. We talked for about ten minutes before she passed her phone around so the rest of her family could congratulate me. My big game seemed to help Bill Sr. forget any unpleasantness from when he caught Kelly and me having slept together the night before he brought Kelly home after finals. Kelly told me her dad planned to brag to everyone at work that I was Kelly’s boyfriend tomorrow. Kelly confirmed that her planned visit to Paradise was still on before we exchanged ‘I love you’ and hung up the phone.

Crowds of fans greeted our buses when we pulled into the hotel parking lot. We ran the gauntlet of fans, shaking hands and greeting our well wishers as we made our way into the hotel. The travel staff had us carry our bags straight to the banquet room and pile them by the door so we could get dinner sooner.

The hotel served us steak dinners with a garlic cream potatoes, and vegetable medley. I choose the hot apple cobbler for dessert. The meal was a great way to finish off a spectacular day.

My friends were equally excited about their part in our victory. Damian had 17 carries for 104 yards. Trevor was credited with 6 tackles, 2.5 sacks and 8 QB hurries. Christian had three receptions from Chip, equaling Tanner’s three. Chip and Bruce MacCauley were bouncing off the wall happy about their performances. Bruce went around table to table retelling the story of his touchdown catch to anyone who would listen.

Our fourth floor Hartranft gang got together in Shawn Byrd’s room and watched the second half of the Orange Bowl. West Virginia was playing Boston College that evening. WV was leading 24-17 when we arrived in Shawn’s room. #13 Boston College was overmatched by #6 West Virginia.

WV ran a spread offense too, but relying much more on running than we do. BC couldn’t contain all the runners. My high school teammate Drew McCormick got about ten carries in the third and fourth quarters, getting 51 yards for his team. Both Damian and Trevor knew Drew from our playoff games while we were all in high school.

I felt a little bittersweet watching Boston College play. My friend Greg Harrison should have been down on the field that evening playing for his Eagles. That drunk driver robbed all of us of a great human being and good tight end that night almost three years ago.

Damian knew about Greg and how my mood could get when I remembered my friend. Damian had met Greg at the state championship game three years ago when Greg and my friends beat Damian's Strong Vincent Colonels team. Damian pulled my mind back to current and more pleasant thoughts.

West Virginia beat Boston College 31-20. All of us went to bed as soon as the Orange Bowl was over. We had an early breakfast.

Damian and I got our wake up call at 5:30 am. We showered quickly and finished packing our bags. The team had breakfast at six am and departure for the airport at seven am. There were two buses of alumni and fans loading as we prepared to leave. The alumni association had 15,000 fans booked to return home to Harrisburg through LAX during the day. We shook some hands and talked with the fans before we boarded our buses for home.

The flight home was long. I read and listened to my MP3 player most of the way. The 102 of us on the team were pretty much talked out after spending 24/7 together for twelve days. Everyone was happy when the captain came on the intercom.

"We are eighteen minutes from touchdown in State College. The local time is 5:43 pm. The temperature is 18 degrees and we have an 18-22 miles an hour wind from the northwest. I hope all of you well tanned gentlemen remembered your winter coats. Welcome back to Happy Valley."

The pilot put us down gently into a snow covered landscape minutes later. We made our way through the airport to luggage claim and picked up our bags. Everyone searched through their luggage to get sweat shirts and winter coats before we made the way through the chilly evening to our waiting buses.

Buses dropped us off outside the Lasch Building. Hundreds of Penn Staters and State College residents cheered us as we climbed off the buses. A couple TV cameras recorded our return home for broadcast later that evening. Christian, Charlie Taylor and I headed off for our dorm. I was giving Christian and Charlie rides to their homes on the way to mine. We stopped off at our rooms in Hartranft to drop off a few things and pick up more things for our abbreviated winter holiday.

We loaded up my poor little Golf to overflowing. Charlie had to sit in the back, then Christian and I stuffed all our bags in beside and around Charlie. Christian and I climbed

in front. I headed east. We stopped off in Lewistown at the Mickey D's drive through for dinner.

Our area had been hit by a couple snow storms while we were in California. We drove east past big drifts and snow covered hills as we headed east. I dropped Christian off in Manheim around 9:30. Charlie arrived home around ten o'clock. I pulled to a stop outside my house twenty minutes later. Six inches of snow covered our lawn. In spite of the frigid weather and gray sky, I was happy to be home with my family.

Chapter 32

I dropped my bags inside the door quietly. I knew Noah, Connor and Hunter would be sleeping. The kitchen was deserted so I headed for the family room. Mom, Liz and Andy were watching TV.

“I’m home,” I said as I walked in the room.

“Don’t you look like you’ve spent some time in the sun,” Mom replied as she inspected me.

“Hey bro,” Andy added.

“Welcome home Kyle,” Liz said.

“Do you need the heating pad or heat cream for your bruises honey?” Mom asked.
“Those young men hit so hard.”

“I’m fine Mom,” I replied. “Oregon didn’t play press coverage. I don’t have many bumps and bruises. I might soak in the tub tomorrow after everyone leaves, but I’m fine other than that.”

“Tell us about your trip,” Mom asked.

I spent the next twenty minutes telling my family about my stay in Beverly Hills. I didn’t get downstairs to my bedroom until 10:45 pm. I was in time to catch the tail end of the Sugar Bowl.

I was shocked when I saw the score. Georgia Tech was up 31-21 with ten minutes left in the game. The odds-makers had #14 GT set as a 14 point underdog to #4 ranked Florida. Florida had the ball when I flipped the TV on and was driving on the Yellow Jackets.

The drive stalled out at GT’s 27 yard line. #5 trotted out with the kicking team. I could read “FRITZ” on his back. Ed never told me he held for his team’s kick holder. I knew something was up the second Ed took the snap. He stood and rolled to his right. I spotted a tight end down field paralleling Ed’s route. Ed rifled the ball to him. The big tight end rumbled down the field. A couple defenders caught him but couldn’t bring him down before he fell into the end zone.

Florida’s defense held on GT’s next possession. Ed’s roommate, Eric Peters, took the punt from GT and made a nice return to give the Gators the ball on their 37 yard line. I watched as Elijah Carter demonstrated why he was called the comeback king of college football. He started the drive with about two minutes remaining in the game. Elijah worked the ball down the field hitting receiver after receiver in nearly impossible

situations. Georgia Tech stiffened as the Gators got into the red zone. Twenty-eight seconds were left and Florida had one time out left.

The Yellow Jackets rushed four and put seven back on pass defense. They managed to force Carter to throw the ball away on first and second downs. On third and goal, GT blanketed the receivers. Carter stepped up in the pocket, desperately searching for an open receiver. He was forced to cut between two rushers and run when the pocket collapsed. GT brought him down at the three yard line.

The Gators were forced to spend their final timeout. They decided to send out the field goal team and try for a tie game. The kick was good. The game was going into overtime.

The Gators won the coin toss and confidently elected to take the ball. Elijah Carter was masterful as his team drove down the field. His timing was perfect. He threw with touch or velocity, as required. His play action fake was perfect, fooling not only the Yellow Jackets but the cameraman too. Eight plays later he hit a wide open receiver on a slant for a touchdown.

When it was the Yellowjackets' turn Carter's heroics inspired the Gator's defense. They stuffed two consecutive running plays, sacked the quarterback on third down and then batted away the desperation fourth down pass.

I smiled as I watched Ed celebrate the 37-31 victory on the field with his teammates. Ed and I planned to get together tomorrow night when he got home so we could regale each other with stories of our bowl victories. It should be fun. I turned off the TV and settled into bed to get some sleep.

I slept until 10:30 on Monday morning. A long soak in a hot bath tub helped ease my various aches, bumps and bruises from Saturday's game. I grabbed some breakfast, headed out to the grocery store for lunch food and snacks and to the video store for some DVDs. I spent the rest of the afternoon watching movies and reading a book from the Paterno Library on Stonewall Jackson at the Battle of Cedar Mountain in June, 1862.

Andy and Liz got home from school a little after three o'clock. Liz took off for her friend Annie's house. She was helping Annie with a project for her Gold Award, the highest award in Girl Scouting. Andy coaxed me into playing NFL Challenge with him. He whipped my ass. I just didn't have enough time to get good at it anymore.

Andy and I heard the scampering of little feet and shouts of "Daddy" when Mom brought the kids home from day care. We could hear them checking the kitchen then the family room before they came upstairs in search of Andy.

"Daddy? Daddy?" the twins chirped as they searched upstairs.

“Daddy!” Noah yelled when he peeked inside Andy’s room. Noah raced for Andy to greet him. Connor followed right behind his brother.

“Daddy!” Connor exclaimed until he spotted me. “Unka Ky!” he shouted as he ran for me. Andy and I gave each twin hugs and kisses and then exchanged them for the other. Of course both boys insisted on plane rides from their uncle too.

When the greetings were done both twins grabbed Andy’s hand and pulled him. “Unka Ky,” they insisted as the tugged and pointed towards the door. “Unka Ky!”

“What’s up?” I asked.

“I think they want us to look at the video of your game again,” Andy said. The two of us followed the twins downstairs as they led us to the family room.

Both twins stopped in front of the TV and pointed. “Unka Ky,” they insisted as they pointed at the screen. Andy turned the TV on and brought up the video of the Rose Bowl. Andy fast forwarded until he got to my first touchdown.

“There’s Uncle Kyle,” he explained.

“No!” both twins insisted. “Unka Ky!” Andy fast forwarded through my next two touchdowns and didn’t stop until he got the third quarter where Coach Burton benched the first team. Andy hit play when the camera panned onto Zack, Aaron and me standing along the sidelines.

“Unka Ky,” both twins said triumphantly. They stared raptly at the TV until the scene shifted away from me. Andy fast forwarded again until the camera caught me again.

“The boys understand the guy on the side line is you,” Andy said as the boys watched raptly. “They haven’t figured out that the guy on the field is also you.”

“I think I know how to fix that,” I said. “I have an old game jersey downstairs. Do we have any helmets?”

“Yeah, we still have that old plastic one,” Andy answered. “I think it’s in the junk closet in the basement.”

I disappeared downstairs for a moment while I found my props. I came back upstairs wearing my 87 jersey and a small plastic helmet that Andy and I used play with in elementary school.

The boys looked surprised to see me dressed in “uniform”. I had Andy rewind back to my second touchdown and replay it. I pointed to myself and explained, “Uncle Kyle,” and then pointed at me on the TV as I caught the ball. “Uncle Kyle.” The boys stared at

the image for a few seconds. I hoped the camera man followed Anders, Hassan, Zack and me as we celebrated the TD. He did. As we passed the Nittany Lion, I had pulled my helmet off before I gave the Lion a high five.

“Unka Ky!” Connor gasped as he realized the guy in the uniform was his uncle. “Unka Ky,” Connor explained to Noah as he pointed at me. Noah got it a second later. The boys danced around calling my name as the video played on. They watched for a couple minutes before Connor made the next connection. He ran over to the play box, dug around and pulled out the Nerf football I had given to each of the twins at Christmas.

A minute later the twins were playing “foobah”. One twin would cradle the ball at the far end of the family room the way Andy showed him and then try to run across the room without being caught by the other twin, Andy and me. The boys seemed to love foobah. The game was interrupted when Mom called us for supper.

Dad had me narrate my week and a half adventure in Hollywood and give him some of the back story behind Saturday’s game. He seemed to enjoy hearing about our win over Oregon.

Noah and Connor babbled along as the older members of the family conversed during our meal. Some of their “words” were understandable, but more weren’t. Little Hunter babbled along with his nephews, not mature enough to form intelligible words yet.

Noah and Connor wanted to play more foobah after dinner. Andy and I indulged the boys for fifteen or twenty minutes until they got tired of the game and went on to other amusements. Andy headed upstairs to do his homework. I watched another movie while I waited for Ed Fritz to call after he got home from New Orleans.

Ed called a little after seven o’clock. I invited him over to work out with me. Ed gratefully accepted the invitation since he was stiff and tired from being squashed into an airline seat all day. He flew home in a coach seat direct from New Orleans instead of flying back to Gainesville with the team.

Ed came over fifteen minutes later. Ed, Andy and I headed to the basement to train. While Andy was doing his reps Ed commented, “I caught part of your game on Saturday Kyle. I had a QB meeting and dinner and I couldn’t watch the whole game. You looked good on the touchdown to start the second half.”

“Thanks Ed,” I replied. “I caught the tail end of your game. I didn’t get home until a quarter to eleven last night. You guys had a hell of a win.”

“Georgia Tech was tougher than we anticipated,” Ed replied. “We got the job done in the end.”

“Yes you did,” I said. “I watched most of the fourth quarter and the overtime. I guess Elijah Carter is pretty popular now.”

“Popular?” Ed snorted. “They worship him like he’s a god on campus. You should know how that is. After the season you had I would assume you’re pretty popular around campus too.”

“Yeah, I am,” I admitted.

“I wouldn’t know about that,” Ed replied. “I’m about as popular around campus as a MADD mother at a beer party. Everybody on campus is expecting Terrence Walker to be their savior next season.”

“You will beat him out next summer,” I said. “Painful as it was, you have three games as a starter. You already understand how fast things move at this level. You will have a leg up on Walker.”

“Painful?” Ed snorted. “That’s putting it mildly. The beating I got in Death Valley was horrible.”

“And you learned from it,” I said. “I watched your stats. You got better with every start. It doesn’t matter what the students on campus think about you. You can go out in the spring and show everybody the same thing you showed us in high school when you beat Steve for the starter’s job in your first year of varsity.”

“Yeah, you’re right Kyle,” Ed agreed. “Coach Meyer gets the only vote on who starts. He still believes in me.”

“That’s what counts man,” I said as my cell phone rang.

The call was from Kathy Trimble. She was organizing a Fiesta Bowl party for Wednesday’s game. I passed Kathy’s information on to Ed. Ed figured he’d give Paige Anderson a call and see if she would be his date for the party.

Ed, Andy and I finished working with the weights and headed back upstairs for our run. We bumped into Mom giving Hunter a bath in the sink while Noah and Connor “helped,” one at each side. I introduced Ed to my baby brother, who he had never seen before, and to the twins, who didn’t remember Ed from seven months ago.

The twins were uncharacteristically shy around Ed. Ed complimented Andy on how cute his boys were. Ed was surprised how much the twins had grown since last summer. The three of us headed out for our traditional three mile run around the neighborhood.

The three of us decided to hang out and watch a little TV when we got back from our run. The twins showed up a few minutes later.

“Unka Ky, book?” Noah asked politely. Of course he held out “The Cat in the Hat” for me to read to him and his brother.

“I’m sorry boys,” I explained. “I have company. Maybe your dad will read it to you.” The boys’ faces fell when they realized I wouldn’t read to them.

“It’s all right,” Ed said. “I wouldn’t mind seeing you reading a bedtime story. The fully domesticated Kyle Martin should be an interesting sight.”

“Thanks smart ass,” I said quietly. I added at full strength voice, “Off to bed boys.”

“Mart ass,” Connor commented to Noah. Noah giggled and agreed, “Mart ass Ed.”

Ed rolled his eyes and chuckled as we followed the twins upstairs to their bedroom. The twins cuddled on either side of me while Ed sat on the edge of the bed as I read the Dr. Seuss story until the boys fell asleep. Ed covered Noah while I transferred Connor to his own bed. We quietly left the boys to sleep.

“You seem to be a good uncle,” Ed commented after we closed the door to the boys’ room.

“It’s fun. You’ll see some day when you’re an uncle,” I answered.

“I am an uncle already,” Ed replied. “My brother Pete knocked up his girlfriend last year. My niece was born two months ago.” Pete had moved to California six years ago, after he graduated from college.

“Have you seen her yet?” I asked.

“No, Pete came in with his girlfriend and daughter for Christmas,” Ed said. “They haven’t decided about getting married. Needless to say, mom and dad aren’t thrilled about the whole thing.”

Ed showed me the picture his niece Sophia. She was a cute little thing. The two of us joined Andy and Liz downstairs in the family room. We watched TV together until ten o’clock, when Ed headed for home.

The week moved along at a quick but relaxing pace. Tammy Brooks and Kathy Trimble decided to go shopping Tuesday afternoon, so Hal Long joined Jake Kring, Ed and me for a trip to the bowling alley. Ed and I played computer games and watched some movies to pass the time. I volunteered to prepare supper for the family while I was home. Mom appreciated the break.

I talked to Kelly every evening before bed. Both of us were anxious for Friday to come. Kelly was leaving right after her family’s breakfast and driving in to Paradise. She expected to arrive sometime after lunch on Friday.

Coach Caffrey gave Ed and me permission to stop by after school to help Andy and Tex organize the weekly video study session for the football team. I'm sure Coach Caffrey was grateful for the help. It was off season and he wasn't allowed to work with the team according to the PIAA rules. I enjoyed teaching the young kids how to study and prepare for the next season.

On the way home I quizzed Ed about the things he learned from his game against LSU early in the season. I knew he was still upset by how poorly he had played in his first start. I wanted Ed to look at the game analytically instead of emotionally so I pressed him for his observations and the lessons he had learned from the experience. Ed went through and described the mistakes he had made, things he had observed and what he would do differently given another chance at LSU.

"Do you want another shot at beating the Tigers this year?" I asked.

"Of course I'd love it," Ed agreed. "But I have to wait until next year to get revenge."

"Not necessarily," I countered. "Would you mind sharing your observations with USC's quarterback? Brady and I have stayed in touch over the last year."

"Really?" Ed said. His eyes lit up at the prospect of sticking it to one of his team's biggest rivals. "Do you think Rasmussen would listen?"

"He probably would," I said. "Brady is a real down-to-earth, nice guy. I'm sure he would appreciate someone who wanted to help him win the national championship."

"Let's do it!" Ed replied enthusiastically.

When we got to my house I put my supper casserole in the oven and then the two of us went straight to my basement bedroom. We spent the next forty minutes in the basement composing a memo for Brady about everything Ed had learned about the Fighting Tigers this season. I sent the e-mail off to Brady just before dinner. Hopefully he would have time to check his e-mail before the game and that Ed's observations would be helpful.

Our gang of friends assembled after dinner Wednesday evening at the Trimble's house for Kathy's Fiesta Bowl party. Hal Long and Tammy Brooks helped Kathy get everything set up in the afternoon. Paige Anderson came as Ed's date. Brandon invited Holly Cox. Mark Good and Karen Reeser came as a couple. They had continued dating in college. Mark's best friend Paul Abbot came stag. Jake Kring, Penny and I didn't have dates either.

All of us grabbed some snacks and drinks and then settled in to watch Notre Dame take on Oklahoma on Kathy's dad's big screen TV. The game proved to be quite good. Oklahoma had a potent offense and a so-so defense. Notre Dame wasn't the juggernaut

that it was last season, but they could move the ball effectively. Notre Dame hadn't lost anything since last season on defense. They were dominating.

The Sooners took an early lead but The Fighting Irish battled back to take a 21-20 lead into the half time. Jeremy was dominating on the field. The Fox commentators raved about how well he was playing. Of course everyone cheered our friend as we watched the action on the big screen TV.

Notre Dame came out in the second half and scored on a long, time consuming drive. Oklahoma responded, driving 36 yards on seven plays before they ran into trouble. On second and five Jeremy shot through a gap in the o-line and drilled the running back in the backfield a moment after he took the handoff.

Everyone in the room cheered as Jeremy was credited with a tackle for a four yard loss. Coach Brown, the Irish defensive coordinator, sent in six DBs to support Jeremy and the four down linemen. Jeremy dropped back into pass coverage as the ball snapped. They played zone, with five shallow and two deep cover men. It looked to me like Jon Stokes, Oklahoma's QB, would have a hard time finding any open receiver in the 9-12 yard range that he needed.

Half a second later as Stokes scanned the field, Jeremy stopped backpedaling and rushed the quarterback on a delay blitz. The running backs had gone out in the flat already as receivers. All the offensive linemen were engaged with the four defensive linemen when Jeremy rushed. He blitzed in clean between the center and the right guard.

I knew Jeremy was a smart football player, but his next move was perfect. Jeremy tackled Stokes' arm and the ball instead of his body. Stokes was dragged down by his arm as Jeremy ripped the ball free. Jeremy rolled over on his back, clutching the ball to his chest as the ref whistled the play dead. Sack, fumble and recovery – all credited to our friend.

The Trimble living room echoed with the cheers of his friends and fans. Kathy basked in the praise we heaped on her boyfriend. Jeremy's play had changed the game decisively. Notre Dame scored a field goal off the turn over, putting them up 31-20. They cruised through the rest of the game to a 38-27 victory.

All of us helped Kathy clean up when the game was over. The group talked about getting together again. We agreed we'd meet on Saturday night at the Green Iguana club in Lancaster. A night of music and dancing would be fun.

I found a reply e-mail from Brady Rasmussen when I checked my e-mail after lunch on Thursday. Here is what Brady said:

To: fastwr87@redroses.net
From: rassmussen.brady@usc.edu

Wow! Thanks for the tips. Most of what you and Ed gave me we knew from studying video. There were a couple things we couldn't see in the tapes that should help us. I guess you have to see the Tigers in person to pick them up.

Congrats on the Rose Bowl victory. I watched the game that evening. You played great. Tell Zack that he would have gotten the Heisman if the voting had been after the Rose Bowl. I'll see him at the Senior Bowl in a few weeks. He'll recognize me. I'll be the QB at the other end of the field celebrating his victory. ;-)

Brady

I showed Ed the e-mail when he came over in the afternoon. Ed took a copy along to show his teammates back at UF. Hopefully Brady could put the information to good use and beat LSU on Saturday night. That would be the best revenge the Gators could get until next season.

Jeremy North arrived home from Phoenix on Thursday evening. Only Kathy was invited to his homecoming. The rest of us would have to wait to see him until Friday evening. The four couples – Kathy and Jeremy; Hal and Tammy; Ed and Paige; and Kelly and me – planned to catch a movie together.

I got up around eleven and took a shower on Friday morning. I was excited that Kelly would arrive in an hour or two. I cleaned up my bedroom so it was presentable. I wouldn't want my lover to have to share a pig sty with me. I had just stepped out of the shower when my cell phone rang.

“Hello?”

“Hey honey, it’s me,” Kelly explained. “I just got on 283 from the turnpike.”

“Cool,” I answered. “You’ll be here in forty-five minutes.”

“Can I get lunch at your house?” Kelly asked. “I don’t want to stop and waste time at a restaurant. It’s been twenty days since we made love.”

“Twenty days, two hours and forty-three minutes,” I corrected. “We have plenty of food here for your lunch. My parents are at work and the kids are at school or day care. No one will be around to bother us until three o’clock.”

“I’m on my way,” Kelly said. “I hope I don’t get a speeding ticket. Love you and see you soon.”

“Love you too,” I said before clicking the off button on the phone.

I dressed and headed upstairs to get things ready for lunch with Kelly. Thirty-eight minutes later I was thawing some of Mom's home-made chicken corn soup when the door bell rang. Kelly certainly had driven above the 65 MPH speed limit on the highway to get here this fast.

"God! I missed you," Kelly exclaimed as she launched herself at me when I opened the front door. Kelly hugged and kissed me, squeezing me tight to her body as our tongues danced together. We finally pulled our lips apart when we needed to breathe.

"God, I missed you too," I gasped as I stared into Kelly's hazel eyes. "I'm so glad you're here." We held each other for a few seconds more until a cold blast of arctic air reminded us we were standing in the open doorway. I helped Kelly inside and then shut the door.

"Do you want lunch first or should I help you bring in your bags?" I asked.

"Lunch would be great," Kelly said as she unzipped her coat. "I'm famished."

I led Kelly back to the kitchen. I fried up a couple hamburgers for us while the soup thawed and warmed. Kelly and I caught up on all the happenings in our lives as we ate. There was one thing I was particularly curious about.

"Did your dad say anything about nearly catching us having sex Saturday morning before you went home?" I asked.

"No. It was amazing," Kelly replied. "He knew you spent the night with me and he didn't say a single word about it the whole way home."

"I'm glad he isn't mad at me," I said.

"I didn't say that Kyle," Kelly said. "I know he wasn't happy about us having sex but I think he realizes that he has no say in the matter. He's finally stopped treating me like a little kid."

I was relieved that Bill was learning to live with me having sex with his daughter. I wanted to be accepted by her family. It wouldn't be good to fight with potential in-laws if I expected to stay together with Kelly.

I helped Kelly move her bags downstairs after we finished cleaning up lunch. The two of us took full advantage of having an empty house that afternoon. Our first time together was pretty frantic, the two of us fulfilling our urgent lust for each other's bodies.

We made love again after fifteen minutes of cuddling and talking. The second time of lovemaking was exactly that. We made love – sharing our complete passion for each other as we shared our bodies slowly and gently. It was a glorious way to reunite with my girl.

Kelly and I cleaned up after cuddling for awhile after our romp in bed. We headed upstairs and watched a movie together. Andy and Liz came home from school a little after three o'clock.

Liz greeted Kelly warmly with hugs and kisses. Teen-aged boys aren't normally demonstrative, but Andy greeted Kelly with a hug and a kiss on the cheek. My siblings seemed to display just as much affection for Kelly as they had for Abby when she was our brother's girlfriend instead of our sister-in-law. Liz headed upstairs to get a head start on homework. Andy cleaned up and headed to work. He would be working until 9:30 that night. I started a pot roast for supper, with Kelly's assistance.

The two of us relaxed with our movie while the beef roasted. Around a quarter to five Kelly and I headed back to the kitchen to finish cooking supper. Potatoes, carrots, celery and onions went in the big cast iron pot with the roast. Kelly put together a simple chocolate pudding pie while I made dough for dumplings to go with the roast.

Mom and the kids got home just as I finished the dough for the dumplings. The twins stormed into the kitchen as hard as their little legs could go calling, "Daddy? Daddy?" The cries switched to "Unka Ky!" when they spotted me. I gave Connor and then Noah a hug and a kiss.

"Guys, do you remember my girlfriend Kelly?" I asked. The boys turned shy instantly when they saw Kelly. They scurried around behind my legs and peeked out at my girlfriend.

Kelly gave the boys a big smile, crouched down so she was closer to their eye level. "Noah, do you remember me?" she asked sweetly. Noah leaned out a little further and stared at Kelly. "I'm finishing a chocolate pie for dessert. Would you and Connor like to lick the spoon?"

My nephews hadn't progressed to the point where they could say chocolate, but they certainly knew what the word meant. Their faces lit up with big smiles and they stepped over to Kelly. She handed the boys the spoon, which they licked until the stainless steel shined. From then on the twins considered "Keh-EE" a normal part of the family.

Mom carried Hunter into the kitchen as the twins were finishing up cleaning the spoon. "I see you've made friends," Mom teased as she looked over the messy faces of her grandchildren. "Did you have a good trip in?"

Mom and Kelly talked as Mom took off Hunter's winter clothing. Mom swiped a finger around the edge of the pudding bowl and gave my little brother a taste of pudding. Hunter relished it. My little brother went in the play pen in the corner of the kitchen when Mom went upstairs to change into every day clothes.

Hunter was slowly becoming mobile. He learned to roll over between Thanksgiving and Christmas. While I was in California he started pushing up on his hands and knees, trying to crawl. Hunter could stay up for a few seconds before he would flop down on his belly again. Eventually he would catch up to and have his nephews as playmates, but not just yet.

Noah and Connor toured the house in search of their daddy, but didn't find him. They ended up coming back to the kitchen, "helping" Kelly and me get dinner ready. I had everything on the table around a quarter to six, soon after Dad arrived home from work.

I received a good review on my first pot roast cooked indoors. The other times I made this meal had been on camping trips with the scouts. I cooked it on the fire in a dutch oven. We enjoyed a pleasant conversation around the table as Kelly told us about her holiday and we filled her in on the happenings in Paradise. Liz agreed to take care of the dishes after dinner so Kelly and I could get ready for the movies.

The four couples were meeting at my house. Jeremy, Kathy and Tammy rode with Hal. Ed drove Paige, Kelly and me to the theater. Kelly and Paige got acquainted on the drive over to Millersville. The four couples settled on a nice romantic comedy with a good storyline.

Kelly and I sat back, cuddled, held hands and enjoyed the movie. Ed and Paige did the same. Jeremy and Kathy as well as Hal and Tammy took advantage of the darkness to make out. Their parents weren't nearly as understanding about their children's sexuality as mine.

Kelly and I had no need to carry on like high school kids. We'd satisfied ourselves twice in the afternoon and had the prospect of sleeping together that night. Ed and Paige were no less horny than Kelly and me. Fortunately for the two of them, the Andersons were as understanding as my parents. Ed was spending the night at the Andersons.

The whole group stopped off at the pizza shop after the movie. We bumped into Matt Sauder, Josh Strickler and Cody Stevens with their dates. The guys peppered Jeremy, Ed, and me with questions about our experiences in our bowl games.

Hal didn't seem to mind the kids ignoring him. Even he realized that sitting on the bench at the Meineke Car Care Bowl wasn't a big deal. His full four year scholarship gave him an equal education to what Jeremy, Ed and I were getting our big name schools.

The kids had to leave in a hurry when Matt realized that his dad would be outside the theater in a few minutes. They all had a midnight curfews. Jeremy, Kathy, Tammy and Hal split soon afterwards. They were off for some parking before they headed for home. Ed drove Kelly and me back to my house before he took Paige home for the night.

My house was dark when we got home around 12:15. Kelly and I made our way downstairs quietly so we didn't wake up the little kids. I made sure to lock the door to

the basement. Mom had sternly warned me to be careful. She didn't want the twins wandering down to the basement on Saturday morning and finding Kelly and me in bed together. She had no interest in explaining what the two of us were doing together if the twins got an eye full.

Kelly and I made love one more time before we went to sleep. Post-coital snuggling under warm blankets was a tremendous way to fall asleep.

Kelly and I woke up around eleven o'clock on Saturday morning. We decided to take advantage of the big shower in our room and showered together. Not unexpectedly we made love in the shower. Running my hands all over Kelly's smooth curvaceous body always got my motor running. Fortunately my well muscled body had exactly the same effect on Kelly. I managed to give Kelly a couple orgasms before I came.

I was making hot dogs and macaroni and cheese for lunch for Kelly and me when the twins discovered we were awake. I gave the kids their obligatory plane rides. They settled for hugs and kisses from Kelly. The boys were hungry already and begged to eat with us. Mom consented, so I added more dogs to the pot and got another box of mac and cheese from the cupboard.

Kelly and I put the boys in their high chairs and fed them their lunch as we ate our own. Poor little Hunter could only sit and watch us from his crib. Hot dogs and macaroni and cheese weren't on his menu yet. Maybe I could let him join his nephews for lunch in the spring when school was out.

Kelly and I washed up the twins and turned them loose after they finished eating. Kelly checked the morning newspaper while I did our dishes. The weather report said that a big winter storm was coming in from the west. The storm was tracking to the north so we were expected to get a dusting of snow. North of the Pa. Turnpike would get 2-4 inches of snow. Northern Pennsylvania was expected to get 6-12 inches of snow.

Kelly was relieved that the storm was staying north. It was to start snowing around midnight tonight and continue into Sunday evening. The last thing she needed was to fight her way through snow when she drove home on Monday morning.

I drove Kelly over to the outlet stores on Lincoln Highway East. The outlets' fame had made it to the western side of the state. I didn't mind shopping with my girlfriend. I needed to get a birthday present for Andy. Andy and Kelly shared birthdays on January 9th. I found a University of Delaware warm up suit for Andy at one of the sports stores.

Kelly and I spent two and half hours wandering around Rockvale and Tanger Outlets. I have a man's perspective on shopping – get in, get what you need as quickly as possible and get the hell out. Even so, I didn't really mind the time at the malls. An afternoon spent walking around arm in arm with Kelly beat almost anything else I could be doing. Kelly bought a few things using her Christmas money.

Kelly and I got home around 4:30. Kelly headed downstairs to shower for our night out dancing. I checked with Mom and confirmed that I received a package from the florists while I was gone. Mom put the bouquet of roses I ordered for Kelly's birthday out in the garage where they would stay fresh in the cooler air until tomorrow morning.

I double checked the Tivo to make sure it was set to record the BCS championship game while I was out clubbing. I planned to watch it Monday after Kelly headed home to Pittsburgh. I was curious to see how Brady Rasmussen performed now that he won the Heisman Trophy.

Mom had dinner ready before I had a chance to clean up for the night out. Andy was working and Alex took Liz out for pizza before they went to the movies. Mom made dinner for Dad, the little kids, Kelly and me. Kelly and I fed Noah, Dad fed Connor and Mom took care of Hunter. We had a pleasant dinner in spite of the fussing, fidgeting and spilled food. Kelly and I volunteered to do the dishes for Mom after dinner.

Kelly and I headed out after I showered and shaved. We picked up Ed first and then drove over to Paige's house. The rest of our group was meeting us at the Green Iguana Club in Lancaster. The low, light gray clouds filled the sky. They promised the snow the weathermen predicted would arrive soon. We ran into Drew McCormick and his girlfriend Stacy Thompson in the parking garage. The six of us headed down the street for the club. The doorman stamped our hands "No Alcohol" and sent us upstairs to the under twenty-one section of the club.

We found a couple tables side by side and spread out so save space for the rest of our group. Jeremy, Kathy, Hal and Tammy arrived a few minutes after us. Penny arrived a few minutes later, with a date. She introduced the 6'-0" tall, sandy blond haired guy to us. He was Harrison Chandler, an acquaintance from school who lived over in York. Harrison was taking pre-law at Penn.

We ordered drinks and talked as our group caught up with each other's lives. The band started up half an hour after we arrived. Brandon and Holly came in as the band started their second song.

Our group danced a bit, talked and then danced some more. Harrison and Kelly, the only outsiders in our group of high school friends, fit into the group well. Kelly knew most of the group from spring break and her visit last summer. Harrison seemed like a nice guy, though a bit of a preppy. I guess that fit his future vocation as a lawyer.

I had half a dozen fans stop by for autographs and to talk about Penn State's Rose Bowl victory. Jeremy was recognized by a few Notre Dame fans. Our friends, even Brandon, took our notoriety in stride. They were finally used to it. Jeremy and I teased Ed, Drew and Hal that fame and recognition would come to them in due time.

The band finished its last set around 12:30. Most of the members of our group were ready to call it a night so we headed back for our cars. Everyone was shocked when they

stepped outside the club. Snow was pouring down in big clumps. All of us were wearing low cut shoes or sneakers and the snow on the sidewalks was over our ankles. We jumped and tip-toed through probably six inches of snow as we made our way the couple blocks back to our cars.

The weathermen certainly had blown it with their forecast. I wasn't worried. I'd driven in worse the last two winters while I was in State College. Ed was more worried, but not as worried as Harrison.

"My poor little Coop' will never drive through this mess," he moaned. The streets of Lancaster were unplowed and had the same six inches as the sidewalks. The few cars on the street had churned it into a mess with deep tire ruts with mounds of slop in between the ruts.

"I'll never be able to get Penny back to Paradise and then drive to York tonight," Harrison griped.

"Penny can ride with me," I suggested. "You can head straight home from here." I turned to Ed and Paige. "You guys don't mind a little crowding for a few miles, do you?"

Ed and Paige readily agreed. Harrison seemed relieved. We got to the entrance to the parking garage a minute later. A Honda Civic pulled out just before we walked inside. The little car promptly hung up on the compacted snow between the garage and the street. The driver gratefully accepted our offer to help push him into the street.

"Oh man, I'm screwed," Harrison complained when we had pushed the car into the street. "My car is smaller than his!"

"What do you drive?" Ed asked.

"I have a Mini-Cooper," Harrison replied.

"You're going to drive one of those the whole way to York?" I asked. Harrison nodded yes.

"Why don't you spend the night at my house?" Penny asked. Harrison's face lit up with hope at the prospect of spending the night with Penny. "...in our guest room," Penny added. Harrison's hopeful grin melted away. Still he was relieved to have a warm place to stay for the night.

We formed up our caravan inside the garage. We decided Brandon would lead the way in his four wheel drive jeep. I would follow him in my VW Golf and then Harrison would come next. Drew would be follow and Jeremy would take up the rear in his old Jeep Cherokee.

We had to stop in the street and push Harrison's Cooper through the hump of snow at the exit to the garage. The five cars made their way slowly through Lancaster, sticking to King Street, the main road east-west through the city. King Street turned into Route 462 and then merged into Route 30 when the bypass ended by the police barracks.

We had to stop twice to push Harrison's Cooper through high, rough troughs of snow. It took an hour to make the drive that normally would take twenty minutes, if the traffic was heavy. Of course there was virtually no traffic at 1:30 on a Sunday morning in the middle of a blizzard.

On the way home Paige called her parents and let them know that she would be spending the night at Ed's house. I had Kelly call home and tell my parents what was going on and that we were fine. Dad thanked me for keeping him informed.

Drew peeled off first to head to his house. Even though it was a little out of his way, Brandon led the rest of the cars right to my house. I parked in front of my house. Harrison stopped right behind me. Brandon, Jeremy and their passengers gave us a wave as they headed for the next street and Jeremy's, Hal's, Kathy's and Tammy's homes.

Eight to ten inches of snow lay on the ground. Someone had shoveled a path to the street earlier in the night, so Kelly and I only had a few inches of snow to tip toe through to get inside.

Kelly and I left our snowy, soaked shoes at the front door and hurried downstairs to bed. Both of us were too exhausted to think about sex that morning. We went straight to sleep.

I woke up around 7:30 on Sunday morning, needing to pee. As I finished my business I heard Mom and Dad upstairs. Snow covered the basement windows, so I had no idea about the weather now. I threw on my robe and went upstairs to see what was up.

The twins were standing at the open back door staring through the storm door window at the storm outside. Noah turned and saw me. He pointed at the window and said, "Snow!" He turned back and watched with his brother. Both were mesmerized by the huge snowflakes falling outside.

The storm had continued pouring snow down on the landscape, just as rapidly as last night. The snow must have been well over a foot deep now but it was hard to tell. The wind was whipping the snow around as it fell. We had a five foot drift in the back yard.

I went out to the garage and picked up the box of flowers the florist delivered yesterday. I unwrapped the dozen roses and carried them and the small teddy bear back to the kitchen. I put the roses in a vase of water.

Mom came back into the kitchen. I asked, "Do we have church this morning?"

"No, it's canceled," she replied. "I see you have something for Kelly's birthday. Very nice."

"Thanks Mom. I know she'll like them," I said. "I'm going back to bed. Kelly and I didn't get to bed until a quarter to two this morning. We can use the sleep."

"I'll try to keep the twins quiet," Mom said as I headed downstairs again. "Lock the door!"

"I hope that will be important," I replied. "... once we get some more sleep. I'll try to keep Kelly from screaming too much."

"You do that," Mom answered as I shut and locked the basement door. I headed downstairs and set the roses on the nightstand beside the clock. I leaned Kelly's birthday card against the vase and then set the teddy bear beside it.

I climbed back in bed with my lover. Kelly rolled over and asked, "Is it time for church?"

"No, church is canceled," I replied. "We can sleep as late as we want." I spooned with my lover as she let out a happy sigh. We fell asleep quickly.

I woke up later in the morning when Kelly stirred. The room was still dark thanks to the snow drifted over my windows. I sat up to check the clock on the nightstand on the other side of Kelly. It said 11:13 am. Kelly rolled over and rubbed my stomach.

"Is it time to get up honey?" Kelly asked sweetly. Her hand dipped lower and she handled my limp cock. She stroked it as it inflated.

"Umm... 11:13," I gasped as I shuddered from the effect she was having on me.

"Perfect!" Kelly replied. "We've had plenty of sleep and have time before lunch. I want my birthday present now." Kelly stroked my cock a couple times to emphasize exactly what present she was requesting.

"Mmmm... yeah," I said. "I can give you that if you're sure you want it, old lady."

"Old?" Kelly responded. "I don't think so."

"Twenty-something... over the hill..." I teased. "One step from the grave." I rolled us over so I was on top of Kelly between her legs. I rubbed my erection up and down a couple times in her moistening slot.

"Do you think I'll let some teen-aged kid use that thing on me?" Kelly responded.

“Kid?” I warned. “If you’re not careful you won’t get any presents today.” I pulled my cock away a few inches. Kelly wrapped her arms around me and pulled me down on top of her again. We kissed, our teasing forgotten.

Kelly and I escalated from kissing to petting to 69 in short order. I brought Kelly to an orgasm before she coaxed my first load of cum down her throat. We kissed for a bit before I was ready to give her my big hard “present.”

Kelly and I made love. I needed to shush her once to get her quiet enough so the twins wouldn’t hear what we were doing. My girlfriend had a satisfied, well fucked look on her face when we finished. We cuddled for a few minutes after our mutual orgasms.

“Could you turn on the light,” I suggested after I had recovered.

Kelly reached over and turned on the light on night stand. She saw the roses immediately. “These are lovely Kyle,” Kelly cooed.

“Happy birthday honey,” I responded. “I love you.”

Kelly clasped the little teddy bear to her chest. “This is soooo cute,” she said. The teddy earned me a hug and another kiss. “You’re a wonderful boyfriend,” Kelly said as she climbed out of bed. “Do you want the shower first or can I?”

“Go ahead,” I said. Kelly padded over to the bathroom and shut the door behind her. I got up, put on a pair of boxers and retrieved Kelly’s real present from its hiding place. I placed the package in the center of the bed.

Kelly came out of the bathroom fifteen minutes later. She delightedly tore open the box with her gift. She pulled out the sweat shirt I ordered the evening after the Rose Bowl Game. She held it up and inspected my gift.

The artist who did the football newsletter cartoons had done a drawing of the of the Nittany Lion, one foot resting on top of the football, proudly holding up a dead duck by the neck. The caption at the top said, “Rose Bowl Champions, Penn State Nittany Lions 62, Oregon Ducks 20.” The caption at the bottom said, “DUCK – It’s what’s for dinner tonight.”

“Thank you Kyle, I love this,” Kelly gushed. “Where did you find it? I haven’t seen it for sale anywhere.”

I explained meeting the cartoonist Saturday night after the game at our hotel. He was doing a limited run of the sweat shirts for big football boosters. He decided that my ten receptions had been a big help to our team so he kindly agreed to send me one of the sweatshirts. Kelly was delighted to have a special gift that no one else at school would have. I got a big hug and more kisses in thanks.

Kelly finished dressing and went upstairs while I took my shower. I met her in the kitchen fifteen minutes later. Kelly was sitting at the kitchen table staring out the window at the snow. It was coming down just as hard as earlier in the morning. There seemed to be about eighteen inches on the sheltered portion of our patio.

“How am I going to get home tomorrow?” Kelly asked.

“I don’t know,” I replied. “Did they clear the street yet?” The two of us went to the living room and looked outside. Big drifts filled our street. The top foot of my car and Kelly’s mom’s car stuck up above the top of the drift. They were the only two cars we could see.

“I don’t see Harrison’s Mini,” I remarked. “He couldn’t have tried to go home in this.”

“I think I see the antenna sticking up out of the snow,” Kelly answered. I could barely see the thin wire sticking out of the drift.

“I don’t think anyone is going anywhere for quite some time,” I observed.

“I think you’re right,” Kelly agreed.

Kelly and I headed back to the kitchen. I had Kelly get some sausages from the freezer and warm them in the microwave while I whipped up a batch of French toast for us. My nephews came running seconds after I pulled the frying pan and set it on the stove.

“Unka Ky” “Keh-EE” the boys called. Noah pointed at the frying pan while Connor pointed at his mouth. “Mmmm... Mmmmm...” The boys had a small vocabulary but they were excellent at expressing their point.

“Kelly, could you find Mom or Andy and see if it’s OK to feed the little mooches,” I asked.

“Sure Kyle,” Kelly agreed. She headed off.

I mixed up the batter for the toast, with the close assistance of both twins. One was glued to each leg while I worked.

Kelly returned a minute later, having found Andy watching TV in the family room. He said I could give each boy one slice of French toast with a little syrup. I added another egg and some more milk to the batter, mixed and began frying. Ten minutes later the four of us were seated, enjoying our breakfast.

Mom brought Hunter downstairs as Kelly and I finished eating. Mom announced, “Dad wants everyone ready to start shoveling in about forty-five minutes.”

“What happened with this storm?” I asked. “The weatherman didn’t predict anything like this yesterday.”

Mom had watched the news on TV earlier. She related how the Canadian front proved to be stronger than expected. It collided with warm air from the Gulf coast over us instead of over the Pennsylvania-New York state border as expected. They were predicting would get another six to eight inches today before the storm moved on. The snow fall depth at 11:00 am this morning outside Channel 8’s studio was 20 inches.

Kelly and I found my brother watching TV in the family room. Both of us wished him a happy birthday. We headed back down to the basement after that. Our normal routine was to read the paper but not that day. No one, including the newspaper delivery boy, was out this morning. I fired up my computer so we could find out about the world’s happenings on-line.

I went straight to ESPN’s website to find out who won the BCS championship game. “USC won 34-28 last night,” I exclaimed in delight. “Brady Rasmussen was named the MVP.”

“Was he? That’s cool,” Kelly agreed. “I was a little surprised you wanted to go out to the club last night. I thought you might want to stay home to watch the game.”

“I wouldn’t miss a chance to go out dancing with my girl and to visit with our friends,” I answered. “Any way, I Tivoed it. I’ll watch it later after you go home.”

“Why? I want to see it,” Kelly replied. “Don’t forget I’m a football fan too. I watch football because I enjoy it, not because I’m your girlfriend. Football runs in my family – Daddy played in high school, Billy and Mike did too. Patrick is on the JV squad. Sean plays for the middle school.”

“OK, we can play the video after I’m done shoveling snow outside,” I answered. “I want to finish watching it before the Eagles game at 4 pm.”

“It’s a deal,” Kelly agreed. “I suppose I can put up with watching the Eagles play since my Steelers are at home enjoying their well deserved week off.” Kelly enjoyed teasing me about my Eagles loyalties. The Steelers’ six Super Bowl wins to none for my team entitled her to gloat a little. The Steelers’ 13-3 record had wrapped up home field advantage for them throughout the playoffs.

Kelly and I browsed articles on-line. We found out that the storm that dumped on Lancaster County hit the easterly two thirds of Pennsylvania as well as the easterly seaboard from Virginia Beach the whole way up the coast to Connecticut.

Dad called downstairs half an hour later to let me know it was time to start shoveling. Kelly volunteered to help watch Noah and Connor while the rest of us worked on digging

out. The twins were excited to get outside and play in the snow. Mom even found plastic shovels from their beach play set so they could “help” us dig out.

Andy and I managed to force the front door open sufficiently for each of us to squeeze out onto the front porch. It took five minutes to clean off enough porch so Liz could join us. Andy and I took turns clearing the walk towards the driveway and garage. We had to clear enough space at the garage door so we could open it and let Dad get the snow blower out.

Snow was still coming down but at a slower rate than earlier in the day. Andy and I took turns moving the almost three feet of wet snow that had drifted into the walk front of our house. We needed fifteen minutes to get to the garage. The twins lost interest in shoveling after a few minutes. Kelly helped the boys make their first snowman on the porch.

The digging along the garage door wasn’t quite as bad. The wind had blown most of the snow elsewhere. Dad fired up the snow blower when we got the door freed up. Dad cut swaths through the snow down each side of the driveway, providing access to his car and Andy’s car. Andy, Liz and I cleared around each car with shovels. The twins got cold and headed back inside to warm up. Kelly joined us in finishing the driveway.

The township snow plow hadn’t come through, so Kelly and I decided to do Harrison Chandler a favor and clear enough snow from his car so the plow driver could see it before he tried to plow our street. We waded through waist deep snow to get to the Mini-Cooper. We used our hands to push enough snow away so Harrison’s roof stuck out of the drift. It would be sufficient to let the plow driver know that there was a car buried there.

Kelly and I joined the rest of my family in the kitchen when we finished. Mom had made her famous hot chocolate to warm up everyone. Mom used real milk and melted chocolate into the milk. She also added some sugar, honey and spices, but she never revealed exactly what her secret was. It sure beat the store-bought powdered mix.

Kelly and I settled down in the family room to watch the USC/LSU game when we finished warming up with hot chocolate. The twins wandered in and stared playing with their toys soon after I started the game. The boys got tired during the first quarter and crawled up on the couch and sat on my lap and Kelly’s lap. Andy rescued us and took the boys upstairs for their afternoon nap.

The game proved to be quite exciting. USC took an early lead but LSU recovered and was ahead 14-13 at halftime. The Tigers extended their lead to 21-13 to start the second half. Brady and his teammates weren’t fazed by their deficit. They rallied to score twice in the third quarter, regaining the lead, 27-21.

As the fourth quarter started USC’s defense turned back the next drive by the Tigers. USC tried to kill the clock with mostly runs on their next possession. They were forced

to punt the ball back to the Tigers with about four and a half minutes left in the game. Andre Dugas, the LSU quarterback, was brilliant in driving his team down the field to seize the lead again 28-27.

1:42 remained on the clock when the Tigers kicked the ball back to the Trojans. A red-shirt freshman kick returner, Malo Kaapana, did an impressive job with the return. A desperation lunge by the kicker is all that brought the kid down.

Kaapana's excellent return gave Brady Rasmussen and the offense possession at their 46 yard line. Brady was positively brilliant running the hurry-up, two minute offense. He completed six of seven passes to move his team straight down the field and into the red zone. The Tigers tightened up and Brady missed on the next two passes. On third down and goal all the receivers were covered so Brady rolled out to buy more time.

Brady spotted an opening along the line of scrimmage, tucked the ball away and ran for the goal line. He dodged a safety and dove for the end zone. LSU was too late, hitting Brady after he crossed the goal line. The Trojan players celebrated as the referee signaled touchdown. The Trojans kicked the PAT to take a 34-28 lead.

Brady left 28 seconds on the clock and the Tigers were out of timeouts. It wasn't enough time for Andre Dugas to engineer a comeback.

"Wow, that was a hell of a game," I commented as the final seconds ticked off.

"Yeah, it was," Kelly agreed.

"They have an excellent team," I said. "If someone other than us had to be national champions, I'm glad it was Brady's team."

"Really?" Kelly asked. "I wouldn't have thought you would say that."

"I still believe we could beat USC or LSU if we had the shot at them," I replied. "We have the best quarterback in the country, we have the best offense in the country, and we have a good defense."

"You got that right Kyle," Kelly agreed.

"Still, I wonder how things would have worked out if I had gone to USC instead," I wondered.

"We wouldn't have met," Kelly exclaimed.

"No, I'm not having second thoughts about coming to Penn State or meeting you," I explained. "I just wonder how much of my success is due to playing with a great quarterback like Zack and how much is due to my talent. Would I have been as successful with Brady?"

“You could ask ‘Would Zack have been as successful without you?’” Kelly answered.
“Your speed opens up a lot of opportunities for the entire offense.”

“You’re right,” I agreed. “I guess we’ll find out how much is me and how much is Zack next fall when Jay or Chip takes over at QB.”

Kelly and I headed out to the kitchen to find drinks and snacks before the Eagles/Bears wild card playoff game. Mom and Dad were in the kitchen talking when we came out. Dad suggested that Kelly call home and let her parents know she wasn’t coming home tomorrow morning as planned.

Kelly talked with her dad and explained the situation in this part of Pennsylvania. Bill Sr. insisted on getting clearance from my Mom before he agreed to Kelly spending more time with us. Mom assured Bill that Kelly was welcome to stay with us until the roads were safe for the trip back to Pittsburgh.

Kelly and I settled in and watched the pre-game show. Andy brought the twins downstairs after their nap and joined us. Dad brought Hunter along and settled into his La-Z-Boy chair. Dad was giving Mom a break from watching my little brother. This game was a rare opportunity for some male bonding among the Martin clan.

The Eagles had an up and down season but picked the right day to be up. The Eagles went up 21-10 when DeSean Jackson caught a sweet pass from McNabb, broke a couple tackles and then raced 42 yards for a touchdown. It was almost the end of the first half when Mom called all of us for supper. Thank goodness for the Pause button on the Tivo.

Mom made a nice dinner for Andy’s birthday – steak, baked potatoes, and salad. Dessert would wait until after the Eagles game. Mom made fuss about Kelly’s birthday too. Noah and Connor enjoyed their steak, cut up in tiny pieces. Even Hunter got a bit of the birthday dinner. Mom gave him a bit of mashed up baked potato with melted cheese. My baby brother liked it much more than his rice cereal.

Half an hour later we picked up the game where we left off. The added advantage of pausing live TV with our Tivo was we could skip all the commercials in the second half of the game.

The Eagles went into ball control mode in the second half. Chicago picked up two more field goals against another touchdown by the Eagles. It was a solid, workmanlike victory by my favorite pro team.

Chicago played hard, had a strong defense, a good running game and no one decent at quarterback. Dad said it was an old story, going all the way back to the late eighties. The last excellent quarterback the Bears had was Jim McMahon.

The Bears could use somebody like Zack Hayes, Brady Rasmussen or Elijah Carter in the draft. Unfortunately they were too good to get one of the top draft picks. They probably would settle for one of the second tier quarterbacks and muddle along the way they had done for the last twenty years.

Mom announced in the fourth quarter that the snow plow finally came down our road. He made a single path down the middle of the road, making the road barely passable. Dad call the family work crew out after the Eagles game was over to finish clearing the driveway.

It took Dad, Andy, Liz and I an hour to dig through the last ten feet of snow between our cars and the path in the street. It was hard, compacted snow boulders kicked up by the blade of the snowplow.

Mr. Edwards, Penny and Harrison Chandler walked down the middle of the street about the time we broke through to the street.

Harrison called out cheerily, "I wanted to see if I could find my car."

"Kelly and I uncovered the top of it earlier today," I answered. "Do you want a hand digging?"

"Sure, help would be most welcome," Harrison answered.

Harrison, Penny, Kelly and I worked for half an hour digging around the little Mini trying to free it from the snow. We had cleared to the outer side of the car.

"Phew!" Harrison huffed. "I didn't think this would be this bad. I don't think I'll be going home tomorrow."

"I know how that is," Kelly added as she pointed at the top foot of the roof of her mom's car. "I won't be going back to Pittsburgh for awhile."

"It'll be fun Harrison," Penny said. She pulled his head down and gave him a kiss on the cheek. "I'm glad you have to stay."

Harrison returned the kiss, square on Penny's lips, with considerable passion. I glanced over at Kelly. She had the same surprised look I had. Penny and Harrison didn't notice our reaction.

"Thanks for your help guys," Harrison said. "I think Penny and I will call it a night. I'll tackle my car again in the morning."

Kelly and I said good night to Penny and Harrison. They headed down the street to Penny's house. When they were out of ear shot, I commented, "I thought Penny said Harrison was just a friend on Saturday night."

“That’s exactly what she said at the club,” Kelly agreed. “Penny said, “he’s a friend who agreed to escort her,’ when she introduced him to us.”

“I think Penny and Harrison are more than that now,” I replied.

We headed back inside to warm-up and to celebrate Kelly’s and Andy’s birthdays. Mom gave Kelly and me some hot chocolate to warm us up while she prepared for the birthday celebration. Mom brought out the birthday cake when everyone was assembled around the kitchen table.

Mom bought a sheet cake from the grocery store on Saturday. She had the baker decorate it in two sections. One side of the cake said “Happy Birthday Andy”. The other side said “Happy Twentieth Kelly”. Andy’s side had two number shaped candles for his “18”. Kelly’s had a “2” and an “0” for her candles.

We sang an off-key rendition of “Happy Birthday”. The Martin family is good at many things, but singing is not one of the things we are talented at. Andy and Kelly didn’t seem to mind. They blew out their respective candles.

Everyone enjoyed the cake and ice cream, except little Hunter. He loved the slightly melted spoons of ice cream Mom gave him but wasn’t interested in the cake or icing. On the other hand, Noah and Connor adored the cake and ice cream. The twins gobbled up the small pieces of cake Andy permitted them and begged for more. Mom diverted their attention with some apple juice while Andy opened his presents.

Andy appreciated the warm-up suit I got him. Mom and Dad gave Andy the title to Dad’s “spare” car that Andy had driven for the past year and half. Forgiveness for getting Crystal pregnant was coming slowly. The fact that Noah and Connor were so adorable certainly helped Andy’s cause along with all the hard work he did to raise his boys.

I was surprised and Kelly was overwhelmed when everyone had presents for her too. Mom and Dad bought her a nice sweater for skiing and cold walks across campus this winter. Liz bought Kelly an I-Tunes gift card. Andy bought her a Rose Bowl Champions cap.

“I wasn’t expecting presents today,” Kelly protested. “It’s enough that you let me stay here so I could spend time with Kyle. All of you treat me as if I was part of your family.”

“You are part of our family dear,” Mom replied. “You’re important to Kyle, so you’re important to the rest of us. It wouldn’t do to forget your birthday this year. You’re young enough that it’s time to celebrate them, not to forget them like you’ll want to do when you get older.”

“I truly appreciate how welcome you make me feel,” Kelly answered.

Mom gave her a wink and added, “Liz and I are outnumbered six to two. We need all the reinforcements we can get.”

“Thank you for your hospitality and thank you for the gifts every one,” Kelly replied.

Noah and Connor begged “Keh-EE” and I to read to them when Andy announced it was bedtime. After a little fussing, the boys allowed me to read them “Horton Hears a Who” instead of the “Cat in the Hat.” The boys were a little harder to get to sleep that evening but eventually Horton did the trick.

Kelly and I went downstairs to check the final BCS poll results on my computer. USC was named national champion by all the polls as expected. Kelly and I celebrated when we saw number two – Penn State. LSU dropped down to third with their loss to USC, followed by Florida, Texas Tech and West Virginia. I felt our team could have beaten USC if we had been given the chance. Still USC went undefeated and we did have that last second loss to Ohio State on our record. We were rated the best one loss team in the country, so I guess that wasn’t too bad.

We caught the remainder of the Baltimore/San Diego wild card playoff game after we finished celebrating. Joe Flacco had the Ravens’ offense humming. Their defense, even though Ray Lewis was getting up in years, played with incredible intensity. Some of the hits made me wince.

San Diego was the division champion and host for the game but they were a seven point underdog. They won the weak AFC West Division by default. Denver had no offense. Kansas City and Oakland were too pathetic for words.

The Chargers hadn’t been a strong team since LaDainian Tomlinson was in his prime. Philip Rivers was an excellent quarterback, but he couldn’t carry the team by himself.

Channel 8 interrupted the broadcast for an emergency announcement. The governor declared a state of emergency for the eastern half of Pennsylvania. Interstates and the Pennsylvania Turnpike were closed. Only emergency and essential health care and government employees were allowed on the roads tomorrow.

Baltimore’s aggressive defense slowly tightened the noose on Philip Rivers. Ed Reed’s second interception near the end of the game doomed the Chargers. Baltimore won the game 27-16.

I watched Coach John Harbaugh and his team celebrate as the last seconds ticked away. Hopefully I’d end up someplace with a winning tradition like Baltimore if I made it into the NFL. I’d hate to play in a division like the AFC West for a bunch of losers.

Kelly and I headed downstairs to our bedroom after the game. We made love again, spicing things up with more role-playing. This time Kelly was the older woman seducing

the teenaged kid. In truth I was a teenager making love to an older woman, so the role-playing wasn't too far out. The two of us fell asleep spooned together after we satisfied each other's needs.

Schools were closed Monday and Tuesday, as were businesses. The entire family got to sleep in and relax during our bonus days off. Liz and Kelly let Noah and Connor out to play in the snow while Dad, Andy and I worked on freeing my car, Kelly's car and Harrison's car from the snow bank.

The weather warmed on Monday afternoon. Kelly, Andy, Liz and I decided to go sledding after lunch now that the sun was out. It was so beautiful outside. Mom and Dad decided everyone should go as soon as they heard our plan.

Mom and Dad are big kids at heart. They love snow, sledding, skiing and any other outdoor winter sport. We bundled up the little kids and loaded them into their backpack carriers. Andy took Noah, I took Connor and Dad carried Hunter. Andy and I took our two runner style sleds and Liz dragged the family's four person toboggan along.

We trekked down our street to the Fritz's driveway, cut through their property to the Norths, went across Jeremy's backyard and down the driveway to his street. Up the hill at the end of his street was an excellent sledding hill that my siblings and I had used over the years. You started your sled run on the street's cul-de-sac, went flying down the hill across the Amishman's pasture and finished in the flat area before you got to the creek. It usually gave you about a quarter mile run. It was the most popular hill within a couple miles of our house.

Lots of kids and a few "big kids" like Mom and Dad had the same idea as us. Liz hooked up with Dave Mitchell, Matt Sauder, Josh Strickler and more of her friends. Hal and Tammy were out sledding when we arrived. Jeremy and Kathy had the bright idea to try skiing on the hill. They gave up on that idea after about fifteen minutes and went home for their sleds.

Andy, Kelly and I took the twins on the first toboggan run. Noah sat up front in front of Andy. Connor was sandwiched between Kelly and Andy. I took the back, pushing us to get us going and hopping on behind Kelly. The twins loved the ride.

Mom, Dad and Hunter took the next toboggan run. Andy and I pushed to help them get started. I loved the look of surprise on Hunter's face as the toboggan started to go. The look turned to delight a few seconds later as they started down the hill. Hunter was laughing and jabbering away when Andy and I met Mom, Dad and him at the bottom of the hill on our small sleds.

Conditions on the hill were excellent. Last evening's wind had blown most of the deep snow off the hill, leaving about six inches of packed snow with an firm icy crust on top. That day was probably the best day sledding I'd ever had on that hill in my life.

Andy, Kelly and I took the twins down on the small sleds too, sitting up with them between our legs at first. Later after they were used to sledding, we went down on our stomachs, with a twin tucked in under our chest and head.

The whole family had a blast. Ed Fritz and Paige Anderson joined the crowd later. Paige was still stranded with the Fritz household.

Between runs I got a chance to talk with Ed. "I got an e-mail last night from Brady Rasmussen," I explained. "He wanted to thank you for help. He said the third touchdown was because of your tip."

"Cool!" Ed replied. "I thought that when I watched the video of the game yesterday."

"You watched it too?" I asked.

"You bet," Ed answered. "My Gators friends will be pleased to hear how I stuck it to those damn Tigers."

"You have the same relationship with them that I have with Michigan and Ohio State," I observed. Ed agreed readily.

He took off when Paige brought his sled back up the hill. Kelly, the twins and I took the toboggan on another run.

The little kids wore out after about forty-five minutes outside. Mom, Andy, Liz, Dad and I drew straws to see who would stay inside while the kids napped. Mom lost. Andy, Dad and I carried the kids back to the house for Mom and then returned to the hill with the rest of the neighborhood.

We stayed out on the hill and enjoyed the sledding, the company and the fine the wintry day. Mom reached Dad on his cell phone around 5:30 to let our group know it was time for supper. The family trooped back through the Norths' and Fritzes' properties to home and our dinner.

Mom's hot food hit the spot after spending the afternoon outside in the cold. Andy and Liz washed up the twins when they finished eating and then turned them loose. Noah and Connor went straight to get their boots, coats, hats and gloves. They tried to dress themselves to go outside. They pointed at the front door, all the time insisting, "Daddy, out!" Andy and Mom finally got them quiet by promising they could go out sledding again after the dishes were done.

Half hour later the whole family headed back to the hill. Mom and Dad decided that it wouldn't hurt Hunter to get out in the fresh air for half hour or forty-five minutes. Andy, Liz, Mom, Dad, Kelly, and I took turns giving the twins and Hunter rides down the hill on the toboggan. Hunter enjoyed himself for about half an hour, until he got cold. Dad took him back to the house when he got whiny.

Noah and Connor lasted a couple more runs down the hill before they wore out. Mom and Andy took the twins back home for their bath and to get ready for bed. The younger kids from the neighborhood cleared off the hill as it got later. High school and college kids were all that were left by 8:30 pm.

Jeremy, Kathy, Hal, Tammy, Penny and Harrison came out to sled. Ed came out too. He reported that Paige Anderson's dad showed up in the afternoon on his snowmobile to give his daughter a ride home.

My friends and I sledded through the evening. We had a blast. As the evening wore on the elementary and middle school kids on the hill got called in by their parents at their curfews. The high school kids didn't have particular curfews since they knew they didn't have school tomorrow. My friends and I sledded on too; we were on winter break for the rest of the week.

We had fun sledding and also spending time with our friends. Harrison fit into our gang pretty well. Penny and Harrison were over the top with their constant displays of affection. Hugging each other, exchanging kisses every couple minutes, whispering to each other, constantly touching each other – it was quite a display.

Around a quarter to ten Penny and Harrison said good night to everyone and headed back to Penny's house. If I read the signs from my ex-girlfriend, Harrison was going to get laid that evening. I knew the look Penny had when she was hungry for a nice cock.

After they were gone I commented, "Wow, that was some display."

"Yeah," Jeremy agreed. "I thought she was going to jump him right here on the hill."

That earned him a playful swat from Kathy. "Behave sweetie," Kathy warned. "Penny found someone she likes."

"Likes?" Jeremy replied. "They were all over each other. It was almost as sickening as the way Kelly and Kyle are." That earned Jeremy a disapproving look from his girlfriend.

Before Kathy could correct Jeremy, I agreed, "I'm nuts about Kelly and I don't care who knows." I pulled Kelly to me and gave her a good kiss. Kelly returned my sentiments with equal passion. When we broke apart I gestured towards Kathy and Jeremy and added, "We're not like the two of you. You're practically like an old married couple." I gestured towards Hal and Tammy. "The two of you are too."

“I wouldn’t argue with that description,” Jeremy said. “Kath and I are comfortable with each other. The difference is we don’t need to touch constantly. We have just as much passion at night when we’re together as I suspect the two of you do.”

“How long have you been dating?” Kelly asked. “Both couples, you seem so perfect together.”

“We’ve gone steady for five years,” Kathy answered.

“Us too,” Tammy agreed.

“Wow! That is amazing,” Kelly replied. “I wasn’t even thinking about boys five years ago. My year with Kyle is the longest I’ve ever dated anyone.”

“Almost a year,” I corrected. “Our first date was January 30th. We went skiing in the afternoon, had dinner at Spats, saw a movie and then stopped off at Zack Hayes’ party for a drink. It was the best night of my life.”

My good memory of our first date earned me a hug and a kiss from Kelly.

“Ewww, mushy!” Jeremy teased.

“Behave yourself,” Kathy responded. “I think it’s nice that Kyle and Kelly are so happy together. I’m happy for Penny too. She deserves a nice guy like Harrison.”

This met with general approval by our entire group. We agreed that Harrison seemed like a decent guy and we were happy that Penny and Harrison seemed to like each other.

The snow plow came by and plowed Jeremy’s street around 9:30 pm that evening, opening it to two narrow lanes. Presumably he plowed my street before he came up the hill to do Jeremy’s.

Our group sledded until around ten o’clock. All of us agreed that we’d get together again tomorrow after lunch for more sledding. There weren’t a lot of choices on recreational activities with everyone stranded here and all roads being closed.

Kelly, Liz, Andy and I made our way back home together. Our street was plowed, but the plow piled a lot of snow against my car, Kelly’s car and Harrison’s car. We would have some heavy work to do tomorrow to get the cars cleared. Kelly was enjoying her stay but she was anxious to get home to her own family again before classes started in a few days.

The four of us made hot chocolate for ourselves when we got inside. We watched TV together until eleven o’clock. Kelly and I headed downstairs to our bedroom, stripped

down to our underwear and cuddled together in bed while we watched the eleven o'clock news and weather.

Channel 8 reported that PennDOT was making progress clearing the interstates. They listed on their website the sections of interstate that were open tomorrow for emergency traffic. They were confident that all interstates would be open on Wednesday morning to all traffic.

Kelly was excited to finally know when she could go home. The weatherman came on next and doused her enthusiasm. Another winter storm was coming across the plains now. It had dumped a foot of snow in Missouri and Illinois that day. It was expected to track farther north than us but it was expected to hit western Pennsylvania and Pittsburgh hard as it traveled onto upstate New York and northern New England.

I flipped off the TV after the weather so Kelly and I could concentrate on each other. Both of us were well rested from our long weekend so we took full advantage of our privacy. Kelly and I made love – twice. Our needs were totally satisfied by the time we fell asleep sometime after midnight.

Tuesday morning Kelly and I got up around 9:30 in the morning. Kelly needed to do wash. She hadn't packed enough clothes for her unexpectedly long stay. All her clothes went in the washer, so Kelly and I were stuck hanging out together without clothing. Oh darn! That was such a nuisance! ;-)

Kelly and I passed the time while the washing machine washed her clothes cuddling and then making out in our bed. I went down on Kelly and induced a couple orgasms. Kelly reciprocated by giving me head until I came. I let Kelly ride me for the finale to our morning tryst. We took showers after the washing machine finished its rinse cycle.

Kelly and I headed upstairs for breakfast when the dryer was finished. I made omelets for the two of us. Noah and Connor showed up as I finished cooking, trying to mooch our breakfast. Andy said I could give each of them a scrambled egg. I melted a little cheese on top of the eggs. Like me, my nephews loved cheese.

Kelly and I went outside to work on freeing our cars after breakfast. We spent a couple hours digging out around her car and clearing enough snow away so she could pull away tomorrow morning. We didn't make enough space to get the driver's door open. Kelly would have to climb in the passenger's side and slide across to get to the driver's seat tomorrow.

Penny and Harrison came out just as we finished with Kelly's car. Kelly and I helped Harrison for half an hour, until Harrison was satisfied that he could get his car out in the morning.

One of Dad's friends stopped by on his snowmobile and gave Dad a ride into the office. Dad needed to start opening things up at work so his employees could come in tomorrow after the governor opened roads to regular traffic.

Kelly and I decided to go inside and warm up a little before we hit the sledding hill again. We bumped into Liz and Andy dressing the twins for another outing on the sled hill. Kelly and I made ourselves some hot chocolate and a sandwich and then relaxed for half an hour.

We bumped into Liz and Andy again on the way over to the hill. Noah had his arms wrapped around Liz's neck and was nearly asleep. Connor was crying, "Daddy! No!" He'd wave his hands back towards the hill and plead, "S'ed S'ed!"

"Sorry buddy," Andy commiserated. "You need a nap now. I'll take you out again after dinner. I promise."

Andy just shrugged his shoulders to me as we passed him. Andy did his best to convince Connor that he'd get to go sledding again after his nap. Poor Andy had his hands full with them.

My nephews were adventurous and confident about trying new things. They were certain their dad, Aunt Liz, Mom-Mom, Pop-pop and Uncle Kyle would make sure they were safe. Still, there were very young guys and they were a handful for my brother. Stinky diapers, whiny kids, messes galore – Andy bore it all and never complained. I could only hope I would do as well when I had kids.

Kelly and I met up with our friends on the hill. We spent a couple hours sledding. Andy and Liz joined us after they got the twins down for their nap. Mom sent word that we were to come back for supper around 5:30 pm.

Kelly and I watched the news after dinner. Channel 8 reported that the travel ban was going to be lifted tomorrow morning at six am. Kelly was relieved that she was finally going to be able to go home.

Later in the broadcast the weatherman reported on the big storm heading across northern Illinois and Indiana. It shut down O'Hare Airport in Chicago and dumped almost a foot of snow. Fortunately the storm was expected to track to the north along the Great Lakes and hammer Erie, Buffalo and southern Ontario. Kelly and I noted that Damian, my roommate, was in for some fun.

Kelly and I caught up with the rest of the family out at the sledding hill after the weather report was over. Mom and Dad gave Hunter a couple toboggan runs before Mom took him back inside. Mom complained that she had overdone the sledding the last two days. She felt like a decrepit old lady.

Dad, Andy, Liz, Kelly, and I took turns giving the twins sled rides or toboggan runs down the hill. Noah and Connor were learning to enjoy the snow and winter weather just as much as the rest of our family. Give them a few more years and we'll have them on skis or snowboards.

Dad and Andy took the twins inside after an hour of sledding so they could get ready for bed. Kelly, Liz and I continued sledding. Andy returned a half later after the boys had their bath for the night. Mom agreed to put the boys to bed.

Kelly and I were hanging out at the top of the hill waiting for our turns with the sleds when I remembered something Coach Burton asked me to do while I was home. Fortunately Matt Sauder, Cody Stevens and Dave Mitchell were handy when I remembered.

I gathered the three together. "I meant to talk to you guys tomorrow when we did film study after school," I explained. "I hear they closed school again."

"That right," Matt agreed.

"I love it," Dave added. "Maybe we won't have school all week."

"Yeah," Cody said. "That would be totally cool!"

"Whatever," I replied. "I wanted to talk to you guys about football camp."

"Football camp?" Cody asked.

"Why do you want to talk about that?" Matt asked. "Coach Caffrey doesn't start that until the middle of August."

"No, not your high school football training," I explained. "Colleges run summer camp programs where you can go learn from the coaching staffs. Penn State runs one late in June. You guys should sign up. You could improve your skills a lot."

"You said, 'work with the coaching staff.' Would we be working with Coach Paterno and Coach Burton?" Matt asked.

"Exactly," I agreed. "Coach Burton runs the program. You guys would have an opportunity to learn from excellent coaches, see other good high school football players and to sharpen your skills from next season. I trust you guys expect to continue our high school's winning record."

"Of course," "Duh, yeah!" "Well yeah, Kyle." My three protégés responded.

"When do they do this and how much does it cost?" Matt asked.

“Good questions,” I said. “It was around \$300 three years ago when I went. I guess the price went up some. It is held near the end of June.”

“Oh shit!” Cody exclaimed. “I want to work at scout camp again. I guess that leaves me out.”

“Me too,” both Matt and Dave echoed.

“No, talk to Mr. Holloway,” I explained. “He’ll give you time off to attend football camp. He did for me. Arrange it with him before you sign your contract to work at scout camp.”

“Cool!” “All right!”

“Would this give me a better chance of playing football for Penn State?” Matt asked.
“I’ve been a fan of them all my life. I’d love to play for them.”

“Whoa, you’re getting into dangerous territory for me,” I replied. “I’m a member of the team and the NCAA doesn’t allow us to talk with guys your age about recruiting. All of you should talk with Coach Caffrey and find out about college recruiting.”

I proceeded to give the kids the quick description of where to learn more about college recruiting. All three thanked me for clueing them in about the camps. I was confident that Coach Burton would be able to observe and evaluate how they perform next summer. It would be good for the kids and good for my school.

I enjoyed spending time with my friends on the sledding hill that evening. Our group was splitting up tomorrow now that the roads were going to reopen. Harrison and Kelly would head back home. Jeremy and Kathy planned to leave for Notre Dame tomorrow afternoon. Ed was flying down to Gainesville Thursday. Penny, Hal and Tammy were heading back to school on Friday.

The next time our group would be together would be spring break. Everyone still planned to camp out down in Panama City Beach like last year. Penny asked if we minded if Harrison came. We didn’t. Ed let us know that his roommate Eric Peters planned to join us. One or two other Gators were considering it too.

Our group broke up and headed for our homes around 10:30. Kelly and I grabbed a snack up stairs and hung out with Mom, Dad, Liz and Andy in the family room until the news came on at eleven o’clock.

Kelly packed her things when we went downstairs to our bedroom while I watched the news and weather. The big Midwest storm was expected to sock the Great Lakes region. The freeze line was expected be midway between Pittsburgh and Erie. Kelly should have wet roads for part of her drive home and no ice to deal with.

Kelly and I made love before we cuddled together and went to sleep.

The alarm roused me from a good dream when it woke me suddenly at seven am the next morning. I shook Kelly awake and told her to go get a shower. I cat napped for a few minutes until the water stopped in the bathroom. I got up and was dressed by the time Kelly came out of the bathroom.

The two of us headed upstairs where we met Mom. She was washing up the twins after their breakfast. For once they didn't bother us for food while we made our meal. I scrambled some eggs for us and popped brown and serve sausage in the microwave. Kelly was anxious to get on the road, so we didn't linger over our breakfast.

I helped Kelly carry her bags upstairs. Connor and Noah joined Mom by the front door. Mom wished Kelly a safe trip home. Connor and Noah said, "Bye bye" "Bye Keh-EE" and waved as we walked out to her car. All the bags went in the side passenger door of her mini-van.

Kelly and I hugged and kissed in the street before she left. "God, I'm going to miss you," Kelly said.

"I'll miss you too," I replied. "I'll see you at dinner on Sunday night."

"I wish I didn't have to meet my advisor Friday afternoon," Kelly said. "...or that you would come back to campus early."

"I get so little time home with my family," I explained. "I want to make the most of the time I have available."

"I understand," Kelly replied. We kissed one last time. "I'll see you Sunday. Call me when you get on campus."

"I will, I promise," I answered. I helped Kelly climb in the passenger's door. I stood in the street and watched as she slid across to the driver's seat, buckled up, started the car and carefully pulled away from the space we had cleared for her yesterday. I waved good bye one last time as my lover drove down our street.

I headed back inside, passing Mom as she left for work. Andy was in the family room with Hunter and the twins. Liz was sleeping in. I decided she had the right idea. I went back downstairs, undressed and went back to sleep.

I awoke from a sound sleep awhile later to the sound of my cell phone ringing. I grabbed it off the nightstand and grunted, "Hello?"

"Kyle, it's Bill O'Keefe," the voice said.

My brain slowly registered who it was. Why was Kelly's dad calling me? The next thought that popped into my head was, 'Kelly's had an accident!' Why else would her father call me?

"What's wrong Bill?" I asked breathlessly. "Is Kelly OK? Is she hurt?"

"No... no, relax Kyle," Bill reassured me. "Kelly is fine. She's at a McDonalds in Bedford." I breathed a sigh of relief. "I need a huge favor from you. We're getting hail and freezing rain here in Pittsburgh. Driving is turning treacherous. I'm worried about my little girl driving for hours on bad roads. Could she stay with your family another day or two? Would your parents mind?"

"Tell Kelly to come back here," I answered. "I'll give my Mom a call, but I already know the answer. Kelly is welcome here anytime."

"That's a relief," Bill replied. "Kelly said the rain had turned to sleet just about the time I called her fifteen minutes ago. I don't want her driving a couple hours through the mountains on icy roads today. She can come home tomorrow after the turnpike is salted and safe for driving."

"That sounds like a plan Bill," I agreed. "What is your phone number? I want to be able to reach you today if I need to."

I jotted down the number Bill gave me. He said he would send Kelly back my way. I was to call him after I talked with Mom and confirmed. I called Mom at work as soon as I got off the phone with Bill. Of course Mom insisted that Kelly should return back to Paradise. Bill was relieved when I called him back and confirmed the arrangements. Kelly called a few minutes later to confirm all the arrangements. She hoped to be back to my house before dinner.

I showered, dressed and got myself some lunch upstairs. I opened up Kelly's parking space with the snow blower so she would be able to pull in again when she returned. I spent a half hour clearing my car, moving it to the driveway and the snow blowing its parking space too. I cleared out the snow that had been around Harrison's little Mini while I was at it. The front of our lot looked much better than it had been in days. The temperature had risen into the high thirties, so the snow was melting nicely. In a day or two all the snow would be just a memory.

I headed over to the grocery store when I finished clearing snow. I needed to pick up a few things for dinner for the remainder of the week. I was cooking again, now that Mom was back at work.

I hung out in the afternoon, reading and listening to my MP3 player until it was time for dinner and until my girl made it safely back to me. Around four o'clock I headed upstairs to start dinner. I had barely started making the meat loaf when the door bell rang.

I opened the front door and Kelly flew into my arms. "I'm soooo glad to be here Kyle," Kelly sobbed. "The roads were horrible. I was so scared."

I hugged Kelly and gave her a kiss. "I'm glad you're safe honey." We hugged for a little longer, periodically exchanging kisses. When I felt Kelly relax a little I asked, "What happened that made you so afraid?"

"I was doing OK when I left Bedford for here," Kelly explained. "It was sleeting but the roads weren't too bad. That changed when I came through the last tunnel. The roads were starting to freeze and I could feel the mini-van slide as I started down the hill. Some nut in a red Nissan SUV went flying by me in the left lane. I thought he was crazy."

"He probably was," I agreed. "If the roads were bad it doesn't make sense to speed."

"It really didn't," Kelly said, continuing the story. "I slowed down a few miles ahead near the bottom of the mountain. There were flashing lights along the side of the road. When I went by the accident I saw it was that red Murano that passed me after I came out of the tunnel. The SUV was upside and smashed against a tree. He had all wheel drive. I'm in my mom's mini-van. How could I make it back here safely in that?"

"The guy in the SUV was driving too fast," I countered. "You were careful right?"

"Super careful," Kelly agreed. "I was afraid of skidding off the road and ending up like that guy the whole way here."

"You're safe now," I reassured my lover. I gave her another kiss to relax her. "How about we bring your bags back inside? After that I have to make supper."

"I'll help you honey," Kelly replied.

We brought her bags inside and took them downstairs to our bedroom. Kelly came upstairs to help me make the meat loaf for dinner. The twins were delighted to find Kelly again. She played with them to keep them distracted while I worked. I joined Kelly with the boys after the meat loaf went in the oven.

Kelly tried to call home to leave word that she made it back to Paradise safely. Surprisingly she couldn't get through, not even the answering machine at her house. She tried calling her dad at work, but the call couldn't be completed. It was curious.

Mom arrived home a little after five o'clock. Kelly and I kicked into high gear to finish supper. Dad arrived home from work about five minutes before Kelly and I set the dinner out on the table. The family sat down for dinner together.

Mom and Dad both complained about how mixed up things were at work. Some of Dad's employees weren't dug out yet and couldn't get to work. That was just as well. The excavator Dad contracted to plow snow at his office this winter didn't show up until after lunch. They had been working for the township the last two days helping clear roads. Things had been just as disorganized where Mom worked.

Kelly was concerned that her mom and dad hadn't returned her call. Mom reassured Kelly that she was welcome to stay as long as she needed at our house.

The twins begged to go sledding again after dinner. Mom and Dad weren't in the mood after work, so Hunter and our parents stayed inside. Liz, Andy, Kelly and I bundled up the twins and took them over to the sledding hill. School kids were out in force that evening. Ed, Jeremy and Kathy were packing to return to school the next morning, so they didn't show. Hal and Tammy came for awhile.

The forty degree temperature earlier in the day had ruined the nice sledding surface we had enjoyed earlier in the week. The sleds with runners no longer glided across the surface of the snow. They sunk in and stuck in the snow. The toboggan worked fine, so all of us took turns riding it down the hill.

Kelly's cell phone rang while she and I were taking Noah and Connor down the hill on one of the runs. She checked the number that called when we reached the bottom. I pulled the toboggan up the hill with Noah and Connor riding it while Kelly returned the call.

It was from her dad's cell phone. She talked with him a few minutes while Andy and Liz took the twins down the hill again. She filled me in on the call when she finished talking with her dad.

It seems the storm that hit Pittsburgh had perfect conditions for forming ice. The moisture was supplied from the weather from the south that was also warming us. It rode overtop of the cold arctic air. The precipitation came down as rain and freezing rain when it fell. It froze when it hit the cold air and cold surfaces on the ground. Roads, sidewalks, trees, bushes and utility lines all were coated with thick ice. Branches and whole trees came down from the weight of the ice. Power was out for hundreds of thousands in the area.

Kelly's house lost both power and phone service. Bill Sr. had run his car to charge up his cell phone so he could call Kelly. Bill said that Kelly was not to return home on Thursday. She should take her mom's mini-van to Penn State on Friday and the family would figure out a way to get it home later.

Kelly had mixed emotions about the news. She was happy to be able to spend two more nights with me. She was also worried about how her family was faring without electricity. She also was short on clothes. She packed for a long weekend and was going

to be gone from home for over a week by the time her family caught up with her to take the mini-van home. I reassured her that we would help her out with anything she needed.

Kelly and I headed back with Andy and Liz when they took the twins home at a quarter to eight. The sledding just wasn't as good as Monday and Tuesday and we missed spending time with all our friends.

Kelly and I consented to read the twins the 'Cat in the Hat' after they finished their bath. It was the twins' favorite. The rest of the family read it to them so often that they couldn't stomach reading the story anymore. I understood. I was reading it to them for the sixth time in the ten days I had been home for the holiday break.

Kelly and I headed to our basement lair after the twins went to bed. Kelly needed to do wash again. We intended to watch some TV cuddled together in bed while the washer did its job. You can't put horny, semi-nude college students in bed together without things getting fun. Kelly and I ended up 69ing with each other. We took a short break to move her clothes from the washer to the dryer and then I made love to Kelly while her clothes dried.

Kelly and I were quite mellow and satisfied when we went back upstairs for a snack when the wash was done. We endured a little teasing from Mom and Dad while we enjoyed our ice cream. The two of us went back downstairs after our snack.

The eleven o'clock news led with a story about the ice storm that hit western Pennsylvania. They had pictures of downed trees and power lines. Kelly was lucky her dad turned her around and sent her back to me that morning.

Kelly and I slept in on Thursday morning. The house was deserted when we got up around 10:30. The little kids went to day care, Mom and Dad to work and Liz and Andy were back to school.

We took advantage of the empty house to make love. It was relaxed, unhurried and without chance of interruption. It was nearly perfect. Kelly and I were spent, lying on our backs recovering.

"Kyle, can I ask you a big favor?" Kelly asked sweetly. I turned my head to look at her. Kelly smiled and batted her pretty baby blue eyes.

"Anything lover," I said agreeably. "Anything you want."

"Could you come back to Penn State with me tomorrow?" Kelly asked. Her smile turned to concern. "Driving in the ice yesterday scared me. I'd feel a lot better if you followed me up to campus. You would be there for me if anything happens."

I hesitated before I answered. I wasn't in any hurry to get back to campus. My vacation at home was wonderful and I didn't want to end it. I took a deep breath.

“Please?” Kelly pleaded. “Jen isn’t coming back until Saturday. We could spend Friday night together.” Kelly reached over and rubbed my stomach. “I’d feel much safer if you drove up with me tomorrow.”

I sighed again and relented. “OK, I’ll come along,” I answered. I was immediately engulfed by an ecstatic girlfriend who smothered me with kisses.

“I’m so happy you agreed Kyle,” Kelly gushed. “I feel better already.”

Kelly showed her appreciation in a more tangible way too. She ground herself against my crotch as she kissed me. A wet, wild and willing woman had the normal effect on me. I was hard in seconds. We made love one more time. We finally got up and showered around eleven o’clock.

After breakfast Kelly and I took a drive down to the convenience store on Route 30 and picked the Philadelphia paper. We spent an hour at my house reading the paper just the way we did at school every Sunday.

We had sandwiches for lunch and then settled in to watch a movie. Around four o’clock we started dinner. I made another one of the casseroles I had learned to cook in scouts. Casseroles are great. They are cheap and can feed a lot of people.

Mom and Dad thought it was a good idea for me to drive to campus with Kelly. Kelly’s dad called after dinner to let her know how things were at her home. The power and phones were still out. Bill decided that he needed to stay home over the weekend until things were going correctly. Kelly was to keep her mom’s mini-van for another week. She could drive it home the next weekend.

Kelly and I spent the evening packing our things and loading up our cars for tomorrow. We spent some time playing with Noah, Connor and Hunter before they went to bed. We also read the ‘Cat in the Hat’ to them before we tucked them in. Neither of us would see that story again for months.

Kelly and I said good bye to Liz and Andy and Kelly thanked Mom and Dad for their hospitality before we went to bed. We wouldn’t see my family in the morning. We planned to get up and to hit the road after my family left in the morning.

Kelly and I made love that evening before we fell asleep cuddled together. The week together had been great. The two of us were intimate more often in one week than we normally managed in a month together on campus. Life should be like this week all the time.

(To be continued)

Chapter 33

Kelly and I arrived back on campus Friday morning without any weather related incidents. We parked our cars side by side in the lot near Hartranft and Beaver Halls and took our things to our rooms. There were a few people on the fourth floor when I got upstairs. No football players came back this early. Damian's dad was bringing him back Sunday afternoon.

I went downstairs and met Kelly back at the cars. We took them over to the East Parking Deck together. We had lunch together at the dining hall.

After lunch Kelly headed for her meeting with her advisor. I went to the campus security office and picked up a temporary parking permit for Kelly. I met Kelly outside her advisor's office when I was finished. We went downtown so Kelly could pick up more clothes to get her through the next week.

Kelly told me about her meeting with her advisor.

"Boy, this meeting was a waste," Kelly griped. "All she wanted to talk about was what my minor would be. Like she couldn't tell by the five history courses I've taken or are going to take."

"So we could have come up tomorrow or Sunday?" I asked.

"Easily. Dr. Duncan could easily have waited 'til later to meet," Kelly replied. "She insisted that the meeting had to be done before the semester started." After a pause Kelly asked, "I know you're majoring in education. What is your minor?"

"The College of Education doesn't work that way exactly," I explained. "My degree will be a B. A. in Education specializing in secondary education. I am in the social studies option program. It's not really a minor like you have."

"Are you any closer to deciding between broadcast and print journalism?" I asked.

"I would prefer print but I think I will probably go for broadcast," Kelly replied. "As much as I love newspapers, I know they are dying out. I think the future will be in broadcast."

"You have the looks to pull it off," I said. "I'm sure you will look great on camera. You have a good speaking voice that should sound good on TV too."

"You're sweet," Kelly said. She gave me a kiss too. We headed down College Avenue for the clothing store.

Kelly picked up a couple pair of jeans, T-shirts, a bra and more panties. She would have enough clothing with what she brought to my house last week. Fortunately Kelly's dad agreed to cover the cost of her extra clothes. I guess he considered it a small price to pay to keep his daughter safe.

Kelly and I decided to have dinner at the dining hall. Kelly and I had just found a seat when I spotted Anders Voight escorting two obviously new students into the dining hall. I looked them over. I recognized Cuch's little brother Marco immediately. It took me a minute to remember the other. Jon Stafford, the hot shot quarterback from Pittsburgh had chosen our school. That was excellent.

Kelly and I invited Ander, Marco and Jon to eat with us. Anders and I introduced the guys to Kelly. Anders told us that they were staying on my floor in room 412. I would be seeing a lot of them. Vlad Lazlo, our senior fullback and R.A. on third floor Hartranft joined us a few minutes later with two more new team members. He introduced everyone to Etienne LeBlanc and Bob Smith, the outstanding tight end I escorted around campus last fall.

I asked Kelly for an hour so I could work out at the Lasch Building. I had skipped most of my training in the last week. I needed to get to work again. Anders and I took the four new guys over to the Lasch Building and showed them some simple exercises on the equipment in our weight room.

I asked Etienne if he had a nickname. He said he went by Etienne. He had an interesting personal history. He was born in Quebec and had immigrated to the United States when he was in kindergarten. He lived in Montpelier, Vermont.

The other three guys had more conventional histories. The Cuchiellas hailed from Holidaysburg. Bob was from Trenton, New Jersey. Jon came from outside Pittsburgh. He went to the same high school that Joe Montana had attended. The school had a long history of turning out excellent quarterbacks. Jon was just the latest in the line.

I met up with Kelly when I finished showering after my workout. We went downtown and caught a movie before going back to her room for the night. Kelly's dad called her during the movie. The message he left said he wanted to make arrangements for returning her mom's mini-van to Pittsburgh. It was too late to return the call so Kelly would wait until Sunday to call back.

Kelly and I went back to her room. We made love that evening. It was our eighth consecutive night together and neither of us was tired of being with the other. It would make up for the fact that we wouldn't get a chance to make love until next weekend.

Kelly and I slept late Saturday morning, confident that Jen and her parents wouldn't be able to get to campus from Berwyn before noontime. It was around 11:30 when I headed

back to my dorm to get a shower. The dorms were getting busy as students returned from the break and moved back into their rooms for this semester.

I grabbed a shower and was going back across the hall to my room when I bumped into Jay Nicholson and his mom.

“Jay!” I shouted in delight. “Man, it’s good to see you!” I stuck my hand out to my friend.

Jay leaned on his crutches as he shook my hand. I looked him over. He had a cast on his left leg from mid-thigh down to his foot. He had put on ten or fifteen pounds thanks to his enforced inactivity.

“It’s good to see you too Kyle,” Jay replied. The big smile on his face told me the feelings were genuine.

“It’s good to see you again Mrs. Nicholson,” I added.

“It’s pleasure Kyle,” she answered.

“How are you mending Jay?” I asked.

“Slowly... very slowly,” Jay answered. “I just got this cast last week. It’ll stay on for a month and then the doctors will replace with a walking cast. They think my leg will be strong enough to bear weight by then. This whole thing has been a total pain in the ass. I’m as fat as an elephant. I’m totally out of shape. Getting hurt sucks!”

“It does,” I agreed. “I was out of commission for eight months when I blew out my ACL in high school. It’s tough. You’ll rehab now. You’ll shed those pounds and get your strength back this spring. You’ll be running the team by fall. I know it.”

“Thanks for the vote of confidence,” Jay said.

“If you give me a couple minutes to dress,” I suggested. “I can help your mom bring your things in from the car.”

“I would really appreciate that Kyle,” Mrs. Nicholson said.

I dressed quickly and met Jay and his mom in Jay’s room. I tried Jon and Marco’s room and Bob and Etienne’s room for help. They weren’t around. I did find Anders in his room. He told me the new guys had meetings with the Coaching staff this morning. Anders and I helped Mrs. Nicholson move all of Jay’s things to his room.

Mrs. Nicholson thanked both of us profusely. She headed back for Newport News as soon as Jay was moved in. She planned to drive straight through and get home before it

was too late tonight. She and Jay had stayed at a hotel outside Harrisburg last night so she would be able to get home that day.

I called Kelly. She joined Anders, Jay and me for lunch. Jay asked if we knew if Stephanie Kolmar was back on campus yet. None of us knew. I explained that we hadn't seen her since she acted as Trevor's last second date for Omega Chi's formal dance back in December. Jay and Stephanie hadn't talked over the break. He was anxious to see her again.

Anders escorted Jay back to our dorm. I went with Kelly when she went to the bookstore to buy this semester's text books. I helped her carry most of them back to her room. We read the newspaper together. When we finished it I went over to the Lasch Building for my daily workout.

I gave Zack Hayes a call to find out his return plans for the semester. I wasn't sure if there was a party at Zack's apartment that night. Zack reported that he and Leigh Ann were coming back after church tomorrow. He said they had to talk with Reverend Hollinger. I was nosy and asked Zack what he needed with the Rev. He said all would be revealed in good time. I knew it must be wedding business. Zack told me on the flight home from LA that planning out the wedding was his main duty while he was home.

I showered and met Kelly back at her room. Jen had arrived from home. Kelly invited her to go downtown with us for dinner, but she said no. She had made plans with Bev, Cindy and Christian already.

Kelly and I decided to go to Baby's for burgers, fries and shakes. Kelly and I already did a movie, didn't know of any parties tonight, so we decided to go out bowling. We ran into Christian, Bev, Cindy and Jen at the lanes. That was their evening plans. We joined them when they asked. It was fun spending time with them. Everyone headed back to their own dorm rooms after we finished at the bowling alley. It was the first night I had slept alone in quite some time.

I didn't have any trouble returning to my college weekend schedule. I got up around eleven am on Sunday. It was nice to be up and not to have a hangover. I grabbed a shower and got dressed. I headed down the hall to Jay and Shawn's room to see if they wanted to join Kelly and me for brunch.

"Come on in," Shawn replied when I knocked at the door.

"Guys, do you want to head over for brunch?" I asked. "Kelly and I are going now."

"Sure," Shawn replied.

“Count me in,” Jay agreed.

“Shawn why don’t you see if Christian and GJ want to come,” I suggested. “I’ll do across the hall and see if Anders, Trevor and Tony are ready.”

“Trevor?” Jay barked. “No FUCKING way I’m eating with that backstabber! Count me out.” Jay hobbled back to his bed and plopped down. Shawn looked embarrassed at Jay’s outburst and stared away from me.

“What’s wrong?” I asked.

“I don’t want to talk about it,” Jay snapped.

“Oooooh-Kaaay,” I replied. “We can go without Trevor if you want. Kelly and I haven’t talked with you in months. We want to catch up on things with you.”

“All right, I’ll go as long as Trevor isn’t there,” Jay agreed. I thought Jay’s mood certainly turned foul quickly as I followed him out. Shawn picked up Christian and GJ and met us at the elevator.

I mouthed, ‘What happened?’ to Shawn as Jay climbed aboard. His silent reply was, ‘Later.’

Our group headed across the quad slowly, letting Jay set the pace. Jay was adept at using his crutches, but he was slower than the pace we athletes normally used. Bev, Cindy, Jen and Kelly met us at bottom of the stairs in Pollock Commons. I waited for Jay and the rest of the group to start up before following.

“Where’s Trevor?” Kelly asked innocently. Fortunately she was quiet enough that Jay didn’t hear and have another outburst.

“Jay and Trevor had a fight,” I whispered. “I don’t think it would be a good idea to ask about it yet. Jay’s in a pretty bad mood.”

Our group headed upstairs, picked up our food and found a table. Conversation flowed among our group around the table as we ate. The girls and Jay got to hear more about our trip to California and about the Rose Bowl game. Everyone compared stories of their vacation and experiences in the big storm. Jay and Anders were the only two people in our group who missed the blizzard.

Jay’s mood brightened considerably sitting and talking with us. If it wasn’t for the extra pounds he put on, the crutches and someone needing to help him get his meal, it would have been like he never had the accident. Hopefully whatever his problem was with Trevor would get worked out.

When we finished eating everyone returned their trays to the cleanup station, except Jay. Jay met us at the door out of the dining hall. We headed downstairs together. At the bottom of the steps most of our group headed back to the dorms.

“Kelly and I are stopping at the Mix,” I said. “We’ll catch up to you guys later.”

“Yeah,” Shawn added. “I’ve got something to pick up too. I’ll see you back at room Jay.”

“Yep, catch you later Byrd,” Jay replied.

The group headed out while Shawn, Kelly and I headed the opposite way down the hall. When the group was out of earshot, I asked pointedly, “What the hell happened between Jay and Trevor? They’ve always been good friends.”

“It’s ugly... real ugly,” Shawn explained. “Jay was anxious to get together with Stephanie yesterday after he got back on campus. He couldn’t reach her at for most for the afternoon. Steph called late afternoon and invited Jay to go downtown for supper at the Diner.”

“That’s a long walk on crutches,” I observed.

“Steph said she could pick Jay up,” Shawn explained.

“I didn’t know Steph had a car,” Kelly commented.

“She doesn’t,” Shawn replied. “Trevor showed up with Steph when she came to pick up Jay. I noticed right away that Trevor seemed real nervous. Steph’s hug and kiss seemed perfunctory too.”

“They’ve always been pretty demonstrative,” I observed.

“Yeah, they were almost as bad as the two of you,” Shawn replied with a wink. “Anyway, the three of them headed downtown for dinner. I didn’t really expect to see Jay back in our room again last night. After all, Steph and Jay haven’t seen each other in three months. I kind of expected he’d spend the night at Steph’s apartment.”

“Yeah, I would have expected that too,” I agreed.

“I was shocked when I got a call at 6:30 from Jay,” Shawn explained. “He was in a foul mood, worse than any I’ve ever seen. He needed a ride back to campus. It took me all night to get the story out of him.”

“OK, what’s up?” I asked.

“When they got to the Diner, Steph slid into the booth opposite Jay and beside Trevor instead of the other way around,” Shawn explained. “Jay said the meal went pretty well, though it was a little weird to have Trevor along on his date. Stephanie broke the news why Trevor was there over dessert. She was dumping Jay. Trevor had been her steady boyfriend for the past month.”

Stephanie and Trevor?” Kelly asked, incredulous.

“Shit! You’ve got to be kidding!” I exclaimed. “How could she break up with her boyfriend of two months that way? I thought Jay and Steph made a great couple.”

“Jay and Stephanie were great together,” Shawn replied. “...but they never were a couple, officially. They just dated a lot.”

“This doesn’t sound like Trevor...” I said. “...not at all. You just don’t go around stealing a teammate and friend’s girl. It isn’t done.”

“Not usually,” Shawn agreed.

“What are we going to do about it?” Kelly asked.

“Do about it?” I replied. “I don’t know that we should butt in. It’s their lives.”

“We can’t just sit around and let our friends hurt like this,” Kelly countered.

“I think that’s exactly what we should do,” I replied. “They’re big enough to look after themselves. We risk hurting our friendship with them if we meddle in things that aren’t our business.”

“Kyle’s right,” Shawn agreed. “I plan to keep my head down to avoid cross fire between them and try to be the best friend I can be to Trevor and to Jay.”

“We don’t want to damage our friendship with any of them,” I added. “Shawn has the right idea.”

“I guess,” Kelly said doubtfully. “I just feel that we should do something.”

None of us said more as we walked into the Mix. I picked up a newspaper, Kelly picked up a drink and Shawn grabbed some gum. We headed back to Hartranft. Kelly and I relaxed in my room and read the news.

I brooded a little as I read. How could Trevor do something like this to Jay? I always felt Trevor was a stand-up kind of guy. It seemed so out of character for him. Teammates just don’t do this sort of thing to each other.

Kelly's dad tracked Kelly down on her cell phone while we were at my room. Bill Sr. needed to make arrangements to get Kelly's mom's mini-van back home. Bill Jr. caught a ride back to college with a friend and left his car for his mom. Bill Jr. had to come home in two weeks for a high school classmate's wedding, so he could pick his car up then.

Bill Jr.'s car helped Kelly's mom, but it wasn't big enough to haul all the kids to Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, band, basketball, dance lessons, trumpet lessons and the myriad of other activities the kids had. Bill Sr. proposed that Kelly drive the mini-van home on Friday night or Saturday morning. He would drive her back to campus on Sunday afternoon.

It was a practical solution, but one I didn't like much. I would be without Kelly for the entire weekend. Before she hung up with her dad I suggested, "Kelly, I could follow you home on Saturday and bring you back on Sunday afternoon. What do you think?"

Kelly's huge smile told me what I wanted to know. "Daddy! Kyle has a great idea!" Kelly gushed.

She filled her dad in on the suggestion. I assume Bill Sr. was grateful for not needing to spend all Sunday afternoon and evening on the road. He quickly agreed to me coming home for the weekend. Kelly and I both were happy. We'd miss out on a party and a chance to sleep together but that was OK. We would at least get spend the time together. We had more than our fair share of sex the past week so we could stand a night in separate beds.

Kelly headed back to her room around mid-afternoon. She needed to do laundry again. This was her tenth day away from home with little more than a weekend's worth of clothing.

Damian arrived shortly after Kelly went back to her room. I helped him and his dad move his things back into our room. Damian and I caught up with each other after his dad left.

The ice storm that nailed Pittsburgh produced snow in Erie. He had to deal with a foot of snow from the storm but hadn't had any of the problems that Kelly's family dealt with or the problems the previous storm had produced for the eastern half of the state. He had a nice peaceful, relaxing vacation.

Damian headed over to meet Billy Robinson. The two of them had a supper invitation at Melanie and Sarah's apartment. I teased that I wouldn't wait up for him. Damian assured me that the two couples had a lot of catching up to do that evening. He didn't expect to be back until late.

I headed over to the Lasch Building to do my daily workout. I was part way through my routine when Zack Hayes called. He invited Kelly and me to join him, his roommates

and their girlfriends for dinner that evening. I conveyed the message to Kelly before I finished the workout.

Kelly and I showed up at Zack's apartment promptly at six o'clock. Evan welcomed us at the door. Zack and Leigh Ann were holding the dinner to ask us to help at the wedding. Zack had already asked Aaron Morano to be his best man. Keneisha, Jake's fiancée, would be the maid of honor. Tania Morano and Kelly were to be part of the wedding party.

Evan Foster, my brother Will and Leigh Ann's older brother Michael would be groomsmen. Zack wanted Karol Zizka, JT Hill, Jake Washington and me to be ushers.

The wedding was to be held at Leigh Ann's church in Schaefferstown on Saturday, June 18th. Zack surprised me when he said that Reverend Hollinger, our pastor, would officiate. Leigh Ann's minister had answered a call from another church a few months ago. Both Leigh Ann and Zack preferred Reverend Hollinger to the fill-in pastor from her church. The reception would be held at the Lantern Lodge in Myerstown.

Zack and Leigh Ann made us a simple but hearty dinner – spaghetti and meatballs, garlic bread and salad. The dinner and the company were enjoyable. The prime focus of conversation of course was Zack and Leigh Ann's wedding. The others discussed the futures too. Jake and Keneisha decided they would wait until after the draft to see where they were before setting a date for their wedding.

Evan, JT and Karol had no plans beyond doing well at the scouting combine and getting drafted into the NFL. Romance and settling down would wait a few more years. I understood their feelings. I wasn't quite ready to settle down now, but if Kelly and I were seniors... That would be entirely different.

Zack and Leigh Ann served ice cream for dessert. The group sat around and talked until around eight o'clock. Kelly and I decided that each of us could use a little personal time, so we went back to our own dorm rooms. We agreed to meet at Pollock Commons for breakfast the next morning at 8:00 am. That left us plenty of time to walk over to the Wartik Building for our history class.

Usually I don't have a problem going to sleep, but I got to thinking about the problem between Jay and Trevor after I went to bed. What impact would their disagreement have on our team? It wouldn't be good for the starting quarterback to be at war with the best defensive lineman on our team. That sort of things could force the rest of us to take sides and splinter the unity we had this season.

My first instinct was to keep my nose out of their business. Could I let this potential distraction harm our season before it even started? After a bit of soul searching, I decided I should talk with Trevor and get his side of the story. I would see after that if there was anything I could do to reconcile my two friends.

Kelly and I met for breakfast as planned on Monday morning. We walked together to our class. We had carefully coordinated our schedules as much as possible so we could be together in classes. We managed to schedule two history classes together, History 21 – American History from 1877 to present, and History 130 – The American Civil War.

We took our seats near the middle of the room when we arrived at 107 Wartik. A minute later Cameron Miller, my next door neighbor back at Hartranft walked in. Cam gave Kelly and me a big smile and sat down beside us. We talked for a few minutes, catching up on our activities during the break.

Our instructor for the course was Mr. John Adam Blanchard, a black man in his late twenties with a shaved head. Mr. Blanchard reviewed the outline for the course and then launched into his first lecture. He talked about the contested election in 1876 pitting Rutherford B. Hayes against Samuel J. Tilden. Three states sent two sets of electors to the Electoral College. Things were messier than the 1960, 2000 and 2004 elections.

I remember going to bed in 2004 wondering who would be president and being shocked to wake up the next morning and still not knowing who won thanks to the closeness of Ohio's vote. I was too young in 2000 to remember the weeks of wrangling after that election. I learned about it in high school.

Mr. Blanchard was no Dr. Brennan, but he seemed competent and an interesting lecturer. I knew I would enjoy the course but I also knew that I was going to seek out more courses that Dr. Brennan taught. She was simply the best teacher I had ever had in my life.

Kelly headed for Spanish 3 at the Thomas Building. I went to Sociology 1 in a medium sized lecture hall in the Waring Building. The professor arrived with a couple teaching assistants. She was an average sized woman, a little full figured but not overweight who looked to be around my parents' age. Her name was Dr. Suzanne J. Smith.

Dr. Smith talked outlined how we would learn about human social interaction and the development of societies over the next fifteen weeks. We would be doing a group project, doing term papers and engaging in debates during the course. It sounded interesting.

I went back to my dorm room and read part of the Soc 1 reading assignment until 11:30. Kelly and I headed for lunch together and then to our next class, History 130, The Civil War Era. Kelly and I had sat down at our table to eat when Cameron Miller joined the short line to get food. Cameron spotted us and gave us a wave. He joined us a couple minutes later.

“Hey guys, good to see you,” Cameron said cheerily as he sat down. “Taking an early lunch?”

“We have a 12:20 history class,” I explained.

“History?” Cameron asked. “History 130?” Kelly and I nodded yes. “I guess I should have guessed you’d be in that class too.”

“You bet,” I agreed. “What else would you expect from a civil war buff and future history teacher? I suppose you’re taking it too?”

Cameron cocked his head, gave me a funny look and replied, “Well, duh! I’m a buff and a history major. I scheduled that course just as soon as my advisor would let me. She wouldn’t let me take it until I had all the relevant introductory courses.” Cameron turned to Kelly and asked, “What’s your excuse for taking so much history?”

“I plan to minor in history,” Kelly answered. “Plus I get to spend more time with Kyle.”

“Both good reasons,” Cameron agreed.

The three of us talked about what we expected from our Civil War class, about our winter break, and how the Thon fundraising was going. Cameron asked a lot of questions about how we managed to dominate Oregon at the Rose Bowl. He was obviously well versed in football from his days playing linebacker in high school.

It was fun to visit with Cameron. I’d missed spending time with him in the fall when I was immersed in football. The three of us walked over to the Ferguson Building for our class. We took adjoining seats in Room 205.

Our professor was Dr. William J. Barnes, Professor of Civil War History for the university. Dr. Barnes was in his mid-forties. He had a touch of gray along the sides mixed in with his brown hair.

Dr. Barnes reviewed the outline of the course. It was much as I expected. We would start with the Mexican War, discuss the causes of the war and then review the course of the war. Dr. Barnes’ first lecture dealt with the Mexican War and the expansion of the United States. Kelly, Cameron and I all were excited about the course.

Kelly headed back to her dorm to work on her Spanish vocabulary. I headed down Curtin Avenue to the Natatorium. I wanted to set up a schedule with Mr. Coleman to lifeguard during this semester so I could earn some money to replenish my bank account.

I headed over to the Lasch Building after Mr. Coleman set up my schedule for lifeguarding. I stopped by my locker first. Coach Burton had put out the schedule of end-of-season performance reviews. I was to meet with him at 3:30 pm on Thursday, January 20th.

I headed for the video room next. I planned to use my free time this semester studying next year's opponents. Our first opponent next fall would be Boston College. I had been studying videos of their games last season for about forty-five minutes when Trevor Conwell walked into the video room.

"Hey Kyle, how's it going?" Trevor said in greeting.

"Not too bad," I replied. "I haven't seen you around since I got back."

"I've been keeping a low profile," Trevor responded. "Did you hear about my problem with Jay?"

"Uh... yeah, I did," I said. "You and Stephanie? What is that about?"

Trevor hung his head momentarily, pursed his lips and answered. "It was a pretty shitty thing to do to Jay," Trevor said. He looked up and stared into my eyes. "It wasn't anything Steph and I planned. It just happened."

I looked at him questioningly. "Oops, I stole your girl?"

"You of all people on our team should understand this," Trevor explained. "Steph and I showed up at Omega Chi's formal as nothing more than friends. The two of us just clicked that night. We fit together. It's like we're made for each other."

"Why would I understand about stealing a teammate's girlfriend?" I replied.

"I'm not saying you stole Kelly from anyone," Trevor agreed. "... but she was dating Tanner before she went with you. What I meant was the you and Kelly are like this perfect couple. The two of you were a couple before you even went on your first date. You are made for each other."

"OK, I get that part," I answered. "Are you saying that you and Stephanie are in love the way Kelly and I am?"

"That's exactly what I am saying," Trevor answered. "You know I've never been big on commitment. I've been with a lot of girls the last two years. I don't know how, but the more time I spent with Steph that evening, the stronger my feelings became. By the time we started dancing, I KNEW she was the girl. You know... THE girl, like in forever."

"Really?" I replied. Trevor had a reputation for being completely uninterested in any kind of long term relationship in the time I've known him.

"The best part is that Steph feels the same way about me as I feel about her," Trevor said. "I wasn't trying to steal Jay's girlfriend. It just happened. Neither of Steph nor I can change how we feel. Anyway, Jay and Stephanie never were a couple. Steph said they never agreed to be a couple."

“They didn’t?” I asked. Trevor nodded yes in answer to my question.

“Steph said she kept hoping Jay would ask her to be exclusive, but he never did,” Trevor explained. “She said he seemed to be working up to asking her, but every time he changed the subject before he could get the words out. For my part I still consider Jay to be a friend. I don’t know how to fix this.”

“We do need to fix things,” I agreed. “Our team doesn’t need the quarterback and a key defender fighting with each other.”

“No, that wouldn’t be good,” Trevor agreed, shaking his head to reinforce his agreement. “I don’t know how to accomplish it. Jay threw me out of his room and won’t speak to me.”

“I’ll talk to Zack for advice,” I replied. “I’m sure he’ll have some ideas.”

Trevor thanked me for agreeing to help mend this potential tear apart the fabric of our team. He sat down at one of the other computers and began his own video study. I felt a little better already. Stealing a friend’s girlfriend was totally out of character for the Trevor I knew. Hopefully Zack would have a suggestion that would help us reconcile Jay and Trevor.

I headed for the weight room around four o’clock to do my daily workout. I was midway through my routine when Zack Hayes arrived to workout. When I was finished with my workout I went over and described my dilemma with Jay and Trevor.

“So?” Zack asked when I finished. “What do you want from me?”

“I was looking for ideas or suggestions about how we handle this situation before it becomes a problem for our team,” I replied.

“Your team,” Zack corrected. “I don’t play here anymore.” My face fell. Why would my friend not help us? Zack correctly read me thoughts. “I’m leaving in a few months. I won’t be playing anymore games here. The players for next year need to address this. How do you think this problem should be dealt with?”

“I’m not sure,” I answered. “That’s why I wanted some ideas from you.”

“What do you know about conflict resolution?” Zack asked. “You did Junior Leader Training in scouts, right?”

“They changed the name to Youth Leader Training when I took it,” I replied. “...but it’s basically the same course you probably did in scouts.”

“Do you remember EAR?” Zack asked.

That did ring a bell in my head. “Express, Address and Resolve,” I said.

“Exactly,” Zack said. “Have you talked with everyone involved in this situation?”

“No, I haven’t,” I answered.

“Start there Kyle. Get Jay, Trevor and uh... the girl...” Zack said.

“Stephanie,” I added.

“...and Stephanie to express their side of the conflict,” Zack said.

“I know and then I get them together and get them to address their concerns to each other and then encourage them to resolve their problem,” I continued. “I remember what they taught me now.”

“Good, I won’t be around next season to help you guys,” Zack explained. “You and the leaders on the team need to stand on your own now.”

“Yeah, I guess,” I answered doubtfully.

“You’re one of the stars on this team,” Zack countered. “That means you need to be one of the leaders. Your team has a problem. You deal with it.”

“I’ll do what I can,” I replied. “Thanks for talking with me Zack.”

I walked away surprised at Zack’s response. I knew Trevor, Jay and I would have to start helping to lead the team next season, but I hadn’t expected to have to do that yet. Hopefully I was up to the task. Reconciling Jay and Trevor seemed like a hard task to start with to demonstrate my abilities as a leader.

I headed back to the dorm after showering. My usual group of friends got together to go for dinner, less Trevor. We met Bev, Cindy, Jen and Kelly outside the dining hall. It was nice to be back together with Jay and my other friends. Jay’s mood had improved that day, probably because he felt a part of the university again now that he was back at class.

Kelly and I headed for her room after dinner. I enlisted Kelly’s help before we started studying. If I was going to get everyone to express their feelings about the Trevor/Jay problem I would need to get Steph’s perspective. Kelly would be much better at that than me. Kelly readily agreed to help. She was worried by the strained relations between Jay and Trevor too.

Kelly called Stephanie and invited her to meet for lunch tomorrow at the HUB. I would find out more tomorrow evening. Kelly and I read our History 21 assignment together

and discussed the reading to help us prepare for class. We watched some TV before I headed back to my room.

It was Damian's turn to laugh at me this semester. I had eight o'clock classes on Tuesdays and Thursday. Damian's careful planning allowed him to avoid those dreaded classes entirely this semester.

I got up, showered and dressed quietly, not disturbing my slumbering roommate. I grabbed some breakfast and then headed to the north end of campus for the Visual Arts Building. I had Art 10, Introduction to Drawing; a course intended for non-majors such as me. Ms. Julie Cunningham was our instructor. We had 19 students in the studio where we would spend three hours Tuesday and Thursday mornings drawing various subjects. I thought the course sounded like fun. I enjoyed art in high school even though I wasn't particularly talented at it.

I had to hurry across campus to get to the Hosler Building for my Geography 20 lab by 11:15 am. Tom Stewart, a grad student, led our group of twenty-three students. He briefly reviewed what we would do in the course and then dismissed us. There really wasn't anything to do in the lab until after our first lecture.

Normally the lab would dismiss at 12:05 pm. I would have fifty-five minutes to get across campus to Pollock Commons for lunch, eat and then get back across campus again to the Deike Building, beside our lab building. Time was going to be a premium on Tuesdays.

I found Chip Brinton heading inside the dining hall when I arrived. We grabbed our lunch and found a table. I quizzed Chip about his off-season study plans. He hoped we would be able to continue studying together the way we did in the fall. I agreed on one condition. I wanted him to spend some time with Damian and me on passing drills. All of us could use practice together.

Damian needed work to become a decent pass receiver out of the backfield. I felt that was the key to him becoming our feature running back. He already was a good runner and an excellent blocker.

I needed to work with Chip so we could get our timing down. Zack and I had worked together so long that we had an almost instinctive feel for each other. Jay and I had gotten pretty good last fall at understanding each other. Chip and I had too little time together to develop that same feel. Chip and I agreed to compare schedules with Damian and find time to work together.

I headed back across campus for my Geography lecture. There were around a hundred students in Room 22 of the Deike Building. Dr. E. William McMahon taught the course.

His outline of the class sounded like it would be interesting. I expected that this would enjoy the course.

Chip joined me later in the afternoon studying video of Boston College. I planned to work on each opponent for a week this semester. I'd have a good understanding of what each opponent did last season by the end of school.

Kelly and I didn't meet up until dinner time. She was anxious to talk, but couldn't since Jay was with our dinner group. The two of us went straight to her room after dinner. Jen was gracious enough to give us privacy for our conversation.

Kelly reported on her lunch with Steph. Stephanie confirmed the things that Trevor had told me yesterday. What was significant was the information that Stephanie added about her relationship with Jay during the five weeks they dated.

As Trevor indicated, Jay never asked Steph to go steady with him. Three times Steph thought Jay was ready to bring up the subject of being exclusive, but each time he talked around the edges and then changed the subject before he asked for a commitment. Steph revealed that had Jay asked last October, she would have said yes to him.

Stephanie tried to keep in touch while Jay was in the hospital in Birmingham and then after he got home. They talked every day or two at first but the calls dwindled as November moved on to December. By the time of Omega Chi's formal dance, they talked maybe once a week, always when Stephanie called Jay. All of this left her unsure whether Jay was still interested in her.

The feelings unleashed in Stephanie the night she and Trevor went to the formal dance were every bit as intense for her as they were for Trevor. The two of them spent every possible minute of finals week together. Before Stephanie went back home to Bucks County at the end of the semester Trevor asked her to go steady. She accepted.

Both Stephanie and Trevor worried over the break how they were going to tell Jay when this semester started. Steph was firm that she would not break things off with Jay in a 'Dear John' letter or with a phone call. Trevor ended up staying with Stephanie in Woodmont last weekend the same way Kelly was with me. The two of them agreed the most responsible way to break the news to Jay would be face-to-face when the semester started.

They met with Jay on Sunday for dinner. Steph arranged Trevor to chauffeur Jay to the Diner. The meeting did not go well. Jay was so mad at Trevor that he refused to speak to him or ride back to the dorms with him. Shawn Byrd had to come over to give Jay a ride back to campus.

Kelly and I knew the rest the story from Sunday evening. Stephanie still liked and cared about Jay, but simply didn't love him the way she loved Trevor. Kelly said Steph used the same comparison about the love between Kelly and me and the way she and Trevor felt about each other that Trevor had used yesterday.

I explained what I had learned in Boy Scout leader training about conflict resolution. Kelly and I discussed ideas for a few minutes but didn't come up with a plan. I had to go over to the Lasch Building for my weekly Thon committee meeting.

Kelly and I got together after my meeting to continue planning our strategy. After a long discussion we decided the next step was to get Jay to agree to meet with Trevor and Stephanie. Trevor and Steph both wanted to remain friends with Jay. Once we got Jay to agree to meet, the three of them could express themselves and hopefully work out a resolution. After more discussion Kelly and I agreed that it would be best if I tackled Jay alone. There wasn't any need to make him feel like we were ganging up on him. I would tackle him tomorrow. Kelly and I both had reading to finish for History 130 that evening.

Tuesday night's football team Thon meeting was great. Every committee member showed up with pledges and contributions they had received in the past month. Cuch was positively ecstatic.

"\$22,410 baby," he declared when it was his turn to speak. "You can pass those movie tickets down the table Kyle." Bowing he added, "Thank you... thank you very much."

I glanced at the report folder he slid across the table to me. The amount in the total column said \$2,410. "You seem to be \$20,000 short Cuch," I said.

"It's Antwaan Booker's money," Cuch explained. "He told me he sent the check last weekend. He's good for it."

"Sorry, you only get credit for signed pledge cards or for checks turned in," I replied. "You can take Gina out to the movies next week, after the money comes."

"Who gets the tickets this week Kyle?" Jared Cantrell asked.

I looked over the envelopes and smiled. "Looks like Kelly and I are going out Saturday night," I said. "My \$10,470 is tops for the week."

"\$10,000! Shit!" Trevor exclaimed. "Who did you nail this time?"

"Mr. Engram and Mr. Jurevicius were the biggest of my generous contributors since our last meeting," I answered.

“Now we know what you were doing on the sidelines in the second half at the Rose Bowl,” Cuch observed.

“You know it,” I agreed. “I knew I had most of the third and fourth quarters to relax. Bobby and I had to talk about something.”

Cuch grinned and shook his head. “You’re a piece of work Kyle,” he said. “I’m still gonna beat you for that ski weekend.”

“You do that Cuch,” I replied. “I’ll be the first to congratulate you.”

I knew that he probably had the best chance of winning the overall tally in the end when Antwaan’s check arrived. My tally of \$25,910 since Thanksgiving was leading the group now but I didn’t expect many more large contributors.

I entered the last figures into my spreadsheet and then announced our current report period’s totals - \$57,290. We reviewed the alumni contact list and made sure someone was contacting every team alumnus on the list. We also reviewed the team roster to make sure all team members were contacted too. Zack and Leigh Ann invited all the committee members over to Zack’s apartment for ice cream after the meeting was over. I met Kelly there. She helped Leigh Ann serve everyone.

Zack and I got a chance to talk after the group left. I was curious to hear about how his student teaching was going this semester. Zack had been assigned to the Lewistown High School, the one I visited last spring for my first school visitation. He was assigned to work with Mr. Robert Kerr, an 11th and 12th grade Phys Ed teacher. He explained that the first few days were spent on campus with his coordinator/supervisor reviewing everything about the student teaching program. He would meet Mr. Kerr and the students at the high school on Thursday.

I bumped into Shawn Byrd in the bathroom on Wednesday morning. Shawn kindly told me Jay’s schedule for the day. He was going to be at the Lasch Building for a three o’clock appointment with our trainers for rehab. I decided I would hang out over there and be around when Jay finished rehab. We could use one of the study rooms so we could talk privately.

Cameron Miller met Kelly and me at breakfast and then walked with us to History 21. Mr. Blanchard lectured on the Roscoe Conkling’s New York Republican machine, James Garfield, Chet Arthur and the fight for civil service reform in the 1880’s. I headed to sociology while Kelly went to Spanish.

We met for an early lunch. Kelly and I rehearsed my arguments to convince Jay to meet with Trevor and Stephanie so they could resolve their differences. Kelly thought I was

ready by the time we headed for our Civil War history class. Dr. Barnes gave a good lecture on the founding of California and the acquisition of the southwest.

I met Chip over at the Lasch Building after class to study video of Boston College's games last season. My friend had paid attention when he worked with Zack and Jay in the fall. Chip had good observations as we watched BC's defense work. He made careful notes about how they handled various down and distance combinations. Chip was proving to be a real student of the game.

I headed for the weight room when Chip left. I began my workout, waiting for Jay to show up. Bless his heart, Jay showed up right on schedule. He hobbled into the training room to do his rehab.

Jay came out of the training room forty minutes later. I hopped up and caught up to him as he approached the door out of the weight room.

“You got a few minutes?” I queried. “There’s something I’d like to talk to you about.”

Jay glanced down at the watch on his hand and said, “Yeah, I got some time Kyle.”

“Good,” I said as I held the door open for my friend. “Let’s go to one of the study rooms to talk.”

“Sure, what’s up?” Jay asked as he led the way to the study area.

“I wanted to talk about how the team’s going to run next fall,” I said.

“How the team’s run?” Jay asked. “What’s that got to with us?”

“It’s best to talk in private,” I answered. Jay made his way back to one of the study rooms. He went in and had a seat at the table. I shut the door behind us and had a seat beside my friend.

“OK Kyle, what’s up that is so secretive?” Jay asked.

“I’ve been thinking about leadership next season,” I explained. “A year ago all of us knew who were going to be captains for the next season. Zack and Jake were a lock. We had to choose between Karol and Cuch on defense and between JT, Evan and Shawn on offense. We had plenty of candidates. Who are going to be captains next year?”

Jay hesitated for a moment and then offered, “Tyler Madden for one.”

“And?”

“Well... Ben?” Jay offered hesitantly. He was referring to Ben Walker, the junior who started at left guard this season.

“Ben’s said maybe four complete sentences this season,” I observed. “Do you really see him as a captain?”

“No, probably not,” Jay agreed. “What are you suggesting?”

“I see that the class ahead of us isn’t real strong on leadership,” I explained. “You remember when we were freshmen how Zack, Evan, JT, Jake, Shawn and Cuch helped Antwaan, Aaron and Bo keep the team straight?”

Jay chuckled and agreed, “Yeah I do. I seem to remember you pissing JT off. He grabbed you by the collar and hoisted you at least six inches off the ground when he chewed on your ass. He sure set the tone.”

“Yeah, that’s exactly what I mean,” I said. “You, me, Shawn, Trevor, Damian... we need to help next year’s captains.” Jay bristled slightly when I mentioned Trevor.

“What’s deal here Kyle?” Jay asked guardedly. “Why are we having this conversation right now?”

“You’re planning on being the starting quarterback, right?” I asked.

“Well yeah, of course,” Jay answered.

“It would be bad for the team if the starting quarterback and the star defensive end were fighting,” I said. Jay stiffened as he lost his smile. “Bad blood between you and Trevor will be bad for the team. The two of you need to work things out.”

“No fucking way I’ll have anything to do with that son of a bitch!” Jay shouted. “That fucker stole my girlfriend.”

“Was she YOUR girl?” I asked. Jay didn’t answer immediately. I let the silence hang.

Jay flushed a little and finally responded, “Are you saying she wasn’t?”

“Did you and Stephanie ever talk about being exclusive?” I asked.

Jay hung his head a little and admitted, “No, we never talked about that.”

“Why the hell not?” I demanded. “Don’t you think Stephanie would have said yes if you had asked?”

“Well, I just wasn’t sure if I was ready for that,” Jay replied. “You know I’ve never gone steady with anyone before.”

“Do you love her?” I asked.

“Maybe... um... I’m not sure,” Jay answered.

“Look Jay, none of this is black and white,” I said looking Jay square in the eye. “It’s shades of gray. You never asked Steph not to date others. She went on a date with Trevor and decided she liked him more than you.” Jay frowned but nodded in agreement. “It sucks to get dumped. I know that. I’ve been there too. The good of the football team requires that you make peace with Trevor and Stephanie.”

“I don’t know,” Jay answered. “It’s just wrong what he did.”

“Would Zack let something personal get in the way of success for the football team?” I asked. The look in Jay’s eyes told me I hit the right argument. Jay didn’t idolize Zack, but he did look up to and try to emulate my mentor.

“Yeah, whatever it takes for the good of the team, that’s Zack,” Jay admitted. After a moments pause he asked, “Did he put you up to this?”

“No. I went whining to Zack about this problem to get his help,” I explained. “He gave me a kick in the butt and told me to go fix it myself. It was time for me to step up and be a leader.”

“OK, if I agree to meet with Trevor and Stephanie, what’s next?” Jay asked.

“I’ll talk to Trevor and see if he can set up a time for the three of you to talk about things and to clear the air,” I replied.

Jay sighed and said, “Set it up Kyle. I guess I can meet with them and listen.”

“Excellent!” I replied. “Thanks for keeping an open mind. This will help keep our team together next season.”

I headed back to Hartranft with Jay. I didn’t envy my friend having to travel around a campus the size of ours on crutches. It had to be a pain in the ass.

Jay and I gathered up our friends from the fourth floor (less Trevor) and headed off to dinner. Kelly, Bev and the other girls met us at the dining hall. After dinner I tracked down Trevor and gave him the news about Jay. He was quite happy that I had convinced Jay to talk with him and Stephanie. He would set up the meeting as soon as possible.

I was in a grumpy mood when I got up for my eight am drawing class and left Damian sleeping. Thankfully the drawing class was interesting. I was in a better mood by the

time the class was finished three hours later. I ate a sandwich on the way to Stuckeman Family Center for my indoor climbing class. Fortunately the Visual Art Building was beside Stuckeman as I had almost no time between classes.

Mr. James Moody, our instructor, took roll and then hurried the twelve students outside to a university bus. We rode across State College to the YMCA for the class. We spent half the class learning how to rig the harnesses and how to belay. We were able to get in a little climbing before class ended.

I headed over to the Lasch Building for my season end evaluation with the coaches at 3:30 pm. I expected it would go a lot better than last year. I wasn't surprised. I met with Coach Burton, Coach Schroeder, Coach Adams and Coach Ferguson.

Coach Ferguson and Coach Burton gave a good review for my kick and punt returns this past season. They told me that they planned to lower number of returns next season to keep me fresher for running pass routes. I would probably get one or two opportunities in most games to keep me in practice, and then be the primary return man against teams like Ohio State and Michigan. I agreed that it made sense.

Coach Burton, Schroeder and Adams reviewed my work as a wide receiver. I had the best season by any Penn State receiver in school history, so their review of my performance as a receiver was excellent. They complimented me on the improvements I made in my blocking late in the season but wanted me to do better. I told them about the working with Damian and said I would continue to work with him off season.

Coach Burton finished the interview with another subject I had anticipated – leadership. Coach Burton wanted me to continue working with Chip Brinton the way I had during the season. Coach asked me to name who I thought were the best candidates for team captain. I offered Tyler Madden's name and added that I wasn't sure who else. Coach told me that he expected me and my classmates who were starters to support the team's captains. I assured him that I planned to do that.

Coach Burton challenged me at the end of the evaluation to continue to work as hard as I had the last year. It wasn't time for me to slack off and rest on my laurels. Coach expected me maintain my high level of performance for the next two seasons. I assured him that I planned to do exactly that. I was in a great mood when the evaluation was over.

I found a memo at my locker calling for a "key players" meeting on Thursday night at 7:00 pm. From the distribution list on the memo, it looked like it was sent out to all of the juniors and sophomores who were starters last season or were likely to start next season.

Jay was missing when we gathered up our crew at dinner time. Shawn Byrd reported that Trevor and Stephanie were taking Jay out to dinner that evening to have their discussion and clear the air. Hopefully they would be able to work things out.

I showed up a little early for the seven o'clock player's meeting. We met in the conference room usually used for defensive meetings. Tyler Madden, Andrew Perkins, Jibril Sloan and Amir Lee were already there. Ryan Reynolds, our offensive grad assistant, was present too. One by one, the players on the list arrived. Our right guard Ben Walker, Josh Bruno, Brendan Hayden, Glenn Korbel, Memed Marsic, Shawn Byrd and Wyatt Smith arrived. Damian came in and grabbed the seat on my left. Jay and Trevor came in together just before seven o'clock. Jay sat down beside me. Trevor took the seat beside him. My friends seemed to be in a decent mood, which I took as an excellent sign.

Tyler Madden signaled everyone to get quiet.

"Zack Hayes and Jake Washington asked me to organize this meeting," Tyler explained. "Zack and Jake wanted this group to keep things together for next year's team until we choose captains at the end of spring practice. All of you have had or are expected to have significant parts in next year's team, so that is why you are here."

"We have one important duty that needs to be carried out this month. As long as anyone can remember we've punked one of the freshman players. It is traditional to pick one of the top freshmen for the prank. I'm told the purpose is to keep our future stars from getting a swelled head. Does anyone have any nominations for this year's victim?"

"Bruce MacCauley," Glenn suggested immediately.

"Squirrel?" Jibril replied. "That's like shooting fish in a barrel. We could tell him he's being switched to play the Nittany Lion and he'd believe us. We've got to come up with someone better than him."

The group discussed about half of the twenty-one freshmen on the team. Chip Brinton and David McCall's names received the most discussion. We had almost settled on Chip.

"If we use Chip, what are we going to switch him too?" Damian asked.

"Linebacker," Josh suggested. "That's just the ticket."

"No, we need to keep him on offense," I countered.

"How about we make him an offensive lineman?" Shawn suggested.

"Offensive lineman?" Tyler replied. "Even MacCauley wouldn't believe a switch like that."

“What about fullback?” I suggested. “Fullbacks are a lot closer to his body type.”

Half a dozen of my teammates agreed with my suggestion. Most of the group settled on Chip after a few minutes more discussion.

“I’m not sure guys,” Trevor observed. “I don’t know if we can get Chip to buy a position change. He’s smart. He was valedictorian of his high school graduating class.”

“I think we can pull it off,” I replied. “Hey Ryan, could you draw up some new fullback plays? Some wildcat style ones with direct snaps to the fullback, fullback passes, etc. You know, some things that would justify this switch.”

“I could do that,” Ryan answered.

“Yeah, this could work,” Glenn added. “We should talk to Wes Kennedy [our #2 fullback]. He should let the word get around that the coaches are switching him to tailback. That would help sell Chip on the idea that we need someone new at fullback.”

The group discussed the idea for a few minutes and agreed that Chip’s destiny was at fullback – at least for the next week or two, as long as we could sustain the joke. The meeting broke up.

I hung back and walked back to the dorm with Jay. When the rest of the players got a good lead on us as we walked down Hastings Road, I asked Jay, “How did dinner go?”

“OK, I guess,” Jay replied. He took a deep breath. “This is tough, but I have a better understanding of what happened. Steph forcefully reminded me that I don’t have any claim over her and that she would date whoever she wanted.”

“Yeah,” I acknowledged.

“I don’t have a problem with Trevor asking her to be his emergency date for the dance,” Jay continued. “Hell, I would probably have suggested it if I was on campus that evening instead of at home. I worried about Stephanie be cooped up and not having fun while I was convalescing.”

“It was nice of Trevor to let her get out for a Saturday night,” I agreed.

“I don’t blame Trevor for falling for a great girl like her,” Jay said. “Who wouldn’t? I guess I can’t fight true love. Trevor and Steph swear that’s what they have. I just hurts to lose Steph.”

“Getting dumped sucks,” I agreed. “I’ve been there before. Keep looking, you’ll find someone eventually.”

“Yeah, I guess you’re right Kyle,” Jay agreed. “I had some fun and got laid regularly before Steph and I started dating. I guess I can find someone to take to bed at Zack’s party Saturday night. All my important parts are working, as long as whichever honey I hook up with doesn’t mind sitting on my face to get her fun.”

“You have fun Saturday night,” I corrected. “I have to miss Zack’s party. Kelly got storm-stayed at my house two weeks ago. She came straight from my house to here last weekend. The two of us are returning her mom’s car to Pittsburgh this weekend.”

Jay and I switched to other topics as we walked slowly back to our dorm. He was in a better mood than any time since he returned to campus. I was happy that I had helped my friends resolve their differences. Jay’s ache from the breakup would ease with time and I was certain he’d find someone else eventually.

Kelly and I did breakfast together with Cameron Miller on Friday morning and then headed for History 21. We split up after that class, me heading for Sociology while Kelly went to Spanish. We met for an early lunch before our Civil War history class. Kelly went back to room after class. I had to meet Chip for an hour of video study.

Chip was excited when we met. “Did you see the new plays the coaches are adding Kyle?”

“No, what do they have?” I asked innocently.

“Cool stuff,” Chip replied. “We’re going to put in some wildcat plays for the fullback – direct snaps and option passes by the fullback. It’s gonna shock our opponents when they see it.”

“Can I see them?” I asked. Chip handed the playbook sheets to me and I browsed through them. Ryan had done an excellent job in making these plays look real. I spent about thirty seconds before looking back up at Chip and commenting, “This is some interesting stuff.”

“Yeah,” he agreed. “Do you think Jabari or Wes can handle the passing? I’ve never seen them do that in practices.”

“I don’t know,” I agreed. “I’ve never seen either guy passing. I guess the coaches know what they’re doing.”

Chip agreed that we’d see in March when spring practice started. Chip certainly nibbled our bait. All we needed to do was to set the hook and reel him in next week when the winter workout schedules were handed out.

Half hour later, on schedule, Wes Kennedy popped into the video study room. He bounced in and announced gleefully, "Coach Schroeder just told me I'm switching to tailback. Isn't that cool?" Before we could answer Wes added, "Maybe I'll get some carries now!" and skipped out.

"One fullback on the team?" Chip commented after Wes left. "They install a bunch of plays for a fullback and then move the other guy to a different position. Did we get a fullback among this year's recruits?"

"Maybe," I answered. "I'm sure the coaches have a plan somewhere."

We went back to studying Boston College's defense from their game against West Virginia at the Orange Bowl. We worked until 3:30 pm. I headed back to my room to get my ski things and then picked up Kelly.

We headed over to Tussey Mountain Ski Area for the evening. Both of us purchased season passes last spring when they were discounted. We wanted to get as much use from them as possible. Kelly had to rent skis this time. We would make sure her ski equipment came back from home after the weekend.

Conditions were pretty good. We hadn't had many warm days to melt and then ice over the trails since the big storm two weeks earlier. We skied until closing time. I parked my car by Hartranft and Beaver Halls. No one would ticket it between 10:30 Friday night and our 9:30 Saturday morning departure for Pittsburgh.

Damian, God love him, volunteered to stay at Billy Robinson's room Friday night so Kelly and I could have privacy in my room. He described it as pay back for leaving him an empty room on Saturday night. Damian and Mel could enjoy themselves in total privacy.

Kelly and I made love twice that evening – once to satisfy ourselves and the second time to make up for not sleeping together on Saturday night. We certainly would not be sharing a bed at Kelly's house.

We were up at eight am on Saturday morning. Kelly headed back to her dorm to shower and pack her things for the trip. We grabbed breakfast sandwiches at the Mix before we left for Pittsburgh. I let Kelly lead the way, since she knew the roads much better in that part of the state than I did.

We arrived at her home in time for lunch with her mom, Sean, Laura, and Patrick. Bill Sr. was putting in some overtime at work, Ann and Bill Jr. were back at college and Mike was working at the Mickey D's that day. Mike had a winter job to supplement his meager summer pay from working at the local scout camp.

I moved my things into Mike and Bill Jr.'s room. This visit I would sleep in Bill's bed while Mike had the top bunk. Kelly and I headed off to the mall for some shopping and relaxation.

Kelly's mom, Kathy, made Kelly's favorite for her belated birthday dinner – lasagna. Bill Sr. and Mike made it home for dinner. We had an excellent four layer dark chocolate cake for dessert. I found out when we sang "Happy Birthday" to Kelly that her family was much more musically talented than mine.

I took Kelly out to the movies after dinner using the Thon reward money Aaron had put up for this week's top fundraiser. We enjoyed the night out. I probably would have to pay the way for future movies. I had made virtually all my contacts and wasn't likely to raise much more money for the Thon. Still, Kelly and I had done pretty well. The two of us raised over \$25,000 this year.

I went to Mass with Kelly and her family on Sunday morning. We had lunch with her family and then headed back to State College. The sun was sinking below the mountains to the west when I pulled in the parking lot by our dorms. I helped Kelly carry her things into her dorm room. We needed three trips to move her ski equipment, camping equipment and clothing into the dorm.

The team received a double shock on Monday. Coach Schroeder went for an interview for the open head coaching job at Lehigh University. He was a graduate of that school and had earned an excellent reputation the past two seasons for his work here at Penn State.

The second shock was closer to home. Ryan Reynolds, our offensive graduate assistant, flew out to Kentucky to be interviewed for a full-time coaching position. Coach Galen Hall was the offensive coordinator for our school before taking over at the University of Kentucky. Ryan had played back-up tight end when Coach Hall was here.

He flew out Monday afternoon for the interview. Tuesday afternoon we got the word that he had accepted the position of tight ends coach for the Wildcats. It was a great thing for the twenty-four year old would-be coach.

I was going to miss Ryan. He had been a huge help to me when I needed to learn the offense last season. He was friendly, approachable and had a first-rate football mind. I knew he would make an outstanding coach.

The winter training schedules came out Wednesday afternoon. Everyone in the know from the meeting last week knew what was up. The rest of the non-freshmen knew someone was getting punked, even if they didn't know who. Probably two-thirds of the members of the team were in the vicinity that afternoon when Chip found his workout schedule.

He skimmed through the first page, totally missing the top line that said, “Winfield Ellsworth Brinton IV, Fullback.” It covered his weight training. Those of us in the know covertly observed Chip as he read on. As he read the second page he got a puzzled look on his face. He continued reading.

He was in the diet section on the third page when he leaned over to Matt Frye, his roommate who had the adjoining locker. “They want me to eat double portions at meals. How about you?”

“No, I don’t have anything like that in mine,” Matt answered.

“Shit, I’ll gain twenty pounds if I follow this diet,” Chip exclaimed. He read a little more. “Holy shit! 240 pounds!”

Matt looked over at his friends, concern evident on his face. Around the locker room the other players tried to stifle laughs and to look disinterested.

“What’s up Chip?” Matt asked.

“This program has me gaining fifty-five pounds this spring,” Chip answered. “It can’t be right!”

“Are you sure you have the right one?” Matt asked.

Chip flipped back to the front cover, pointed at his name and said, “Winfield Ellsworth Brinton IV”

Matt stared at Chip’s schedule for a few seconds and then pointed at the line on the top. “It says fullback.”

“Fullback? I’m not a fullback!” Chip exclaimed. The “commotion” allowed the rest of us the look directly at Chip and Matt. “What the hell is wrong with this thing?” Chip demanded.

“Problem buddy?” Trevor asked helpfully.

“Coach Collins has me listed as a fullback on this workout program,” Chip explained.

“Maybe you should go talk to him and see what the problem is,” Trevor suggested.

“Yeah, that’s a good idea,” Chip agreed. He left in a hurry to find Coach Collins, our head trainer. We knew Coach was out of the building that afternoon.

When Chip was safely out of ear shot, everyone in the know had a good laugh at Chip’s expense. The other freshmen unsuccessfully tried to get an explanation from us. Tyler

Madden warned them to keep their mouths shut for now or there would be hell to pay. Trevor took Matt Frye aside and talked with him for a few minutes and convinced him that his best course of action for the next few days would be to play dumb whenever Chip talked about his “conversion.” Matt agreed reluctantly.

Chip came back a few minutes later, looking dazed and confused.

“What’s wrong?” I asked solicitously.

“I couldn’t find Coach Collins,” Chip explained. “I talked with Matt [Sheppard, our grad assistant conditioning coach]. He said I have the right workout plan. He delivered it personally.” Chip had a stricken look on his face when he stared at me. “I’ve been a quarterback all my life. I haven’t had carried the ball on planned runs since I was in seventh grade. Why would they do this to me?”

“Coach makes position switches all the time,” I allowed. “They just moved Wes Kennedy last week.” I watched as Chip put all the pieces together in his head in the way we expected.

“You don’t think the new fullback plays they added last week have something to do with this, do you?” Chip asked.

“I don’t know,” I replied. “It certainly would answer your question of whether our fullbacks have the ball handling skills to take direct snaps and passing skills to run those plays.”

“Yeah,” Chip agreed. He looked down at the floor. “Yeah it would. I’m going to see if I can find Coach Peterson.” Chip got up and walked out of the locker room in search of his quarterbacks coach. He wasn’t going to find Coach Peterson or any other coach for that matter. They all were on the road finalizing things with our perspective recruits to make sure everything went properly for signing day next Wednesday.

The locker room filled with laughter as soon as Chip was out of ear-shot. “Excellent work Trevor, Kyle and Wes,” Tyler Madden said. “Wiggle the bait in front of him, let him nibble, set the hook and then reel him in. Nice acting everyone. That was almost as much fun as last year with our star ‘linebacker’ Kyle Martin”

Cuch interjected, “I seem to remember you were a pretty outstanding punter the year before that.”

Tyler blushed a little and agreed, “Yeah, yeah I was.” Tyler was quiet for a few seconds before he added, “We’ll throw a party at my apartment Saturday night. We’ll celebrate Chip’s conversion to fullback or back to quarterback – whatever.”

We managed to keep the joke going through the weekend. Chip never managed to connect with any of the assistant coaches. I suspect they may have been avoiding him in the short amount of time they spent on campus that week.

Chip slowly accepted the possibility that he would be switching positions. Trevor and I tried to console him with only a little success. Chip had dreamed of playing quarterback in college and in the NFL most of his life. This switch was a hard blow to his ego. There was going to be hell to pay when he found out about the prank.

Kelly and I headed for Tussey Mountain after I finished up at the Lasch Building on Friday afternoon and skied until closing time. We ended up sleeping in our own rooms when we were finished. Both of us knew we would have Saturday night together – one way or another.

Cameron Miller and Joel Peterson had bugged us all week to drop by the frat's party on Saturday night. We agreed. Kelly's roommate Jen didn't end up with a date that evening so we asked Joel and Cameron if she could come too. He agreed.

Kelly and I both knew the odds were excellent that one of the brothers would end up inviting Jen to go home with him. If not... well, neither of us would object to including Jen in a threesome if she was so inclined.

Kelly and I headed for Tussey Mountain again on Saturday. The skiing Friday night was excellent so we wanted to take full advantage of good snow. We didn't get back to campus until 4:30 Saturday afternoon. We cleaned up and then met for dinner. Both of us were hungry for barbecue, so we headed downtown to Beulah's.

We went to Omega Chi after dinner. The brothers and sisters were friendly, as always. Kelly and I had more than our share of the excellent beer the frat always had at their parties. Kelly and I danced and talked with the partiers. The brothers kept Jen busy on the dance floor. She had a couple offers for the night but she turned them down.

Kelly, Jen and I wandered off around ten o'clock. I had promised Tyler Madden that I would stop by his party that evening. Tyler Madden roomed with Dermot McMillan, Jabari Walker and Glenn Korbel. Glenn met us at the door and welcomed us to the party. He directed us to the bar they set up in the kitchen. We grabbed more beers and mingled with the guests.

I was pretty drunk by the time I ran into Chip that evening. He was drunker than me. He was intent on convincing a cute freshman I hadn't met to accompany him back to his room for the evening. We left him to his quest.

Kelly, Jen and I drank a few beers, talked and enjoyed the music at the party. Cuch teased me about my harem. I didn't reply, I just gave him a knowing grin. Kelly, Jen and I headed back to the girls' room around a quarter to twelve.

I'd relate what happened when the three of us got to their room but it all is a blur. I had six, eight, maybe ten beers that evening. I'm not really sure; I lost count before we left the frat party. I remember naked limbs and bodies tangled together. I remember fucking Kelly one time while Jen gave me an awesome prostate massage. The three of us fell asleep in a tangled heap on the two mattresses on the floor.

All three of us woke up late Sunday morning with horrible hangovers from our partying. We were covered with dried semen, juices and saliva. The girls had my sperm dribbling from both their lower orifices. We followed our standard prescription – aspirin and lots of water rehydrate our bodies followed by long hot showers. The mid-day sun was blinding as it reflected off the snow when I made my way back to my dorm to clean up that morning.

I wore dark sunglasses when I met the girls for brunch. Many of my friends weren't much better shape than me. Trevor told me that Anders had showed up at the party to quiet things after Kelly, Jen and I left. Things got a little crazy at Tyler's party without Zack and his influence to keep things under control.

Kelly and I read about the Senior Bowl when we settled into my room for the afternoon. Zack had started the Senior Bowl for the North. He had out-dueled Brady Rasmussen, starter for the South, in the first half. Zack went 12 for 15 for 241 yards, three touchdowns and a field goal. Brady managed 17 for 26 for 210 yards, two touchdowns and a field goal. Elijah Carter came in and beat out Pete Cochran and the QB from Boston College in the second half to take the lead. Still the North needed late game interception by Karol Zizka to pull out the win.

Zack was named the MVP for the game. Zack, Brady and Elijah had established themselves as the best three quarterbacks in the draft. No one else in the country came close to them in accomplishments. All three of them were going in the first round and would make their new teams very happy.

Chip found Coach Burton Monday afternoon. Coach revealed the prank to my buddy. Chip swore revenge on all of us when he got back to the locker room. I was going to have to be on my guard. My classmates and the upper classmen knew not to pull things on me. Chip and the other freshmen hadn't learned that lesson yet.

Chip managed to put any animosity aside on Tuesday afternoon when he, Damian and I spent an hour practicing pass routes in Holuba Hall. We were fortunate that Coach Burton didn't mind us working out in the Holuba. We couldn't have done this outside. Our practice fields were covered with six to twelve inches of accumulated snow from the previous storms. The three of us planned to get together twice a week for an hour of passing to improve Damian's skills and to improve timing between Chip, Damian and me.

Cuch Cuchiella brought in Antwaan Booker's \$20,000 check at the next Thon committee meeting. That put Cuch firmly in front for the lead in fundraising and for the ski weekend for two that went to the top guy. Cuch was \$4000 ahead of me and there was little chance that Kelly and I could catch him.

Kelly and I decided a ski weekend with my Venturer Crew would have to do this season. They were going on February 18-20. I let Joe Baer know we were coming and sent our money to him for the weekend.

National Letter of Intent Day went well for our team. All the expected recruits signed with us. We also picked up a big bonus. Brian Henson, the fast and very talented wide receiver from Bloomsburg that visited last fall, had announced he was attending Michigan back in December.

A flurry of visits by Coaches Burton, Schroeder and Adams turned him around. Calls from Daryl Clark, Phil DiStefano, Glenn Walker and Zack Hayes all helped. Brian changed his mind Tuesday night and signed his letter of intent to come to Penn State on Wednesday morning.

We brought in one four star receiver. We weren't able to get the state's other top wide receiver. My brother Andy signed his letter of intent to play at Delaware Wednesday afternoon. I sent off a congratulatory e-mail that evening.

February flew along at a break neck pace. I loved my two history classes. Geography was fun. Sociology was OK. I understood it and was getting good marks so far. Intro to Drawing was fun. We did still life drawings for a few weeks. Ms. Cunningham promised us we would start on the human figure in a few weeks. I looked forward to the climbing session every Thursday. It was a blast. I would take that class every semester from now until graduation if they let me.

The first Saturday in February Jen had a date with a nice guy that was in her Stat class. She ended up going home with him that evening even though he wasn't interested in a long term relationship. That left Kelly's room empty for the two of us. We enjoyed ourselves at a more sedate party at Zack's apartment to celebrate Ryan Reynolds' new job in Kentucky. He was the guest of honor at the party. Kelly and I celebrated with my friend and coach until we went to bed for the evening around midnight. It was nice to share myself with my lover while I still was cognizant of what I was doing.

Coach Schroeder didn't get the head coaching job at Lehigh. Coach Burton recruited a surprising grad assistant, or more accurately a "future-grad" assistant to replace Ryan Reynolds. He hired Anders Voight to work for the team this spring coaching Jon Stafford in our offense. If Coach Burton liked his work and Anders was interested, Coach might hire him to continue in the fall while Anders worked on his Masters Degree in Geology.

The NFL Scouting Combine was planned for February 28th to March 5th. Zack Hayes, Shawn O'Conner, Evan Foster, JT Hill, Jake Washington and Karol Zizka all received invitations. Steve Cobb, Cuch Cuchiella and Hassan Jackson all hoped for but didn't receive invitations. They still had the chance to work out for NFL scouts at Penn State's scouting day in March.

The team's Thon committee decided to follow last year's pattern and to ask one of the team captains to dance at the Thon with his girlfriend. Jake and Keneisha weren't interested. We drew names out of the hat between Evan, Zack and Karol. Zack won. After some discussion with Leigh Ann, the couple agreed to represent us on the dance floor for the Thon weekend.

I put Tyler Madden in charge of organizing the support group for the Thon. He organized most of the team, as well as their girlfriends or dates into two hour shifts throughout the 46 hour marathon. The final report meeting for our Thon committee was on Tuesday, February 15th. When everyone turned in their last week's money I tallied everything. Leigh Ann and Kelly brought in pizza and soda to celebrate the successful conclusion. My friends enjoyed their snack while I tallied the total funds.

We raised \$137,020 dollars over the course of four months. As expected Cuch won the overall title for best fundraiser. He and his girlfriend Gina were heading to the Poconos for an all-expense paid weekend skiing the weekend after the Thon. Cuch beat me by \$1,800 dollars.

I called Aaron Morano later that evening to report the results of the Thon fundraiser. I got down to business after greeting my friend.

"Hey Aaron, it's Kyle Martin," I announced.

"Hi Kyle," Aaron responded. "What's up?"

"I thought I owed you a final report on the Thon," I answered. "We just finished the final report meeting for our team. We raised \$137,020 this year."

"Excuse me?" Aaron gasped. "Did you say \$137,000? That's amazing Kyle."

"I'm pleased with the effort," I agreed. "It's mostly due to your help with the incentives. It really motivated the guys to go out and raise money."

"I'm glad I could help," Aaron said. "When do you and Kelly want your ski weekend?"

"Um... Kelly and I didn't win it," I answered. "Cuch beat me by about \$1,800. That was the other reason I called. I wanted to know how you want to handle setting up the weekend for Cuch and Gina."

“Gina?” Aaron asked.

“Gina is his girlfriend for the past four months,” I replied.

Aaron and I talked for a couple minutes about the details. Cuch wanted to do the ski weekend the first weekend in March. Aaron would make arrangements at the ski lodge and cover that bill directly. He was sending out money to cover meals, gas and lift tickets for the weekend. I thanked Aaron for his help as we finished our call.

I barely had time to put my phone back in its case before it rang again. I glanced at the name as I popped the phone open. It was Aaron again.

“What’s up Aaron?” I asked in greeting.

“I was thinking after we ended the call,” Aaron explained. “You and Kelly did a fantastic job raising money for Thon. I feel bad that you aren’t getting some recognition for your effort. Some of the other guys I’ve talked to on the team have said you did an outstanding job organizing the fund drive. I would like to include you and Kelly in the ski weekend. You interested?”

“Are you serious?” I asked. “I have to check with Kelly, but I’m sure we’re interested.”

“Check with her and then get back to me Kyle,” Aaron replied.

I thanked him for his extremely generous offer and hung up the phone. I wasted no time giving Kelly the good news. She was delighted. We decided to go the same weekend as Cuch and Gina. I called Aaron back and let him know our plans.

I was lucky to have such a good friend. I needed to follow his example when I got out of school. Supporting my school and its worthy causes was the right thing to do.

Kelly and I were looking forward to our ski weekend with my Venturer Crew. We took off immediately after History 130 on Friday afternoon for the scout camp where my crew was staying. We arrived at the ski area around a quarter to four that afternoon. Kelly and I purchased full day lift tickets along with their “bounce back” tickets good for a second day. It was cheaper than night tickets today and full tickets with our group the next day.

We grabbed an early dinner and then hit the slopes. All trails were open on the mountain with groomed snow rather than natural snow. Mother Nature had been gentle with our state in February after socking it to us in January. Skiing conditions were decent. Kelly and I had a blast that evening. We didn’t pack up and head for the scout camp until after the 9:30 lift closing.

We drove the few miles to camp and hooked up with the crew at the same cabin as last year. The kids in the crew greeted us warmly when we arrived. They lost interest in us when the cracker barrel snack was served a couple minutes later.

We received a few surprises as we settled in. My brother Andy came. The restaurant where he worked was slow and they didn't need him that weekend. Mom and Dad were feeling kind hearted so they let him come on the trip. Will and Abby also decided they wanted a break from school in Philadelphia. They met the crew here a half hour before Kelly and I arrived.

The last surprise was my sister Liz. I expected her to bring her boyfriend Alex but she didn't. She dumped Alex a few days earlier for reasons she refused to discuss. My very attractive, well built sister was now available. Nearly all the unattached boys in the crew were all over her, to her total delight.

Kelly moved her things into the room with the other females. I moved into a bunk the males' room above Will and beside Justin Baer and his son Billy. Billy invited his friend Brian Miller. Joe and Barb Baer brought Billy's cousin Betsy along too. The Baers had indoctrinated their offspring in the delights of skiing, so they no longer were satisfied staying with grandma when the crew came here.

Kelly and I managed to grab some of the snack food before it disappeared. Dan Moyer, this year's crew president, told everyone to get to sleep early – lights out was at eleven o'clock. It took Joe and Justin forty minutes to get the kids to quiet down and go to sleep. That's pretty good for a Friday night on a scout camping trip.

Joe had the group up at 6:30 Saturday morning. We grabbed donuts, danish, cereal and orange juice before we hit the road. We were in the parking lot at the lodge by 7:45. Joe and Justin took the kids through the rental shop, had them outfitted and on the slopes just as the lifts turned on at 8:30.

Kelly and I went skiing with Will, Abby, Sherry and Barb. Joe and Justin spent the morning with Billy, Brian and Betsy, helping the eight year-olds to improve their skiing. The high school kids scattered all over the mountain using everything from the green beginner's trails to the double black diamond suicide trails.

Andy went out with his best friend Eric Connell, Eric's girlfriend Sammy, Heather Miller and a couple other seniors. I was happy Andy was getting to do some normal high school kid things this weekend. He certainly had earned some fun time for himself after the way he raised his boys in the last two years.

Justin and Joe joined our group at lunch. Billy, Betsy and Brian were too fast for the "old men" to keep up. The six grown-ups (well most of us were mostly grown-up) headed out for afternoon runs.

The bright sun produced slushy spots but we skied anyway. We had fun anyway, skiing, talking, and teasing each other. I enjoyed spending time with my big brother, his wife and the Baers. Three or four years ago Joe and Barb seemed impossibly old but now I could see my outlook on the world growing more similar to theirs. The fourteen and fifteen year-olds on this trip seemed completely immature now. The kids Liz's age – Sarah, Matt, Cody, Dave and the other tenth graders – weren't so bad.

I ended up beside Gary Harrison at dinner. He turned fourteen last month. This was his first camping trip with the Venturer Crew. We talked football for awhile. Gary was proud of the fact that he made #1 tight end for the JV team in the middle of last season. I counseled him to keep up with the video study this winter and to make sure he showed up for the spring passing drills. Those were the things that helped his brother Greg be a success. Gary thanked me for taking an interest in him.

The Baers, Will and Abby lingered over dinner. The 'Old Farts' were tired and needed their rest. Kelly and I were sociable, so we stayed in for awhile too. Gary Harrison and the other younger kids took off for more skiing. We were still there when Andy, Eric, Sammy, Heather and the other seniors came in for dinner.

I noticed Heather sat down beside Andy when they had dinner. Knowing the strange and rather tortured history the two of them have had, I observed while they were inside. Given a choice any girl in the world, Andy would probably choose to date Heather. Heather ran hot and cold for my brother. The two dated, fought, broke-up, got together and then broke up again repeatedly over the past five years. They were like two moths drawn to the intense white light of their feelings for each other.

Heather was in the attraction portion of their cycle. She sat close to Andy, was constantly leaning into him and bumping or touching my brother. Andy was responding, undoubtedly enjoying what time he could spend with Heather until the almost inevitable explosion. It probably was best if they didn't reconnect permanently anyway. Andy was committed to go to Delaware and Heather took early admission to Carnegie-Mellon. She was planning to study architecture there. Andy and Heather didn't need separation as an additional obstacle to their relationship on top of the history.

The seniors ate their meal and hurried back out to squeeze in more skiing. We 'older folks' followed them out for more skiing fifteen minutes later. We skied until after nine o'clock. Will, Abby, Kelly and I helped the Baers round up our crew, send the renters inside to return their equipment and to get everyone together for departure.

It was after ten o'clock before everyone was accounted for. We loaded up in the cars and headed back to camp. The crew had a snack before the 11:00 pm lights out.

I settled in as Joe turned out the lights but didn't go to sleep. I lay awake, listening to my MP3 player for another hour. The cabin got quieter much faster that night than on Friday night. I was still awake when the first venturer needed to get up to 'go to the bathroom'. I wasn't surprised that for every girl who needed to use the latrine, a guy always needed

to go too within a minute or two. The pair didn't return in a couple minutes either. They needed more like twenty or thirty minutes to take care of things. Some things do not change.

I wasn't surprised when Heather needed to go outside, followed a couple minutes later by my brother. I saw all the signs at dinner of them hooking up again, albeit briefly. I fell asleep before the pair came back to the cabin.

Joe had the crew up at seven am to get packed and to make breakfast. We had French toast, sausage and orange juice. Our crew always ate well on our trips. Dan Moyer got assigned three guys to clean out the cabin as people packed up.

This isn't intended as social commentary or anything, but I was packed up and waiting outside for Kelly to get her things together. Sometimes it just takes women awhile to get themselves together. Andy had his gear packed and in Justin's van already, so he was hanging with me.

I gave Andy a wink and nudge. "I guess you and Heather had some fun last night?"

"You knew?" Andy replied then chuckled. "Yeah, we got together last night."

"Did Heather bite your head off this morning like usual?" I asked.

"It's amazing," Andy answered. "She was really nice to me this morning."

"Do you think maybe you and Heather will stay together this time?" I asked.

"Together?" Andy snorted. "If I'm lucky she'll be civil to me for a few days. Long than that – I don't know."

"I hope the two of you work things out," I said. "You make a good couple."

"I'd love for us to be a couple again, but I'll take it a day at a time," Andy answered.

"If you two make a go of it long term," I said. "Don't make the same mistake I made. Don't try and stay together in college. It'd be a disaster."

"I know Kyle," Andy replied. "One of the advantages of being the younger brother is that I get to watch you and Will screw up. I've seen all kinds of ways to screw up and managed to avoid most of them." Andy huffed. "Except for the big one – getting your girlfriend pregnant."

"Andy, look at me," I said as I put a hand on his neck and pulled him close to me. I stared in his eyes. "All I can say on that is this: There but for the grace of God go I. I was lucky where you were unlucky. I could easily have a four year kid now."

“Really?” Andy said, trying to mask his surprise. “I didn’t know that. It’s been hard but I don’t know if I would change anything. I love Noah and Connor so much. I guess I’m really paying the price for my carelessness back then.”

“I don’t know if I ever told you this Andy,” I said. “I’m so proud of how you have handled this whole thing with Crystal getting pregnant, deciding to keep your boys and everything you are doing to raise them. You make a hell of a father.”

“Thanks Kyle, that really means a lot to me to hear you say that,” Andy replied.

“I really mean it Andy,” I replied. I gave my brother a hearty pat on the back. “You the man!”

Kelly came out with her gear as Andy thanked me again. “We’ll see you guys in three weeks,” I explained. “Kelly and I plan to stop in Lancaster at the end of spring break. See you then.”

“I’ll see you then Kyle,” Andy said. He gave Kelly a hug and a kiss on the cheek. “I’ll see both of you then.”

I helped Kelly load her things in my car. We said good bye to the crew, to the Baers, Will and Abby before we headed back to State College.

(To be continued)

Chapter 34

Things started to get busy the week before Thon, two weeks before our spring break. I had a mid-term in sociology on Friday, geography on Monday and term papers due in both history courses before spring break. Kelly's schedule wasn't better. In addition to the history term papers, she had a Spanish midterm Wednesday and Poly Sci midterm on Thursday. We spent Sunday afternoon and evening studying.

I bumped into Jay for the first time since the weekend on Monday afternoon when I was leaving our dorm to go to the Lasch Building to study video. Jay left early on Friday morning to fly down to Alabama to have his surgeon check out his leg. Jay had a walking cast on and was using one crutch for support instead of two.

“Good news from the doctor?” I asked pleasantly.

“Hell, yeah!” Jay replied enthusiastically. “Dr. Andrews said my leg is healing nicely. I’m allowed to put a little weight on it. The best news is that I’m allowed to start working out again – only curls, bench press and things like that where I’m sitting or lying down.”

“That’s good news Jay,” I responded.

“I’ve got to shed some of this,” Jay added, patting his stomach. “I’m up eighteen pounds since the accident.” Jay shook his head and added, “Any exercise will feel good.”

“Any chance you’ll have that thing off by spring practice?” I asked.

“No chance,” Jay answered. “I have an appointment to go back to Birmingham on the 19th of March for my next check up. I won’t need another cast if everything is good with my leg.”

“I hope everything works out for you,” I replied. “We’re going to need you this fall.”

“I’ll be ready Kyle,” Jay said. “You can count on it.”

“I am,” I agreed.

I was driving myself crazy trying to keep up with my studies and to prepare everything to support Zack and Leigh Ann during the Thon. I needed to get snacks, drinks and ice for the dancers. I needed to check the support team schedule to make sure everyone knew when they were on duty. I needed to coordinate our participation with Thon organizing committee. I needed to distribute floor passes to all the members of the support team.

Zack brought sanity back to my life with a pointed reminder that a good leader delegates responsibilities and then monitors performance rather than trying to do everything himself. I put Tyler Madden in charge of the support team duties. Damian volunteered to take care of the snacks and beverages with Christian's help. Cuch agreed to coordinate the Make-A-Wish kid's tours of the Lasch Building. Duty by duty I passed out all the jobs so I could fill my proper role – overseer and motivator.

The Make-A-Wish Foundation was one of the benefactors for the funds raised by the Thon. Some of the kids with cancer that the foundation was helping wanted to visit with the football team. The kids had some specific requests for players they wanted to meet. Zack Hayes, not unexpectedly, was the most popular. Shawn O'Conner, Jake Washington, Karol Zizka, Evan Foster, Cuch and I were all asked to meet with the kids.

The last player asked to meet with the kids was a surprise. One of the boys wanted to meet Brendan Hayden. Brendan is a decent linebacker but not one of our "name" players. I was curious why someone asked for him specifically.

Tuesday afternoon Trevor and I were hanging out outside the weight room while we waited for our roommates Damian and Tony King to finish their reps before dinner. We were talking about nothing in particular when Trevor asked, "You doing anything special this year for spring break?"

"Yeah, Kelly and I are going down to Panama City Beach again," I answered. "We had a good time last year. We're going to meet some of my friends from high school down there, stay near the beach, catch some sun and go out dancing in the evening."

"That sounds pretty cool," Trevor responded. "I'm not doing anything special, just vegging out at home I guess. Maybe I'll invite Stephanie to come down to Unionville for a visit. I spent part of a week at her house over winter break." Trevor paused and then adding wistfully, "I wish I had planned something special for Steph and me."

"Come down with us," I suggested. "I'm sure we have room for two more people."

"Really?" Trevor answered. "Would we be imposing if it's just your friends from high school?"

"It'll be fine," I replied. "Ed's college roommate Eric, Eric's girlfriend, a girl for Ed, another friend's boyfriend and Kelly didn't go to our high school. That's five out of our group of twelve that aren't from our school. You and Steph ought to come. You'd have fun."

"Yeah, we would," Trevor agreed. "Can you get another room for us this close to break? Don't the rooms sell out fast?"

“We’re camping out near the beach,” I explained. “That isn’t a problem for you, is it?”

Camping? No, I was a Boy Scout for five years. Camping is no problem,” Trevor answered. “I don’t know if Steph is in to camping though.”

“I didn’t know that about you,” I said. “Were you in the same troop as Chip?”

“Sure, Unionville only has one troop,” Trevor answered. “One very large troop – we had seventy kids in it when I was a member.”

“That’s a lot bigger than my troop,” I said. “We only have thirty-five kids in ours and we’re still the largest of the five troops in our school district.”

“Cool!” Trevor replied. “I’ll talk this over with Stephanie and see if she is interested in going. We’ll both have to clear this with our parents too.”

“I hope it all works out for the two of you to come,” I said. “I promise you’ll have fun.”

Trevor and I continued talking for a few more minutes until our roommates finished their workouts. The four of us grabbed quick showers and headed back to the dorms for dinner.

I called Ed Fritz after dinner to make sure that there would be room for two extra people. Ed teased that he didn’t want some to spend a week with a defensive end. Trevor had sacked him quite enough back in high school. After a minute Ed admitted he had no problem with Trevor and his girlfriend coming along. We had enough space in the campsites for more than the fourteen people we currently had lined up for the week.

Trevor reported back to me Wednesday afternoon that Steph loved the idea of going to Florida for spring break too. Trevor hadn’t known it, but Stephanie was an experienced camper. She was in Girl Scouts and her family camped frequently. The Conwells and the Kolmars both gave their blessing for their children to head south for spring break. I e-mailed all my friends the news about our additional company.

I got a phone call from Zack Hayes as I was finishing my workout Wednesday afternoon around four o’clock.

“Hey Kyle,” Zack said after I answered the call. “What are you doing for dinner?”

“Nothing special,” I answered. “Kelly and I are going over to Pollock around 5:30 with our friends from the dorm.”

“No you’re not,” Zack replied. “You and Kelly are coming out for dinner with Leigh Ann and me. We’re celebrating my signing with my new agent. He’s taking us out to dinner.”

“I won’t get in trouble having dinner with an agent, will I?” I asked. The NCAA is extremely strict about those kinds of things.

“You won’t as long as I treat you and Kelly and Max doesn’t,” Zack answered.

“Cool, I’ll clear this with Kelly, but I’m sure she won’t turn down a free meal,” I replied.

Kelly was delighted at the chance to eat out. There were lots of nice places downtown and we knew Zack would choose a good restaurant.

Kelly and I showed up at Zack’s door at 5:15. Leigh Ann answered our knock and invited us inside. She introduced us to a short, older gentleman, Max Solomon. Mr. Solomon was maybe 5’-9” tall, had a slight paunch that went with late middle age. He looked to be in his mid to late fifties. His once dark ring of hair around his bald head was nearly white now.

“Mr. Kyle Martin, it is so good to finally meet you,” Mr. Solomon said. “Zachary has said so many fine things about you.” Mr. Solomon turned towards Kelly. “Who is this lovely young lady?”

“This is my girlfriend Kelly O’Keefe,” I explained.

“Miss O’Keefe, it is entirely my pleasure,” Mr. Solomon said as he bowed and kissed Kelly’s proffered hand instead of shaking it. “You are an extremely fortunate young man to have this lovely young lady as your sweetheart.”

Mr. Solomon, Leigh Ann, Kelly and I talked for a minute while we waited for Zack to come downstairs. Mr. Solomon asked us to call him Max. He didn’t wish to stand on formality. Kelly and I gave him permission to use our first names. Max was a courtly but very friendly man.

Zack offered to drive us downtown but Max said he preferred to walk. He took the train into New York City every morning from his home in Connecticut. He was used to walking or taking the subway nearly everywhere he went in New York City. Zack and I assured Max that our downtown wasn’t far from here.

Zack suggested we go to Spats on College Avenue. Zack and I described the Cajun’ style food they served as we walked downtown. Max said it sounded delightful.

Kelly and I concurred. Spats was probably our favorite fancy restaurant downtown. We had eaten there a couple weeks earlier for our Valentine’s Day dinner. The restaurant

was busier than I expected for a mid-week evening. The hostess found us a table after a few minutes wait in the narrow hall by the front door.

Max filled the time after we ordered with questions. He wanted to hear how Zack came to be one of the most sought after quarterbacks in college football. He was curious about how Zack and I ended up together in football.

Zack told him most of the story about how he and my high school had recruited me including my brother Will suggesting they check me out. The only part he didn't tell Max was that Zack felt he owed Will for getting him laid the first time a few months earlier.

The dinner conversation wasn't strictly football. Max asked Leigh Ann questions about growing up too and her plans for the future. He also was curious about Kelly's background and experiences. I was pleased that Max was kind enough to include Kelly in the conversation.

Max's share of Zack's signing bonus and first contract stood to make Max a lot of money. It was only understandable that he would want to get to know and show interest in Zack. Leigh Ann, as Zack's future wife, certainly rated attention and stroking from any competent agent. I represented a potential client for him in a couple years. Max's interest in me was also understandable.

It was Max's interest in and kindness to Kelly that impressed me. For all Max knew when the evening started, Kelly was my date for the evening and wasn't anyone of importance. He had no way to know that Kelly and I planned a future together. Max was unfailing polite to and interested in every member of our dinner party.

I understood why both Zack and Aaron chose the man to represent their interests. Max definitely would be high on my list of potential agents when the time came. He probably would have been even without this dinner together. When both of my mentors took the time to interview potential agents and chose the same man, well I would take a look at him too when the time came for that.

Spats' food was up to their excellent usual standard. We lingered over our dinner, enjoying the food and the company. Zack insisted we all needed to have dessert before we left. We had an unusual and interesting dessert – white chocolate & raspberry “jambalaya.” It was delicious.

As we were finishing our dessert Max said apologetically, “I suppose I should admit to having an ulterior motive to inviting you and your girlfriend to dinner this evening. I wanted to ask you to help me put Zachary on full display for the NFL scouts.”

“What can I do?” I asked.

“I know next week there will be plenty of fast wide receivers for Zachary to throw to at the NFL Combine,” Max explained. “Your university holds a pro scouting day later in March. Zachary has a rifle for an arm and I want that attribute to be given the full spotlight. I want to make sure he has the fastest, best wide receiver on the field with him so he can demonstrate his prowess.”

“Could you help me out Saturday March 19th?” Zack asked. “Slip on your cleats, throw on a jersey and come out and catch some long balls with me.”

“Sure, no problem,” I answered immediately. “You didn’t need to butter me up with dinner for that. You could have called that Friday night and said ‘Come catch some balls with tomorrow,’ and I would have been there. Anything for the guy who got me started in football.”

“Thanks Kyle, I really appreciate your help,” Zack replied.

Zack paid the bill for my and Kelly’s dinners. Max paid for Zack and Leigh Ann. The five of us headed back to campus together after dinner. I thanked Zack and Max for dinner when we got to Pollock Halls. Kelly and I went to our own rooms to study. I had to wrap up my term paper for History 130 – “Napoleon, Jomini & Civil War Tactics.” Kelly had a Poly Sci midterm at 10:10 the next morning.

I was pleased on Friday morning after I finished my Sociology midterm. I believed I had done well on the test. Kelly was in a good mood too when we met back at our dorms for lunch. She thought she would get a good grade on her Spanish midterm. Both of us had our Civil War term papers ready to hand in that afternoon.

Cameron was frazzled. He had put things off and hadn’t written his term paper until last night. He had been up until 3 am working on the thing. He was fortunate that Omega Chi didn’t have him working overnight Friday night at the Thon. He would be able to get a good night’s sleep.

Kelly and I were lucky too. Tyler Madden had scheduled everyone for one – two hour night support session and two – two hour day sessions. He had pulled names at random to fill in the for the forty-six hour marathon. Kelly and I were on duty from 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm on Saturday, from 6:00 am to 8:00 am on Sunday and again from 2:00 to 4:00 pm Sunday afternoon.

Kelly and I were extremely lucky to have pulled one of the most desirable “night” sessions for Sunday morning of the Thon. Of course “night session” was a relative term – we were college students after all and anything before 8:00 am was too damn early!

I had to be at the Lasch Building from 9:00 am to noon on Saturday to conduct tours for the Make-A-Wish Foundation’s cancer survivors. That was fine with Kelly. She could

get some extra sleep Saturday morning and then finish her History 21 term paper while I was tied up at the Lasch Building.

Kelly headed back to her room to work on her paper. I went to the Lasch Building for my workout. Kelly and I met up at the Mix in Pollock Commons to grab sandwiches for dinner. We ate them on the way over to the Bryce Jordan Center for the Thon.

My Thon Committee pass got us inside the doors ahead of the crowd waiting outside. I checked in with the floor manager to see if he had any last minute information for my team. He didn't. Kelly and I found Zack and Leigh Ann waiting anxiously for the time to take the floor. Damian, Melanie, Christian and Bev had a cooler filled with water, fruit juices and iced tea for our dancers. Tyler and his girlfriend Kayla Allen had the first two support couples ready to go. Everything was set.

The football team was assigned to the blue spirit team. This worked out well since all of us could wear our blue football team game jerseys for the weekend. The dancers came out to the floor and stowed their personal gear away while committee members warmed up the crowd of arriving supporters.

The dancers took the floor and did stretching exercises to prepare themselves for the marathon. The arena continued to fill as the dancers prepared.

At five minutes before six the MC welcomed everyone to the Thon. He reminded everyone about the history of the dance marathon from its humble beginning in 1972 with 34 dance couples when the Panhellenic council raised \$2000. The Thon had raised \$69 million since then to fight cancer. The biggest beneficiary of the Thon was the Four Diamond Fund. Four Diamonds supported families of children with cancer through their ordeal.

The DJ started the music promptly at six pm and the Thon was off. Kelly and I hung out with Damian and Melanie; Cuch and Gina; Tyler and Kayla; and Christian and Bev. Damian and Melanie had drawn the first two hour support shift. Bruce MacCauley arrived a few minutes before eight with Kirsten Knowles, a freshman I hadn't met before, to take over from Damian and Melanie. Our group hung out for the line dance which happened a little after eight o'clock.

I walked Kelly back to her room after the line dance. Both of us had to finish our history term papers for History 21 next week and didn't expect to get much free time the rest of the weekend. I gave my lover a passionate good night kiss before we parted.

I dragged my tired butt out of bed around 8:15 on Saturday morning. I grabbed a quick shower, dressed and headed for Pollock Commons. I charged a breakfast sandwich on my eLion card at the Mix and ate as I rushed over to the Lasch Building. Eight of us

were giving tours and spending the morning with kids from the Make-A-Wish Foundation.

I met Mr. Kemp, from our athletic department, in the lobby of the Lasch Building. He was coordinating the tours for the twenty-four families. Chip, Evan, Jake and Shawn O'Conner were already there when I arrived at a quarter to nine. Brendan Hayden came in a minute behind me, followed by Cuch Cuchiella.

Mr. Kemp waited a couple minutes for our last tour guide. He started the briefing at ten of nine without Karol Zizka. Karol hurried in a couple minutes later, apologizing profusely for his tardiness – nothing out of the ordinary for Karol. The briefing finished a couple minutes before one of the university buses delivered the Make-A-Wish families to our lobby.

Mr. Kemp welcomed the families to our facilities, introduced us, and then teamed us up with our families. I was to guide William Buchanan, Kyle Morgan, Tyler Lyons and their families around the building.

“Hey, my name is Kyle too,” Kyle Morgan chirped brightly. “Did you know our names are the same?”

I looked over at the nine year old boy with the big smile. Kyle looked small for his age and the cancer that had ravaged his body left its mark. His blond hair was thin but growing back. The boy’s complexion was pale.

I mustered my biggest smile and answered, “Yes we do Kyle.”

I introduced myself to Mr. and Mrs. Morgan. Kyle’s parents were in their early thirties. Both wore Penn State sweat shirts under their coats. They told me they were college sweethearts who married after graduation. Mr. Morgan graduated in the Class of 2000, Mrs. Morgan in 2001. The family lived just outside of Harrisburg.

I greeted the Buchanans next. I asked if it was all right to call William Bill.

“I go by Will,” the eleven year insisted.

“Will?” I replied. “I have a brother that uses that name too. It’s good to meet you Will.” The boy stood just shy of five feet tall, probably weighing around 85-90 pounds. He looked to be the picture of health. I never would have guessed he had cancer if it wasn’t for the Make-A-Wish T-shirt he was wearing.

I welcomed Mr. and Mrs. Buchanan to the Lasch Building. I learned from them that the family lived in Hamburg, Pennsylvania, in Berks County, north of Reading. Will’s parents were in their mid to late thirties.

Tyler Lyons shook my hand warmly when I greeted him. The fourteen years old was 5'-8" tall, big framed but a little thin. He was wearing an old, beat up blue and white #52 football jersey with the name "Trojans" across the front.

"Do you play football?" I asked.

"I do... well, I did... before..." Tyler responded, letting his answer hang for a couple seconds. "You know... before I got sick. This is my older brother's jersey," he explained as he saw my curiosity about his shirt. "The doctors said I won't be strong enough to play this fall, but I hope I can play on the JV team next year. I LOVE football."

"You're in the right place if you love football," I replied. "What school do the Trojans play for?"

"Chambersburg," Tyler answered.

"That's cool," I answered. I didn't let on that I knew a little about his school. They played in District 3, the same as my high school. I had never heard of them in the playoffs in six years I had followed high school football. Chambersburg didn't have a strong team.

I led my guests and their families back the hallway to the locker room first. As we passed the wall of honor leaving the lobby Kyle commented, "Wow, look all these names!" He stopped and stared at the wall. "Are all these guys on the football team?"

"They were," I explained. "All the men on the wall were captains of our team over the years."

Kyle stared up at the wall for a few seconds until he spotted a name he recognized. "Zachary Hayes," he said as he stretched to touch the letters. "I know who he is. He's the best quarterback around."

"Yes, he is excellent," I agreed.

"Will he be here today?" Kyle asked. "Can I meet him?"

"Zack is over at the Jordan Center now dancing to help raise money," I answered. "I could introduce him to all of you after lunch if you are going back to the Jordan Center. We can catch him during one of his breaks."

"Cool!" Will agreed.

"We're going back to watch the marathon after lunch," Tyler added.

"Hey Kyle, your name isn't on the wall," little Kyle interjected.

“I’m not a team captain,” I explained as we continued walking. “Team captains usually have played on the team for four or five years. I’ve only been a Lion for two years.”

Kyle accepted my explanation. We continued into the locker room. I showed the boys and their families around. They wanted to see Zack’s, Jake’s, Trevor’s, Shawn O’Conner’s and Karol’s lockers. I showed them mine too. All three boys got to try on my helmet, shoulder pads and game jersey.

Little Kyle looked comical in my equipment. My jersey hung down below his knees. He had to push the helmet way back to see. My pads doubled his body’s width. I posed for pictures with all the kids while they were dressed in my equipment.

We headed on to the video room where I showed them a playbook and how we studied video to prepare for games. We toured the meeting room the wide receivers use where I diagrammed a few plays on the white board. They played around with X’s and O’s too, developing some very esoteric plays that were best left on whiteboard and not on the field. They had fun, which was the point of their visit.

I took them to the training room and showed them the whirlpool and the other facilities we had for healing aches, pains and injuries. We ran into Jay Nicholson there working with Jason Pennington to rehab his injuries from the accident. He was just finishing up when we came in.

“Everyone, I want to introduce you to Jason Nicholson,” I announced as Jay limped over to us. “Jay is going to be the next star on our team. He’ll be taking over at quarterback now that Zack Hayes is done.”

Tyler, Will and little Kyle flocked around my friend, who gave me a goofy grin and then tried to answer the questions the kids fired at him. Chris Morgan, Kyle’s dad, tapped me on the shoulder.

“A little inside information?” Chris asked quietly. “I follow Penn State football pretty closely. I hadn’t read anywhere that Coach Burton had chosen Hayes’ replacement yet. I understood that he wanted to have a competition next summer for the job.”

“Call it a prediction,” I answered. “Coach Burton is going to let Glenn Korbel, Chip Brinton and Jay compete for the starting spot. I’m telling you who I think will win in the end.”

“I read that Winfield Brinton was a real hot shot recruit,” Chris responded. “Don’t you think he’ll be any good?”

“Chip prefers not to use the ‘Winfield’ name,” I explained. “He isn’t pretentious. Both Chip and Jay are smart, athletic and have strong arms. I expect Jay to beat Chip because

he has an extra year and a half of experience in our program. That is going to be the margin of difference between the two of them.”

“Thanks for the insight Kyle,” Chris replied. “I guess we should get our autographs now before the rush.”

All three families got Jay’s autograph before they left the training room. Jay felt pretty good about that. They were the first people to ask for his autograph, not counting a few young kids back home right after his high school team won the Virginia state championship when he was a senior in high school.

The group thanked Jay for his time before he limped off for the player’s lounge. I took my group to the weight room and let them play a little bit with the weights and the machines. Will’s dad insisted that he try only the bench press. His leg with the surgical graft couldn’t take extra weight.

I took the group to the study center and showed them the facilities. I took them to the player’s lounge too so they could see how we spent our free time. The final stop was Coach Burton’s office. Each family had pictures taken of themselves with me in Coach’s office.

We headed over together to Pollock Commons for lunch. The Thon was covering meals for the families at our dining hall while they visited over the weekend. I gave Kelly a call as we left the Lasch Building so she could meet us.

I introduced Kelly to my guests and their families when we met inside the dining hall. All three boys, but particularly Ty, were captivated by my girlfriend. They followed her upstairs to the dining hall.

Kyle tugged at my shirt as we waited in line. “You know your girlfriend is really pretty?” he asked.

“She certainly is,” I agreed. I caught Kelly blushing a little and trying to suppress a smile. My little namesake had good taste in women.

The three boys grabbed the seats immediately around Kelly at our table. I ended up sliding down the table and sitting with the parents for lunch. I talked with the parents while the boys pestered Kelly.

I learned more about the three boys’ illnesses from their parents. Kyle was diagnosed with leukemia about fifteen months ago. Kyle completed chemo three months ago. The doctors were monitoring him closely to make sure he stayed in remission.

Will’s mom found a growth on his left leg two years ago. The tumor growing on his thigh bone turned out to be Ewing’s Sarcoma. He had to undergo radiation, chemo and

surgery to graft replacement bone onto his thigh so he would be able to walk again. The cancer was localized and Will's prognosis was good to remain cancer free.

Ty was diagnosed with Hodgkin's Lymphoma twenty-seven months ago. He went through eight months of a combination of radiation and chemotherapy. They caught his disease early. The doctors said that 98% of people with his type of cancer survived. Ty's parents said given some time, Ty would get his strength back so he could get back into the sports he loved – football, wrestling and baseball.

The enormity of what the three kids had faced sobered me. The challenges and problems (mostly self-inflicted) I had faced in my life were nothing compared what they had faced. I remarked, "It's good the guys are finished with their treatment. I guess this weekend would have been much harder for them if they were still doing chemo."

"My son wouldn't be able to come here if he was doing his treatment," Mr. Morgan explained. "The treatment suppressed his immune system. This is Kyle's first outing since he finished chemo. Even a simple cold could have been life threatening then."

"Will's whole life while he underwent treatment was home and the hospital," Mrs. Buchanan added. "The risk of infection was too high to take him into a crowd of thousands the way we are able to do now."

Mr. Buchanan chuckled and added, "I was sent home to live with my mother for a week when I came down with the flu. Thankfully Will didn't catch it before I moved out."

The Morgans and the Lyons confirmed what the Buchanans explained to me. "I knew chemo was hard, but I had no idea that it was that difficult," I said. "How do you manage to get through all that?"

"What other choice is there?" Mrs. Lyons answered. "You do what you have to do for your son."

"All the help provided us through the Four Diamonds Fund has been great," Mr. Lyons added. "I don't know how we would have handled things without their support." Mr. Lyons stared me square in the eye. "What you and your teammates are doing today – spending time with Ty, giving him this tour – this means so much to him. He has been looking forward to this for weeks, since we found out that Make-A-Wish was able to arrange for us to visit with you."

The Buchanans and Morgans agreed how much their sons looked forward to meeting team members and touring our facilities. They thanked me effusively for spending the morning with their sons.

"I truly was my pleasure," I answered. "I enjoyed showing your sons around today. It gave me a better appreciation of where the money we raised goes too."

“We?” Mr. Morgan asked. “Are team members involved in more than giving tours?”

“Oh yes,” I replied. “The football team is one of the many organizations raising money for Thon.”

“How did you guys find time to raise money while you play football?” Mr. Buchanan asked.

I explained how organized ourselves to raise money after the football season ended. I didn’t brag about how well we did. I praised the football team alumni and their generosity.

It was close to 1:00 pm, so Kelly and I took our leave of the boys and their families. We planned to spend about half the afternoon at the Thon and use the rest of the time to proofread and help correct each other’s history term papers. I reminded the families to stop by and visit us at the Bryce Jordan Center. I promised the boys that I would introduce them to Zack Hayes.

The Buchanans and the Morgans headed off to the Creamery for ice cream. The Lyons family headed west so Mr. Lyons could show Ty the dorm he stayed in when he was a student at Penn State. Kelly and I headed back to the Jordan Center.

Jibril Sloan and his girlfriend Imani were half way through their shift when we got there. Zack and Leigh Ann were in good spirits, still going strong. Kelly and I joined them down along the edge of the dance floor. Brendan Hayden and his Thon partner Allison Montgomery joined us about fifteen minutes later.

The football team was issued six floor passes for the weekend. I reserved two for the on-duty couple, two more for the couple finishing their shift or due to come on soon. The final two passes Tyler, Kayla, Kelly and I shared as we supervised our operations for the weekend.

Brendan and I got a chance to talk. He really enjoyed taking the kids on a tour around the Lasch Building in the morning. I also found out why Brendan was asked to be a guide. One of the three boys he took around, the eight year old, was from Brendan’s hometown, Mechanicsburg. The boy’s parents knew Brendan and his parents from church. The little boy had been diagnosed with leukemia eighteen months ago. This weekend was the first opportunity he had to get out since he finished treatment.

The Morgans caught up to me just as Jibril and Imani left and Brendan and Allison took over the 2:00 pm to 4:00 pm support/morale booster shift. Little Kyle hung out with Kelly and me for about ten minutes, until Zack and Leigh Ann took their next break.

Zack graciously agreed to autograph Kyle’s shirt and have his picture taken with my little buddy and his parents. Mr. and Mrs. Morgan were still talking with Zack when little

Kyle insisted he needed a drink. I offered to take him over to a concession stand to buy water.

Little Kyle spotted the Nittany Lion on the way back to his parents. "Do you think we could meet him Kyle?" he asked politely.

"Sure, I know him," I replied. I took Kyle over to the side of the stage where the Lion was waiting. We walked over to the Lion. "Mr. Lion, I'd like to introduce you to Kyle Morgan," I said. "Kyle and his family are one of the Four Diamond families."

The Nittany Lion cocked his head and pretended to carefully appraise the appearance of his little fan. He took little Kyle's right arm and felt his bicep muscle. When he finished gauging the boy, the Lion stared to the ceiling and pretended to catch a long pass, which he cradled into his body. He pointed at Kyle and pretended to cradle another pass.

"He thinks you're the next star wide receiver for our team," I suggested. The Lion gave exaggerated head nods to confirm my comment.

"Wow! I'm too short to play football here," Kyle protested. The Lion pretended to examine little Kyle again. He put a hand on his head and transferred the measurement to a spot midway between his chest and waist. The Lion shrugged, went down on one knee and shook Kyle's hand. It began as a handshake but the Lion pulled Kyle into a hug.

"I see you on TV all the time," Kyle said when the Lion released him from the embrace. "It's great to meet you. I gotta get my mom and dad to get a picture of you. Is that OK?"

The Lion nodded his head up and down in agreement immediately. Kyle raced back to his parents before I could follow. They must have seen their son with the Lion and were heading our way.

"Thanks for giving Kyle a nice welcome," I said while we waited for Kyle and his parents to cross the floor. "I appreciate it Gary."

"I'm not Gary," a voice inside the suit corrected. "I'm Patrick."

I didn't have a chance to follow up that comment as the Morgans arrived. I introduced Kyle's parents to the Lion. He shook hands with the Morgans, posed with Kyle for pictures and then posed with the whole family while I took their pictures. Mr. and Mrs. Morgan thanked the Lion repeatedly before they left. I stayed to talk with Patrick, to learn more about the mystery man in the suit.

"I didn't realize the university had substitutes to man the suit," I commented after the Morgans left.

"Gary Stapleton is graduating in a few months," Patrick explained. "I've been his understudy this year. I take over from him next fall."

“Welcome aboard Patrick,” I replied.

“I watched the way you and Gary interacted this fall,” Patrick said. “I hope you don’t mind doing that with me next season.”

“Absolutely,” I agreed. “I think the crowd enjoys us goofing around.”

Patrick and I talked for a few minutes, getting to know each other. Patrick was Patrick Clark from Frazier, Pennsylvania, on the Main Line outside Philadelphia. He was a freshman majoring in weather. He planned to become a TV weatherman after graduation. He was a gymnast and drum major at his high school, Conestoga High School.

I hadn’t known before, but the job of being the Nittany Lion came with a full scholarship at the university. Patrick had appeared at a couple basketball games before, but the Thon was his first extended appearance in public as the Lion. He and Gary were taking turns so the Lion could be on display most of the weekend without either of them staying awake through the entire marathon.

I rejoined Kelly, Brendan and Allison back at our station. We enjoyed the music, did the line dance when it was time and hung out. A Thon committee member found me there a few minutes before three o’clock. The committee wanted me on stage during Coach Paterno and Coach Burton’s pep rally.

Coach Burton started off praising the committee, the volunteers helping run things, all the students who raised money and the Four Diamonds families for their participation. Coach led the crowd in a “We are... Penn State” chant and then introduced his predecessor as head coach.

Coach Paterno received thunderous cheers from the crowd as he took the stage. Coach Paterno, ever the English Lit major and philosopher, gave a different perspective on our efforts for the Four Diamonds family.

I waited nervously on the wings while Coach Paterno spoke. I was used to performing in front of a 100,000 people but not speaking to a huge crowd. The largest group I ever spoke to was 400-500 people on a Friday night back at scout camp. The Bryce Jordan Center held 20,000 people. One of the committee members reassured me that I didn’t need to speak when they called me on the stage – just smile and wave. That helped me relax a little.

Coach Paterno knows how to work a crowd. He had the Jordan Center rocking with cheers and the “We are!” “Penn State” cheer when he finished. The MC waved for me to join him on the stage as Coach Paterno left. He gave the crowd a few moments to quiet down before he talked.

“All of you have enjoyed following our nationally ranked football team this past season. Members of the team spend countless hours working out, studying film, preparing for, practicing and playing football. The football team members carry a full academic load on top of all the hours they put in every week to represent our university.

“I doubt most of you realize the other things the team does for our university. Team members gave some of our Four Diamonds families tours of the football center this morning. That is fantastic!” The crowd gave a cheer of approval.

“The team has done more for Thon than that. Last year they assisted Omega Chi Epsilon and Tau Nu in raising money for Thon. Records show they raised \$21,000 last year without being an official participant in the Thon.

“The team decided to get involved officially this year. They registered as a Thon organization and started raising funds for us. Team captain and All-American quarterback Zack Hayes is representing the team on the dance floor this year with his fiancée Leigh Ann Bowman.”

The lighting crew ran a spotlight around the dance floor until they located Zack and Leigh Ann. The crowd cheered and applauded our team’s most popular player. Zack and Leigh Ann smiled and waved to acknowledge the crowd’s cheers.

The MC continued, “The team’s outstanding wide receiver Kyle Martin agreed to chair the team’s Thon fundraising this season.” The crowd cheered for me. I waved and tried not to blush at the ovation.

“The Nittany Lion Football Team did an outstanding effort raising money for our cause. Kyle and the team’s \$137,020 not only shattered the old record for a first year organization but also put the team in fourth place on the list among all organizations involved this year.” This drew cheers from the crowd. The MC shook my hand and added, “On behalf of the Thon committee and the Four Diamonds Fund, I want to thank you for your and the team’s efforts this season.”

I waved to acknowledge the cheers and applause from the crowd as I walked off stage. Coach Burton was still in the wings off stage. He motioned me to come over.

“\$137,000?” he asked. “How in the world did you find time to raise that kind of money?”

“I had a lot of help,” I explained. “There are twenty-four of us on the team’s Thon committee. We worked on this in our spare time between Thanksgiving and last week.”

“But a \$137,000?” Coach asked. “How did you manage to raise that much?”

“You know what Willy Sutton said,” I replied. “I rob banks because that is where the money is. Our team has a lot of alumni playing in the NFL. That’s where the money is. I raised ten thousand dollars standing on the sidelines at the Rose Bowl.”

“That’s impressive Kyle,” Coach Burton replied as he shook his head in wonder. “That is an outstanding job of organizing.”

I glowed from my coach’s praise. I felt I had made a good start towards Coach’s challenge to show leadership on our team. I headed back to meet up with Kelly again. GJ DeLuca and Jen D’Antonio were there when I got back. GJ and Jen were taking the 4:00 pm to 6:00 pm shift. We hung out with them, Brendan and Allison until four o’clock. Kelly and I took off when Brendan and Allison left. We needed to get supper before we took over from GJ and Jen for the next shift.

Kelly and I felt like barbecue that evening, so we went downtown to Beulah’s for dinner. Kelly ordered their delicious pulled pork sandwich with fries. I went with a rack of baby back ribs. Kelly and I had time to clean up back at our dorms before we headed back to the BJC (Bryce Jordan Center).

GJ and Jen decided to hang out with us after they finished their shift at six o’clock. That was fine since Kelly and I already had floor passes of our own. We still had two more passes available later for the next shift – Jonathan Stafford and Lori Brown.

Zack and Leigh Ann were holding up fairly well. Still, you could see their energy level dropping as the dance passed the twenty-four hour mark. Saturday night featured Family Variety Hour performances by some of the Four Diamonds families. Some of them were quite talented. Kelly and I worked to keep Zack and Leigh Ann engaged in all the activities going on the building during the evening. The two hours passed by quickly.

Cameron Miller, his helper Dana Patterson, Joel Peterson and Joel’s girlfriend Beth were on duty with Omega Chi/Tau Nu at the same time as Kelly and me. We chatted a little when we weren’t needed to support our dancers. Omega Chi/Tau Nu had two couples again this year. We probably would get a second dance couple next year, based on how well we raised funds this year.

Jonathan Stafford and Lori showed up around a quarter to eight to get briefed on their responsibilities. Tyler Madden texted me a few minutes later looking for floor passes. GJ and Jen headed off the floor so Tyler and Kayla could come down. GJ and Jen promised to wait for us in the spectator’s seats until our shift was over.

Kelly and I stayed around a few minutes after eight o’clock to help Jonathan and Lori during Zack and Leigh Ann’s next break. I wished my buddy luck after he downed a bottle of water and ate his granola bar during his break. Kelly and I headed for the stands as Zack and Leigh Ann went back to the dance floor.

Joel, Beth, Cameron and Allison were hanging out with GJ and Jen when we found them. Cameron inquired, "What are you guys planning for the evening?"

"Nothing special, just hanging here I guess," I answered.

Come on back to my room," Cameron offered. "We can hang out, listen to some music and party a little."

"Cam scored a couple cases of beer," Joel added. "One of the brothers came through with some Troegs Amber Ale for us."

I looked over at Kelly. She smiled and nodded yes. "Cool! Count us in," I responded.

GJ and Jen decided that sounded good too. The eight of us headed back to room 414 of Hartranft Hall. We settled in on Joel's bed, Cameron's bed, and the chairs in the room. Cameron started pulling beers out of the refrigerator for everyone. Cameron had been lucky. His frat brother bought Cameron two cases of the delicious amber ale.

We enjoyed some music and talked as we enjoyed our beers. I popped over to my room and brought back some snack food for the group. Cameron suggested watching an old 1950's era horror movie on the Sci-Fi Network. The movie was a hoot. It was so bad we laughed and mocked the actors as we watched.

The couples, both formal ones – Joel and Beth; and Kelly and me, and the informal, for the weekend only ones – GJ and Jen; and Cameron and Dana, cuddled together as watched the movie and had more of Cameron's fine amber ale. Cindy Young, Bev Umble's roommate had family obligations this weekend – her grandparent's fiftieth wedding anniversary party. I knew Christian was planning to spend the night with Bev, leaving GJ with privacy this evening.

Jen knew this too. She was carefully trying to draw out GJ, a genuinely sweet but somewhat shy guy. I knew her goal was to spend the night with GJ. I don't think GJ realized what Jen's intentions were, but he was enjoying the cuddling and stroking he was receiving. I was perfectly happy if GJ got lucky that night. It would give Kelly and me privacy.

Joel spent nearly every Saturday night over at Beth's apartment. Cameron was intent on convincing Dana to spend the night with him. He plied her with plenty of beer as we watched the movie. The rest of us, except GJ, kept up with Cameron and Dana's consumption.

Things between GJ and Jen progressed to kissing and a little petting as the evening wore on. Dana seemed receptive to Cameron's intentions too. It looked like it was going to be a good night for everyone at the party.

I was a little surprised when the movie ended when I noticed ten empties piled on the end of Joel's desk beside Kelly and me. Six were mine and four were Kelly's. We weren't totally wasted but we certainly weren't feeling any pain.

Jen and Kelly had a brief whispered conversation. Kelly then whispered to me that GJ had invited Jen back to his room for some more privacy. I was happy to have a whole night with Kelly. I also was happy for Jen and GJ. I knew Jen was looking for a good time with a guy. GJ didn't get a lot of opportunities to bed a girl and Jen was a sure thing for him that evening.

As GJ, Jen, Joel, Beth, Kelly and I prepared to leave Dana made no move to depart. Cameron's face was a study in hope at the prospect of entertaining Dana for the evening. Everyone thanked Joel and Cameron for their hospitality as we departed.

Kelly and I took the elevator downstairs with Joel and Beth when we departed. Kelly and I waved good bye as we headed inside Beaver Hall while Joel and Beth walked downtown for her place.

Kelly and I didn't waste much time when we arrived at her room. I went across the hallway to use the bathroom while Kelly undressed. I desperately needed to get rid of some of the beer from the evening. Kelly was sitting on her bed naked as the day she was born when I returned.

"Did you set the alarm clock for 5:30?" I asked as I stripped down.

"Of course honey," Kelly answered. "We won't miss our shift at the Jordan Center."

Satisfied with the answer and naked, I hopped in bed with my lover. We started with necking and petting for a bit. We moved onto 69 and gave each other monster orgasms. The two of us cuddled, rubbed our bodies together and kissed so I could get hard again for the big fun.

I was ready to perform after a few minutes. Kelly gave my knob a quick suck to make sure it was good and hard and then lay back and spread herself open for me. I mounted her and went to work showing her my love. In and out. In and out. I gave my girl good long strokes followed by a pubic area grind to bring her to climax. I coaxed Kelly to an orgasm after a few minutes.

I wasn't close, so I continued to hump and thrust through her orgasm and beyond. I was approaching my peak too the next time I brought Kelly off. The way her pussy throbbed and clutched my primed and almost ready to explode cock blew my mind. I thrust again and again, trying to stave off my cum a little longer.

Kelly panted and squealed as the wondrous feelings from her sexual peak flowed through her body. I thrust hard, trying to bury my cock deep one more time. My force pushed Kelly up the bed almost to the end.

Kelly's phone rang as I thrust one last time and planted my cock deep inside her. Kelly's eyes lost focus and widened into large white circles as I spurted my sperm into her body while the phone rang.

Spent, I collapsed on top of my lover. Kelly rolled us onto our sides as we clung together, still connected. We exchanged small kisses as we unwound from our frenzy. The phone had stopped after about thirty seconds of ringing. Neither of us had the energy to see who wanted us at this time of night.

Kelly and I cuddled and kissed when we recovered our senses from our recent intimacy. I played with Kelly's lovely boobies for awhile, getting her stirred up again. Kelly went down on me to get me hard again for another go at mating. I was nearly there when the damn phone rang again.

“FUCK!” I groaned.

“I've got to get this honey,” Kelly explained as she spit out my cock and crawled over top of me to get her cell phone. “It must be important for someone to call me after midnight.”

Kelly was half beside me, half sprawled on my chest when she answered the phone. “Hello?”

The phone was so close to my ear that I could hear both ends of the conversation. “Kell, I'm soooo sorry to call this late,” the voice announced apologetically. I recognized Jen's voice.

“What's wrong honey?” Kelly asked.

“Things didn't work out for GJ and me,” Jen explained. “Call me when the two of you are done. I don't have a place to sleep tonight.”

I groaned quietly while Kelly asked, “What happened? I thought you and GJ were going to hook up.”

“GJ is a real sweetie,” Jen answered. “...but he isn't in to one night stands. We made out some after we got to his room but he wasn't willing to do anything below the waist on a first date.”

“You poor thing,” Kelly replied. “Come on back here. You are welcome with Kyle and me.” I frowned a little at the comment but Kelly ignored me.

“I can't do that,” Jen protested. “I don't want to get in your way. Call me when the two of you are done. I can wait.”

“Nonsense,” Kelly answered. “Get over here and join us. Kyle and I want you too.” Kelly ignored my disapproving look.

“If you guys insist,” Jen replied. “I’ll be there in a couple minutes.”

“We’ll be ready,” Kelly said before she snapped her phone off. Kelly stared into my eyes. “I know you wanted it to be just me tonight, but Jen needs us. You know how horny she gets when she is left hanging by a guy.” Kelly pleaded with her eyes.

Six of the potent Troegs and my desperate need to get off again overcame any further objections in my head. I sighed and nodded. Kelly added, “I promise the two of us will make it worth your while.”

Jen must have been down the hall when she called. She knocked at the door less than sixty seconds later. “Are you guys decent?” Jen asked from outside.

“Of course not,” Kelly answered loudly. “Get in here and get naked!”

Jen didn’t waste any time joining us. She was naked in two eye blinks and on the bed with us. Jen gave me a thank you blow job while Kelly ate her pussy. The only thought I could get in my head as Jen slowly unfrazzled my synapses was that GJ was an idiot. Who in their right mind would refuse a night with Jen?

Things happened quickly after Kelly brought Jen to climax and Jen sucked down a load of my semen. Girl on girl, girl on guy, girl and guy on girl and two girls on the guy – we didn’t leave much undone that night.

I did Kelly doggie style while she ate out Jen. Jen and Kelly 69ed while I did Jen anally. It blew my mind when Kelly alternated between bathing Jen’s pussy and my balls with her tongue while I fucked Jen. Jen blew my mind with a prostate massage while I fucked Kelly. Jen and Kelly made out and played with each others titties when I was too exhausted to go immediately.

Every sex act we did brought the frenzy higher and drove us on. When I was ready to go again Jen and Kelly were doing each other again in the 69 position. I drove Kelly wild using my tongue and finger to stimulate her anus while the girls continued their oral copulation.

I was near exhaustion when Kelly insisted that I fuck Jen missionary style while she sat on Jen’s face. I bucked, thrust and humped desperately, trying to bring Jen off one last time before I collapsed. I didn’t quite make it. I weakly expelled the last few cc’s of semen left in my body before Jen climaxed.

I collapsed in a heap on the two mattresses on the floor. Jen and Kelly disentangled themselves from my prostrate form. Kelly and Jen finished each other with some 69 while I gasped for air and stared at the ceiling, unable to move a single muscle.

The girls lay down beside me and covered the three of us with a blanket. Exhaustion brought sleep immediately. I slept the sleep of the dead. Nothing in the world was going to rouse me.

“KYLE!” the voice demanded. “KYLE, WAKE UP!”

“Oooohhhh...” I groaned as I cracked an eye open. The little light filtering in around the curtains was too much. I scrunched my eyes shut. My head was pounding from too much drink last night. “Let me die,” I groaned.

“Come on Kyle,” Kelly insisted. “We were supposed to be at the Jordan Center an hour ago!” She tugged me so I was sitting up. I cracked my eyes open carefully, trying not to be overwhelmed by the light. “Come on Kyle,” Kelly repeated. “We are sooooo late. We have to go.”

I opened my eyes a little more as I got used the half light of the morning. Kelly was kneeling over me in her panties and sports bra. Jen was unconscious at my side.

“Take these aspirin and drink some water,” Kelly said. “We have to go. Right NOW!”

The water helped a little. I pulled on my boxers and pants. I stumbled across the hall to the bathroom. My bladder was full to bursting. I drained it, splashed my face with some water to wake up and stumbled back to Kelly’s room. Kelly hurried me as I tried to dress. I did the best I could. I had an awful hangover. Six Treogs followed by a three-way orgy was too much for me.

We hurried downstairs. The early morning sunlight drove nails into my brain.

“I’ve got to stop at my room and get my shades,” I insisted. Kelly didn’t disagree. She left her room with her eyes shielded from the brutal sunlight. A neck tie was hanging outside my door. It meant Damian was entertaining a guest. I listened at the door and couldn’t hear anything. I HAD to have my sunglasses so snuck in anyway.

My roomie was dead to the world, covered from head to toe with his blanket. In the dim light I could see he was sharing his bed with a slim form. Just the top of Melanie’s dark hair showed above the top of the blanket. Damian embraced her in his sleep. I grabbed my sunglasses and left quietly without disturbing the lovers.

Kelly and I hurried over to the BJC and picked up our floor passes at the main desk. Cuch and Gina weren’t not too happy when we met them at the side of the dance floor.

“Where in the hell have you been?” Cuch demanded. “I was lucky Leigh Ann had Kelly’s phone number so I could call you.”

“Sorry, we were up kind of late last night,” I replied. Cuch eyed me carefully.

“Up late? Yeah, right. I hope the two of you had fun,” Cuch answered. “We’re going to split. We need some more sleep. Keep Zack and Leigh Ann talking during the breaks. They are starting to wear out from the all this. Keep them alert and moving during the breaks.”

“OK we will,” I promised.

“The two of you owe us big time for this extra hour we put in,” Cuch said.

“How about I buy the booze for next weekend’s trip?” I offered by way of apology.

“Deal!” Cuch replied. “That will begin to make up for this.”

Aaron Morano’s ski weekend included lodging, food and lift tickets. He did not include booze in the package.

Kelly and I stood watching the cavernous arena. The dance floor was full of dancers and support people. Otherwise there were few spectators at this un-Godly hour of the morning. The DJ played lively music to try to keep everyone peppy. It tore at the ragged edges of my headache.

The Thon committee insisted that everyone in the arena stand all weekend so the dancers weren’t confronted with people at rest. Everything was geared towards keeping them awake, alert and engaged in dancing for the Thon. It was agony to stand in my condition. Kelly and I stood side by side with our arms around each other’s back for support. We swayed from side to side with the music as we awaited Zack and Leigh Ann’s next break.

Zack and Leigh Ann’s break came about ten minutes later. “How’s it going Zack?” I asked cheerily.

“Where the FUCK have you been?” my mentor demanded. He eyed me warily while he waited for my answer.

“We overslept,” I replied.

“You look like shit!” Zack said. “Leigh Ann and I have been dancing for thirty-seven hours and we don’t look as bad as the two of you.”

“Do you need water?” I asked lamely.

“Are you still drunk?” Zack demanded.

“Hung over, not drunk,” I insisted.

“My sweetie and I are out here busting our tails to help raise money for kids with cancer,” Zack replied. “You’ve been prancing around all weekend like you’re hot shit for organizing the team’s fund raising – taking bows and applause for everyone’s work. When Leigh Ann and I need you, the two of you are nowhere to be found.”

“I’m sorry,” I offered.

“I don’t have time for it,” Zack snapped. “Let’s go dance honey.”

Leigh Ann looked back and mouthed, “He’ll cool down,” as Zack led her back to the floor.

“It’ll be all right honey,” Kelly said soothingly. “Zack will calm down.”

Kelly hugged me and we held each other as we swayed to the music. I know Kelly was trying to soothe me but it wasn’t helping. The hangover and lack of sleep hurt but not as much as my feeling that I had let Zack down. He was my mentor and friend. He had always been there for me when I needed him. Today he was counting on me and I had failed him.

I was glad when Trevor and Stephanie showed up a few minutes before eight to relieve us. I really didn’t want to face Zack again when he took his next break. I briefed Trevor and Steph before Kelly and I left. Kelly and I headed back to our own rooms to clean up.

The tie was missing from the door when I got to my room. I listened outside for a few seconds. I heard Damian talking with another guy. Confident I wasn’t interrupting anything, I unlocked the door and went inside. I startled Damian. He stared at me.

“Hey Damain. Did Melanie take off already?” I asked. I saw the other guy was Billy Robinson. “Hey Billy.”

“Hey Kyle,” Billy answered.

“Melanie?” I roommate asked.

“I’m sorry,” I explained. “I had to sneak in earlier this morning for my sunglasses. I hope I didn’t disturb the two of you.”

“No… no, it was fine,” Damian answered. He face relaxed and he quickly added, “Billy just came over. He and I are going downtown for breakfast. You and Kelly want to join us?”

“I don’t know,” I responded. “I need a shower and need to work on my hangover. Why don’t you guys go ahead?”

“We can wait for you,” Damian answered. “It would be nice to have company for breakfast.”

“Yeah Kyle, we’re not in a hurry this morning,” Billy added.

I called Kelly and caught her just before she headed for a shower. She agreed to meet us outside Beaver Hall in forty minutes. I grabbed my shower things and headed across the hall to clean up from my night of debauchery.

A long hot shower followed by a couple bottles of water and more aspirin helped me regain some semblance of being a human being. Damian, Billy and I met Kelly outside Beaver Hall. We walked downtown to the Waffle Shop. The four of us had an enjoyable leisurely breakfast ahead of the normal Sunday morning rush.

Damian and Billy headed for the BJC after breakfast. Damian and Melanie were relieving Trevor and Steph at ten o’clock. Billy and Sarah decided to hang out with them. Kelly and I stopped by Pollock Commons for the Sunday paper and then headed back to my room. We shared the paper for a couple hours.

A little after noon I went around our floor looking for brunch companions. I met Christian in the hallway returning from church. He grabbed GJ and called for Bev and Jen to join us. I found Jay, Shawn and Trevor. All of us headed over to Pollock to meet the girls.

Trevor commented on the walk over, “Zack certainly was in a surly mood this morning. I thought he’d handle the Thon better than this.”

“It’s my fault,” I explained. “I was an hour late getting over the BJC this morning.”

“An hour late! You had the easiest ‘night’ session of anyone on the team,” Trevor exclaimed. “How in the hell did you manage that?”

“Joel and Cameron scored some beer last night,” I explained. “I had a bit much too much to drink.”

“A bit much?” GJ teased. “I thought you polished off one of the cases by yourself.”

“I had six bottles,” I corrected. “...which was one or two too many.”

The group teased me that I was overestimating my ability to hold my liquor. We met the girls at the bottom of the steps to the dining hall. We went upstairs, grabbed our brunch and found a table.

I noticed that GJ maneuvered himself so he found a seat beside Jen. He paid a lot of attention to her as our group ate and talked. My friend wasn’t a virgin and I knew he wasn’t celibate. Last fall I had spotted his girlfriend leaving early on a Sunday morning a

couple times. GJ apparently was still interested in Jen. Why would he skip a sure chance to boff a great looking girl like Jen when he had the chance? I certainly didn't understand.

Most of our group headed over the BJC after brunch for the finale of the Thon. Kelly and I picked up our floor passes and joined Jake and Keneisha for the last forty minutes of their shift. The stands in the Jordan Center filled up as the finale of the weekend approached. The crowd did the line dance in the stands, along periphery of the floor along with the dancers of the main floor. Excitement ramped up as the crowd swelled.

Zack and Leigh Ann were tired but upbeat when they took the break a little after two o'clock. Zack said nothing about my screw-up in the morning. Kelly and I massaged our friends to help them prepare for the last two hours. Our dance couple seemed primed for the finish when they headed back on the floor.

They started the Celebration of Life photos as quieter music played. Families and dancers stood shoulder to shoulder holding each other as they watched the photos of the kids with cancer play on the big screen. The whole arena was silent as we watched.

Coach Paterno took the stage following the photo set. Cameras flashed all over the arena.

"There are very few times in my life I'm speechless, but I am now," Paterno said. "I wish the whole world could see and feel what's in this room right now. Love and commitment and the dedication that just reeks from this room."

"In my [61] years at Penn State, I've never been more proud than right now," Paterno said.

Paterno shook hands with Thon families after his speech. The crowd [chanted] a deafening "We Are!" "Penn State!"

[This is an excerpt from the Daily Collegian's blog from the 2009 Thon. I can't match Joe Paterno's real words.]

The final band took the stage after Coach Paterno. They struck some classic rock hits, starting with "Walk of Life." Energy pulsed through the arena as the Thon came to a conclusion. Beach balls bounced high through the crowd of families and dancers on the floor. The capacity crowd cheered and danced until the conclusion.

The dancers and families linked arms and danced to "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" as the finale approached. When the music stopped this year's Thon chair, Debbie McGowan, motioned to silence the crowd.

"This year's Thon total dwarfed all previous efforts," she proudly announced. "We have raised \$8,102,955 this year!"

The cheers around the arena roared to a crescendo as everyone realized. This was the first time we broke eight million dollars in thirty-nine years of the Thon.

“Dancers, you can sit down now!” Deb announced.

Dancers and families hugged on the floor before they headed for seats. I met Zack and Leigh Ann as they came off. Kelly and I helped them sit down. Tyler, Kayla, Kelly and I massaged Zack and Leigh Ann as the announcements continued.

The top Commonwealth Campus for the third year in a row was the Fayette Campus with a total of \$89,315. The crowd cheered for our fellow students from that end of the state. The next announcement was the number one independent organization.

Cuch, Gina, Tyler, Kayla, Kelly and I jumped up and down and cheered as they announced, “The number one independent organization this year is the Penn State Nittany Lion Football Team with a total of \$137,020.” Zack and Leigh Ann waved to acknowledge the sustained cheers from the crowd.

I turned and saw almost a third of the football team standing and cheering in the stands behind us – everyone recognizable in their football game jerseys.

Deb McGowan concluded by announcing that Zeta Tau Alpha sorority and Alpha Tau Omega fraternity had raised an astounding \$317,928.56 this year. The whole arena rocked from cheers at their achievement.

[Note: The Greek number one fundraising pair’s total is real – from the 2009 Thon. Zeta Tau Alpha, Alpha Tau Omega and the other 350 organizations deserve real cheers for their efforts to help the kids. You can go to www.thon.org to learn more about Penn State’s Thon, a totally student run fundraising effort.]

Kelly and I led Zack and Leigh Ann out of the BJC while Tyler, Kayla, Cuch and Gina brought our supplies from the weekend.

“I can’t believe I have to fly out of Harrisburg tomorrow morning at six am,” Zack griped. “Why does the Thon have to be the day before the NFL Scouting Combine starts?”

“Aaron said you don’t have to do anything physical tomorrow,” I replied. “Jake’s driving tomorrow. You can sleep on the airplane ride to Indianapolis, get checked in, and do your medical tests. After that you get the rest of tomorrow to sleep and get ready for the testing on Tuesday.”

“It was hard Kyle,” Zack answered. “...but I’m glad I did this. We really are helping these kids, aren’t we?” I agreed as I led him outside.

Jake Washington met us with his car. He gave Zack and Leigh Ann a ride back to the apartment.

“Good luck at the combine,” I shouted as they climbed in the car. “You’re going to knock’em dead out there.”

(To be continued)

Chapter 35

Kelly and I finally got around to proofreading each other's History 21 term papers Sunday evening after the Thon was over. I thought Kelly did a good job. I gave her a couple minor corrections that I thought would help her paper. Kelly gushed over how good she thought my paper was. Both of us turned in early on Sunday night to make up for our busy and tiring weekend.

I offered to give Cuch and Gina a ride up to the Poconos for our ski weekend the next weekend. Cuch thanked me for the offer but passed. His parents agreed to pay his little brother Marco's way for the weekend. Marco was going along his roommate Jonathan Stafford. Cuch guessed that this was his parents' way to buy off their not quite eighteen year old son to keep him from heading off for a college spring break week down south. Cuch said they would meet Kelly and me at the lodge Friday night.

I found a memo from the athletic department along with a housing request form on Monday afternoon when I stopped at my locker after my workout. The memo said I had until the end of March to decide on where I wanted to apply to stay and to choose roommates. First and second year athletes would stay in the dorms. Athletes with more seniority, such as me, had their choice of the Nittany Apartments or Nittany Hall. The apartments housed four students. Nittany Hall had private rooms.

Damian was in our room when I got back from the Lasch Building. I asked, "Did you see that the housing request forms are out?"

"No, I haven't been to Lasch today," Damian replied. "I'm going to work out after dinner."

"Do you want to go in together with me again?" I asked. "If you can put up with my messiness for another year."

"Hell yeah," Damian answered immediately. "I can't think of another person on the team that I'd prefer to room with."

"Now we need to come up with two more people to share an apartment," I said. "What do you think about asking Jay and Shawn? Maybe Trevor and Tony?"

Damian winked and added, "Or we could ask GJ and Christian."

I laughed. "Neither of us could handle rooming with one of them," I countered. "Do you think we'd have a chance in hell of lasting for a year with both of them together?"

"We'll cross them off our list," Damian agreed. "Why don't we try Jay and Shawn? We could talk to them after dinner."

“OK, that sounds good,” I agreed.

It was close to dinner time, so we rounded up our friends and headed for dinner. Damian and I broached our idea to Jay and Shawn after dinner. Jay was receptive but Shawn had already made other plans. He was hooking up with GJ DeLuca and Denzel Hunt, the other sophomore cornerbacks on our team.

The identity of our fourth potential roommate next year stayed a mystery for a couple more days. Trevor Conwell was griping while Damian and I were working out Thursday afternoon. Trevor’s roommate Tony King decided to room with the other sophomore linebackers, Josh Bruno, Brendan Hayden and Jarrell Cook. That left Trevor out in the cold searching for roommates for next fall.

Damian and I shared a look with each other. We silently agreed that Trevor would make an excellent fourth for our apartment, assuming Jay approved. Jay and Trevor weren’t close buddies they way they had been before Jay’s accident and Stephanie’s decision to go steady with Trevor instead of Jay. My two friends had come to an understanding of the situation and managed to coexist without fighting.

Damian and I conferred before dinner and agreed that I would feel out Jay about the possibility of inviting Trevor to join us next fall. I invited Jay to take a walk with me after we finished dinner.

“Did you think anymore about whom to ask to join us in our apartment next year?” I asked, trying to broach the subject gently.

“A little,” Jay replied. “Christian is looking since GJ decided to hook up with the other DBs.”

“Damian and I would prefer not to share a room with Christian,” I answered. “He’s a very good friend but... I already experienced rooming with the guy. How do you feel about people that get up at 6:30 in the morning and make a bunch of noise?”

“OK, I get your point,” Jay agreed. “Cross Christian off the list.”

“Did you hear Tony, Josh, Jarrell and Brendan decided to room together?” I asked. Jay abruptly stopped walking and stared at me warily.

“And?” he queried.

“Would you consider inviting Trevor?” I asked. “The two of you were good friends before...”

“...he stabbed me in the back,” Jay said. “That’s what you expect me to say, isn’t it?”

“I might not phrase it that way,” I admitted. “But I can understand how you might feel that way.”

“I don’t feel that so much anymore,” Jay replied. “I’ve done a lot of soul searching in the last five or six weeks. I found I like being unattached – having the pick of the pretty girls at the party. I don’t know if I was ready to be tied down with one girl.”

“Really?” I asked.

“If I was to go steady with anyone, it would have been Stephanie,” Jay explained. “I think part of the reason I didn’t ask her for a commitment was that I wasn’t ready for that. In the back of my head last fall I was still looking at other girls and wanting to get them in bed with me. I didn’t ask Steph because I didn’t want a steady yet.”

“So you will consider Trevor?” I asked. Jay nodded yes. “Do you want more time to think about this or can I invite Trevor now?”

“Go ahead and ask him,” Jay answered. “I see how devoted Trevor is to Stephanie. The two of them are almost as sickeningly sweet as you and Kelly. Sometimes I think I’m going to get saccharin poisoning around you guys.”

“You’ll understand one day,” I replied. “You’ll love it when you find the right girl.”

Jay headed off to the Lasch Building while I went back to Hartranft in search of Trevor. Tony King answered the door when I knocked. He explained that Trevor had taken his books and headed over to the study center in Lasch. I went over there next.

I found Trevor at one of the study cubicles. I asked him to follow me out to the lounge for a minute where we wouldn’t disturb the studiers.

“Damian, Jay and I wanted to know if you would be interested in sharing an apartment with us next year?” I asked.

“Really? Jay’s OK with this?” Trevor asked.

“Jay’s cool with it,” I confirmed.

“That’s fantastic,” Trevor replied. “I was beginning to feel a little unloved since Tony ditched me to room with the other linebackers. You guys were naturals to room with until you invited Jay into your group. I didn’t think he’d be willing to share space with me.”

“He is getting over Stephanie choosing you over him,” I answered. “So, you’re in with us?”

“Absolutely!” Trevor gushed. “Thanks man, I really appreciate the invite.”

“No problem Trevor...” I began. Trevor spun around and headed across the room to where Jay was watching the news on TV.

“Jason, my man...” Trevor boomed as he crossed the room. “Thanks for letting me room with you guys. I appreciate you putting our problems behind us.”

“It’s OK Trevor,” Jay answered as he stood and faced Trevor. He extended his hand to shake with the big defensive end. “You and Stephanie are a good couple.”

Trevor brushed his hand aside and grabbed Jay in a bear hug. He hugged Jay hard, picking him up off the floor in the process. “You’re the best, man,” Trevor gushed. He planted a big kiss on Jay’s cheek. Jay blushed as Trevor set him down again. “I’ve always considered you a true friend.”

“Oh man, way too much male bonding here!” Karol Zizka said as he edged down the sofa away from Jay and Trevor.

“Way toooooo... much!” Mehmed Marsic agreed.

Trevor and Jay ignored the commotion they caused. Jay settled down to watch TV again and Trevor went back to studying. I returned to my room and filled out my housing request form. The other three guys filled theirs out too. I turned the four forms in at the front desk of the Lasch Building Friday morning. Hopefully we would be quick enough to get a premium townhouse style apartment with four private bedrooms instead of the smaller garden style unit. They had two bedrooms that you had to share.

Friday after lunch I helped Kelly carry her things for our ski weekend over to my room. The two of us headed over to the Ferguson Building for our Civil War history class. After class I brought my VW down to Hartranft and loaded our bags and skis while Kelly went to her Poly Sci class.

I double parked for a couple minutes in front of the Thomas Building when her class ended. Kelly hopped in when she found my car. We took off for the Poconos immediately. I took Route 26 up through Bellefonte and hopped on I-80. We grabbed some snacks in Bloomsburg on the way east. I turned off onto Route 209 just east of East Stroudsburg. Twenty minutes later I pulled into the parking lot at the Fernwood Inn. The trip had taken a little more than three hours.

Cuch’s girlfriend Gina Rossi had an accounting class that didn’t end until 3:20 pm, so Cuch, Gina, Marco and Jon would be an hour or so behind us. Kelly and I went into the lobby to check in. Kelly managed to suppress her giggles when I registered us as Mr. and Mrs. Kyle Martin.

I was a little surprised when the manager explained that our room wasn't in the hotel proper. Aaron Morano had rented a one bedroom villa for us for the weekend. The manager said Mr. Cuchiella would be next door to us. Marco and Jon Stafford would be in hotel in one of the regular rooms. He gave us directions to our villa and told me where to park.

The villas were along the golf course. We had a nice living room with a TV and a gas fireplace and a kitchenette downstairs. The bedroom with a queen sized bed and a bathroom were upstairs. Aaron had outdone himself with these accommodations.

Kelly and I left our bags by the door and drove back to the inn to find supper. We decided to eat Mama Bella's Tuscan Grille, an upscale Italian eatery at the resort. Aaron had been quite generous with money for meals too. We wouldn't be pinching pennies this weekend.

Mama Bella's was a nice little restaurant. They had checkered table clothes on the table and had the place decorated in the typical southern Italian theme. The waitress seated us at a quiet table to one side of the restaurant, out of the kitchen traffic. She handed us menus and took our drink orders.

I ordered a Cappasante Con Panchetta while Kelly chose the Ravioli Duo for our antipasto course. I picked the Stuffed Pork Loin for dinner with salad, mixed vegetables and a side of angel hair pasta with marinara. Kelly thought the Pasta Bolognese looked tasty. Her pasta came with salad too.

While we waited for our dinner I asked Kelly about her plans for next fall. I knew she was going to have to move out of the dorms since upper classmen must live off campus. Kelly said she and her girlfriends had decided to share an apartment. Kelly felt she would enjoy living with Bev, Cindy and Jen next year. The four girls planned to start shopping for an apartment after spring break was over.

The waitress brought out our antipasto while we talked. I shared my seared scallops wrapped in pancetta with Kelly. She gave me a couple of her spinach and cheese filled ravioli. Both appetizers hinted that we would enjoy the rest of the meal.

Salads and crusty Italian bread came next. Kelly and I barely started on our salads when Cuch, Gina, Marco and Jon walked into the restaurant. We waved them over and invited them to join us. The waitress was hesitant but we assured her it would be fine. Our friends didn't mind if our food arrived ahead of theirs.

The waitress brought more bread along with the menus for our friends. Kelly and I told them how delicious our antipasto was. Cuch and Gina ordered some for themselves. Marco and Jon were on a tighter budget. They were paying their way using money from their jobs last summer.

We ate and talked casually, enjoying ourselves. The waitress and chef managed to slow our entrees slightly to let the rest of our table catch up with their appetizers and salads. Our main course arrived with Cuch's lamb chops, Gina's Chicken Provencal, Marco's Fettuccine Alla Crema and Jon's Shrimp Scampi. Our meals were excellent.

It was a little after seven o'clock when we finished at the restaurant. I gave Cuch the money I owed him for covering most of my night shift the previous weekend at the Thon. He and Gina headed back to East Stroudsburg for beer. I agreed to take Marco and Jon along when Kelly and I went over to Shawnee Mountain for a little night skiing. Aaron's weekend package included lift tickets good for the whole weekend.

The ski area was only five minutes away from Fernwood. We changed into our ski clothes and hit the slopes. Shawnee Mountain has twenty-three trails and we tried them all in the next two and a half hours. Both Marco and Jon were good skiers, fully capable of keeping up with Kelly and me. We packed up and drove back to Fernwood when they shut down the lifts at ten o'clock.

Cuch invited all of us in for a night cap before bedtime. Each of enjoyed a bottle of beer before we said goodnight. The six of us decided it would be fun to ski together tomorrow so we agreed to meet at the hotel lobby at 8:30 in the morning for breakfast.

Kelly and I finally unpacked our things after eleven o'clock. We showered and then headed to bed. Kelly and I did make love once that night. We didn't need to hurry. We had all weekend together with absolutely no interruptions.

The front desk gave us our wake up call at 7:30 am on Saturday morning. Kelly and I tried to shower together. It was probably best that the stall was too small. I was playful and probably would have gotten distracted showering with Kelly in the morning. All of that would have to wait until that evening.

We ended up getting Cinnabons and coffee for breakfast in the lobby of the hotel. That was easier than a sit down breakfast at a restaurant. I led the way over to Shawnee Mountain with Cuch following with his girlfriend, brother and Jon.

The six of us took off and started skiing. The grounds crew had had made snow and groomed the mountain during the night. Conditions were pretty good thanks to the cold weather we were experiencing. Crowds weren't too large thanks to the lateness in the season.

We skied all morning, took a break for lunch and then headed back out for more fun. Marco and Jon proved to be more than capable. They were downright crazy on the black diamond slopes, flying nearly out of control straight down the hill. We took a longer break for dinner in the lodge and then went back out again. We skied until the lift closed down.

Cuch invited all of us back to his villa for drinks when we returned to Fernwood. I allowed myself three beers that evening. All of us were dog tired from the day's efforts and we didn't plan to squeeze in anymore skiing on Sunday. Kelly and I would sleep in and clear out of our villa before the eleven am check out time. Cuch and Gina had pretty much the same plan for themselves.

Kelly and I made love twice that evening before we finally fell asleep. We woke up around 9:30 the next morning. We made love one more time before we cleaned up. This probably would be our last opportunity until we got to the beach in Florida the next weekend. We made the most of our opportunity.

We grabbed an early lunch at the Trolley Stop Pub before we headed back to campus. Their burgers were huge and delicious. We hit the road around noon and headed west for campus.

Sunday evening I called Aaron out in San Francisco to thank him for his help and generosity for the Thon. Aaron was pleased that our team was the top independent organization at the Thon. He told me to contact him again next year. He would be happy to support the fundraising effort the same way again.

Kelly stopped by my room later Sunday after I finished working out. "I have big news," Kelly announced as she settled in on my bed.

"What's up?" I asked.

"Jen is flying sky high," Kelly explained. "She hooked up with a guy on Saturday night. She is head over heels for this guy."

"Who is he?" I asked.

"His name is Mark Armstrong," Kelly explained. "He's an engineering major and a sophomore like us. Not only did Jen spend the night with Mark, they spent the today together too. That is why she wasn't around at supper tonight."

"I hope this works out for her," I said. "She deserves a nice boyfriend."

Dr. Barnes handed back our term papers on Monday in our Civil War history class. Mine had a big red A+ on the front. "Excellent effort Kyle. You captured the difficulties tacticians faced using turn of the nineteenth century Napoleonic tactics to a battlefield environment where a common rifleman outranged the artillery of fifty years earlier. I look forward to your next effort. W. Barnes."

Cameron Miller was pleased too. He got an A- on his paper. Kelly received a B on hers. The three of us were all happy when we left class fifty minutes later.

Monday evening Kelly and I spent some time together preparing for meetings with our academic advisors. Most of the courses were set for the fall semester by degree requirements but each of us had room for one history class. We browsed the course catalog on-line looking for something we could do together.

We found the perfect course after about fifteen minutes of studying. History 161 was going to be taught in the fall semester. The title of the course was “The Battle of Gettysburg in Historical Memory.” Best of all – it was taught by Dr. Katherine Brennan, our favorite history professor.

My appointment with Dr. Henderson was for 3:30 pm on Tuesday afternoon. He reviewed the courses my curriculum required me to take. I needed a course in teaching secondary social studies, two more geography courses and a course from the list of seven additional intermediate level geography or history courses in my Citizenship Teaching Option. He agreed to me taking History 161.

I stood up to leave when Dr. Henderson asked, “Given in the inordinate amount of time that you spend playing at football, exactly how do you plan to fit your required student teaching into your schedule?”

“I know it wouldn’t fit into my schedule in the fall of my senior year,” I agreed. “I suppose it will have to be in the spring.”

“Don’t potential NFL stars depart after their last college game and prepare for professional football?” Dr. Henderson asked.

“Maybe some do,” I replied. “I won’t be one of them. My friend Zack Hayes is student teaching right now.”

“Hayes?” Dr. Henderson queried. “He isn’t in the College of Education.”

“No Zack is studying to be a physical education teacher,” I explained. “He is in the College of Health and Human Development. No one is going to make a bigger splash in the NFL draft than Zack but he’s still out there every day doing his student teaching. I can do it if he can.”

“You have shown some facility for test taking so far,” Dr. Henderson replied. “It would be unfortunate if you wasted my time and yours in this curriculum to pursue vainglory in the future.”

Dr. Henderson’s attitude pissed me off royally but I managed to keep my cool. “Actually I have had another professor suggest that I would do better as a history major,” I countered. “I do not want to do that. My goal and ambition is to spend my life teaching history to students. I want to share the love I have of the subject with them.”

“I hope your athletic pursuits to not dissuade you from that goal,” Dr. Henderson answered.

“Count on it doctor, they won’t,” I replied before I turned and left his office.

Why was it always a hassle when I went to see him? I made the dean’s list the past two semesters. I had straight A’s on my midterms and term papers so far this semester. What was the guy’s problem?

I wondered how I had been so unlucky as to get Dr. Henderson as my faculty advisor. All my other professors were supportive of me playing football. Some were enthusiastic. I was going to have to keep myself focused on my school work. I’m sure Dr. Henderson would like nothing more than to prove himself right that a football player wasn’t serious enough or committed to becoming a teacher.

Kelly’s meeting on Wednesday afternoon with her advisor went better than mine. She was approved to take History 161 with me. It would be the only course we would have in common this fall. She was taking journalism related courses and I was taking courses for social studies teachers.

I caught up with Zack Wednesday after classes in the weight room in the Lasch Building. He told a bunch of us about his experiences at the NFL Draft Combine.

“They measured, weighed, poked and prodded me,” Zack explained. “They did all kinds of physical tests. I made a decent time on 40 – 4.55 seconds.”

“4.55?” I asked, laughing.

“I don’t have your speed,” Zack replied. “I placed second among the twenty-one quarterbacks. I did well on the vertical jump, the broad jump and I was the top quarterback on the bench press.”

“You ought to be,” Cuch said. “You are almost as crazy about lifting as our linemen.”

“I sucked at the three cone drill,” Zack added. “I’ve never had to make a lot of sharp direction changes on the field. I did OK on the 20 and 60 yard shuttle runs too.”

“What QB specific tests do they do?” Jay asked.

We went through the whole passing progression,” Zack replied. “Three, five and seven step drops – slants, ins, outs, corner and go routes – the whole package. I was pleased with my work throwing. I don’t think any team is going to turn me down for these results.”

“Any teams interview you?” Tyler Madden asked.

“I did ten in-depth interviews while I was there,” Zack answered. “The Jets, Tampa Bay, Jacksonville, Carolina, Chicago, Green Bay, Kansas City, Denver, Oakland and San Francisco all sat down with me.”

“No interest from your brother’s team?” I asked.

“No, Seattle didn’t contact me,” Zack replied. “I guess one Hayes is enough for them.” Zack paused a few seconds. “It would have been cool to be on the same team as Sam. Of course I’d have to be the starter and Sam would be my backup.”

“Did you get to meet many of quarterbacks at the combine?” Jay queried.

“I enjoyed meeting all these guys,” Zack answered. He looked over at me. “You’re right about Brady Rasmussen. We got to be friends last week. He’s a real sweet heart. We hung out with Elijah Carter from Florida most of the week. It was a blast.”

Zack must have answered questions for forty-five minutes before he satisfied our curiosity. Things ended with Chip’s final question. “Who do you think you’ll play for?”

“After a week of teams talking with me, scouting me and testing me...” Zack replied. “I have absolutely no idea where I will be this summer.”

I’m glad Zack took time to tell us about the scouting combine. Hopefully many of us would be attending in a year or two, on the way to a professional career.

Trevor, Stephanie, Kelly and I were all excited about spring break the next week. Trevor and Steph were leaving immediately after classes on Friday afternoon, driving to her home in Woodmont so she could pick up camping gear. They couple would stop by Trevor’s house in Unionville on the way south so he could get his gear. The two of them planned drive straight though and get down to Panama City Beach, arriving on Saturday afternoon sometime.

Kelly’s parents insisted she had to spend at least one night of spring break at home. The two of us decided to go to Pittsburgh first. We would leave early Saturday morning and drive all day. Google/map said it should take us seventeen hours to get to our campsite from Kelly’s house.

I had a geography midterm on Thursday afternoon. I thought I aced the test. Kelly was lucky. She had all her midterms finished the previous week. We loaded nearly all our things, except a few clothes, in my car Thursday night. Friday’s classes seemed to drag on. I was free at 12:50 while Kelly had to go to Poly Sci before we could leave. Fifty minutes later I was parked outside the Thomas Building when Kelly came out after her class.

We headed straight for Pittsburgh from her class. We got stuck in traffic on Route 22 a dozen miles west of Kelly's house. Kelly called home and asked her mom to hold supper a little. We wanted to eat dinner with her family.

I pulled into Kelly's driveway at 5:47, about seventeen minutes later than planned. Mike, Patrick and Sean were finishing their meals when we arrived. They had to be over at the church by 6:30 for their troop's March camping trip to the Heritage Scout Reservation. Kelly and I barely had time to say hello before Mike drove his brothers off for the weekend.

Anne made it home from college for dinner too. Bill Jr. did not. I enjoyed sharing a meal with Kelly's family. Her mom Kathy was an excellent cook. Kelly filled her family in about our success at the Thon. I told the family about tour I gave little Kyle, Ty and Will. Bill Sr. had been in a frat when he was in college and had helped with the Thon when it was much smaller. They raised \$245,000 his last year at the event. Bill and Kathy complimented us on our efforts.

Bill Jr. arrived as Kathy and Laura cleared the table to make room for dessert. Bill Jr. was a little out of sorts, complaining about having a four o'clock class on a Friday afternoon. He thought they should be outlawed. I would never have to worry about that. Football players had to keep their schedule free in late afternoons to leave time for football practice.

Kelly and I hung out with her parents that evening. The purpose of staying overnight at Kelly's house was so her family could see her a little before we headed for the beach. We couldn't very well go out that evening.

Kelly's parents decided it would be best if I took Patrick's bed that night. Kelly and I planned to depart at five am the next morning. Bill Jr. didn't need me bumping around in the dark when I got up at 4:30 am.

Kathy served us pie and ice cream before we went to bed. We turned in around 10:30, much earlier than normal so we could get a good night's sleep before we headed south for Florida.

I got up around 4:30 am and took a quick, quiet shower and then met Kelly downstairs. We managed to get on the road a few minutes earlier than planned. I took the first driving shift. We stopped off along I-79 in West Virginia for breakfast sandwiches around 6:30 in the morning.

Kelly and I took turns as we headed south, each of us driving for three hours before turning the wheel over to the other. We headed south through West Virginia, the corner of Virginia, North Carolina and on to Charlotte. We stopped for lunch near Charlotte.

We followed I-85 southwest to Atlanta. I-185 took us south to Columbus, Ga. We grabbed dinner and then followed Route 431 south from there on a four lane, at-grade

access highway. Eventually we ran into the construction that would turn this highway into a limited access interstate.

We were in the middle of nowhere in southern Georgia at dark. We drove on crossing into Florida around nine o'clock. We hit Panama City just before ten. Kelly and I pulled into the campground around 10:30 pm. I pulled in beside Brandon McCafferty's Jeep Cherokee. It was a relief to arrive.

Kelly and I hopped out of the car and stretched as our friends came over to welcome us to spring break.

"It's about time you got here slowpoke," Ed teased as he shook my hand. "You left me stranded here with a God damned defensive end. At least he didn't try to sack me."

"Yet," Trevor taunted. "So far I've managed to suppress the urge to flatten him." Trevor came over and shook hands followed by Hal, Jeremy, Eric, Brandon, Penny and Harrison. Tammy, Kathy and Steph greeted Kelly warmly. There were three girls standing back watching us that I didn't recognize.

Ed and Eric introduced Kelly and me to Nicole Johnson, Shelby Carter and Lindsey Boiko. Nicole had been going with Ed's roommate Eric Peters since last fall. Shelby Carter was Ed's companion this week. Lindsey Boiko was Brandon's companion this week. She hailed from Pottsville, Pa. and went to Lehigh with Brandon.

Ed inquired, "You guys want some beer?"

"Not yet," I answered. "I need the bathroom, to put up my tent and then to get beer – in that order."

"It was a brutally long drive down here," Kelly added. "We got up at 4:30 this morning."

"Take care of business," Jeremy said. "We'll be over here by the fire."

Kelly and I headed off to the bathrooms to relieve ourselves. We set our tent up between Ed's and Brandon's tent. Twenty minutes later we were ready to sit down, have our beers and catch up with our friend's lives.

A couple beers relaxed Kelly and me. We stayed up and talked with our friends until after midnight. Kelly and I stripped naked when we went to bed but just cuddled. Both of us were too tired for fooling around. Most of my friends agreed with my plan for the morning which was sleep through it.

I knew it was late morning when I awoke Monday morning. I could see the sun was well above the horizon in spite of the trees around our campsite. Kelly and I were both on our

left sides, loosely spooned together. I glanced at my watch. It was 10:32 am. The camp site was quiet, so I decided to enjoy the quiet and relax.

I scooted closer to Kelly, hugging myself to her body. I draped my right arm over her side, holding her abdomen and chest. I nestled my head on her shoulder. I drew in a deep breath. I smelled “Kelly” – slightly musky with hints of the body wash she used yesterday morning and a bit of her perfume. The smell was comforting. This was the woman whom I loved.

I rubbed her belly and chest gently as I cuddled against my sleeping lover. Not unexpectedly my cock hardened and poked between her legs as I held her. I rocked my hips back and forth, sliding my hardness between her warm soft thighs and against her outer labia. It felt fantastic.

This continued for a few minutes. Kelly let a sigh and murmured, “Mmmmm....” as she clasped my hand to her breast. I stopped rocking for a moment. “Keep going Kyle, that feels wonderful.”

I caressed and fondled her breasts with my right hand while I worked my cock up and down along her slot. I could feel my lover getting aroused as her body bathed my cock in her secretions. A couple minutes was all Kelly needed. She let go of the hand on her breasts and grabbed the end of my cock as she pulled her waist away from me.

She deftly positioned my cock and slid me inside her as she brought her waist back against mine. I pushed my cock in as deep as it would go and slowly withdrew. We began our lovemaking slowly and gently. I thrust and pumped while I teased at her nipples. Kelly’s neck and shoulders went from pink to rose colored and then to bright red as she became more excited.

Both of us were breathing heavily when Kelly reached between her legs to help me bring her off. Kelly squirmed and panted as she fingered her clit. I held onto her and continued thrusting my cock in and out.

“Ooooohhh... Oooohh.... Yeah...” Kelly panted as she neared climax. “Keepp going.... Kkkkylleeee....” she whined. A couple more thrusts sent her over the top. Kelly spasmed and groaned as her body was racked by an intense orgasm. Her pussy throbbed and squeezed my cock. I held onto her to keep from slipping out. One half hearted thrust more was all I could manage.

My cock exploded and pulsed as it deposited a week’s worth of sperm into her womb. I did a few rabbit thrusts as my balls drained completely. Spent, I clung to her as she calmed down too. After twenty or thirty seconds I gave Kelly sweet little kisses on her neck and shoulder.

“That was a wonderful way to wake up honey,” Kelly said.

“Indeed it was,” I agreed as Kelly pulled away from me and rolled over so we faced each other. “We get to do that all week.” Kelly smiled and embraced me. We kissed and hugged for a minute or two before disentangling ourselves from each other.

We pulled on some clothes and grabbed our shower things. Our campsite was mostly quiet. I heard whispering in Harrison’s and Penny’s tent. It also sounded like Brandon and Lindsey were quietly engaged in the same pursuit that Kelly and I had just completed. We walked together to the shower house, kissed each other and then took separate showers.

Trevor and Stephanie were sitting at the picnic table in the middle of the three campsites were occupied, looking fresh and clean. “Morning Kyle, morning Kelly,” Trevor said amiably as we joined them.

“Did the two of you sleep well?” Steph asked.

Trevor leaned towards us as we sat down and gave us a leer. “It sounded like you were having a VERY good morning this morning when Steph and I went to the showers.”

“We had an excellent night’s sleep and fun this morning,” I confirmed. Neither Kelly nor I blushed. All four of us were veterans of Zack’s parties. We had all waited outside for a bedroom more than once. Our sexual activities weren’t secret.

“Do you know where the food is stored?” I asked. “We don’t stand on ceremony in the morning. Help yourself to breakfast whenever you get up.”

“OK, that sounds good,” Trevor said. “Steph and I were going to wait for someone else to get up before we ate. We didn’t want to step on anyone’s toes by being presumptuous. We don’t know how your friends like to do things.”

Trevor showed me to the plastic storage boxes where our group’s food was stored. Trevor helped me find things while I browsed for breakfast. Trevor and Steph knew exactly what we had. They had gone to the store with Jeremy and Kathy yesterday afternoon.

The four of us settled on bacon, eggs and toast. Kelly and I went to work cooking while Trevor and Steph set the table. The eggs were nearly done when I heard a familiar squeal from the next campsite to the south. My ex-girlfriend Penny must have been having some early morning delight with her boyfriend Harrison.

“Nobody is shy around here are they?” Steph asked.

“Most of us have known each other since we were in elementary school,” I explained. “We don’t have many secrets.”

“This is pretty normal for this group,” Kelly added. “The leaders in Kyle’s Venturer Crew are pretty liberal about who shares tents. How long have you and your friends been camping in coed tents?”

“About five years,” I replied.

“My Venturer Crew never did anything like this,” Trevor said. “Our advisors would have had a shit fit.”

Penny and Harrison popped out of their tent a few minutes later as we were eating our breakfast. Penny greeted everyone cheerily, “Morning everyone!” as she walked for the shower house. Harrison was considerably less comfortable with us knowing what he and Penny had been doing. He blushed and mumbled a good morning to our greetings as he followed his girlfriend.

Two by two all our friends got up, showered, had breakfast and joined Trevor, Steph, Kelly and me around the fire circle. We talked and relaxed while our group got its act together. We made up a few sandwiches to take down to the beach for the afternoon. Our first day’s goal was to catch some sun and to plan out activities for the rest of the week.

We played volleyball for awhile in the afternoon. When most of the girls tired of that they went to sun themselves. The guys decided a little ultimate Frisbee would be fun. Later Ed grabbed information from an information kiosk and gathered our group together.

Another visit to the water park beside received unanimous agreement for one of the afternoons. An afternoon of mini-golf was easy to pick too. Other ideas that the brochures suggested were deep sea fishing out in the Gulf, snorkeling or scuba diving and parasailing.

All three of these ideas sounded appealing but none of us could afford to do all three. Ed and Eric were gung ho on selling the group on a scuba trip. I liked the idea too. The rest of the group was unsure since they never tried it before. Ed finally sold the rest of the group on it when he explained the resort courses that dive outfits ran to introduce newcomers to scuba.

We split down the middle between the people in favor of fishing and the group that wanted to try parasailing. Ed, Eric, me and Trevor argued strongly in favor of the parasailing. Hal, Jeremy, Harrison and Kathy strongly favored the fishing.

In the end we agreed to disagree. Half our group would go out fishing tomorrow afternoon. The remainder would try the parasailing. Ed would arrange the dive session for Tuesday. We would do mini-golf on Wednesday, and we would go to the water park on Thursday. Friday afternoon would provide more time to relax on the beach and

improve our tans. It also could provide a day to reschedule one of our activities if we ran into bad weather during the week.

Jeremy and Kathy took off to make arrangements for deep sea fishing after we finished planning. Ed would go to the Panama City Dive Shop to set things up for Wednesday afternoon.

“So, Eric and I are certified divers, Kyle needs an open water dive and the rest of the group will do the resort course, right?” Ed asked.

“No, I’m certified too,” Trevor said.

“Where’d you get that?” I asked.

“I got it years ago in Boy Scouts,” Trevor explained. “The older guys in my troop did a dive and sailing trip in the Bahamas when I was fourteen.”

“Wow, sailing and diving in the Bahamas,” Jeremy said. “Our troop never did anything like that.”

“Troop 33 had always been extremely active,” Trevor replied. “The troop does a high adventure trip of some kind every year – Philmont, Northern Tier Canoe Base, and sailing. One year the troop went out to Yosemite and did a week of rock climbing.”

“That is a lot,” Hal said. “Our troop and Venturer Crew only does canoeing in Algonquin every other year.”

“Kyle has told me about your trips up there,” Trevor said. “It sounds pretty cool.”

“Did you make it Eagle?” Jeremy asked.

“No, I didn’t,” Trevor replied. “I wish I had stuck around. I quit when I turned sixteen. I was all fired up to buy a car. I wish now that I had stayed and earned my Eagle. I know Kyle got it. Did anyone else in make it that far?”

“All of us,” Ed answered gesturing towards Jeremy, Hal and me. “Well, except for Brandon. We never could get him to join Boy Scouts.”

“It didn’t sound like fun to me,” Brandon added. “Not until my girlfriend invited me to join Venturers. When she said we could share a tent for the night it was, ‘Sign me up! Quick!’ ”

All of us had a good laugh at Brandon’s dedication to the ideals and principles of scouting. Most of the group hung to at the campsite and helped get dinner started. Brandon and Lindsey left to arrange tomorrow’s parasailing session. I hopped in Ed’s car and rode over to Panama City with him to the dive shop.

The Panama City Dive Center was located on Thomas Drive down almost to the St. Andrew State Park by the Grand Lagoon. The gentleman behind the counter was happy to help us set up an afternoon for our group. Tuesday was booked but they would be able to help us out Wednesday. The gentleman, Ron, suggested that we should figure a longer day. The people in the resort course would do an hour of classroom study at ten am, suit up and put in an hour in the pool, have lunch and then go out on a dive boat for a dive or two in the afternoon.

Ron suggested that Ed, Eric and Trevor could catch one of their morning dive boats and dive at a few wreck sites while the rest of our group received their training. The boat would be back after lunch and the three of them could hook up with the resort course and dive with them in the afternoon.

I was a special case. I hadn't planned on diving while I was down here, so I didn't bring any of my papers showing my progress towards certification. I needed to produce my paperwork or I would have to go through the resort course with the rest of my friends.

That wasn't terribly appealing. I had spent forty-five hours in the classroom and pool back at school learning everything they would learn and far more. Ron suggested that perhaps my instructor could fax my paperwork to them. If all my training was correct, they would allow me to go out with Ed, Eric and Trevor to do my open water dive and to complete my certification.

I called Mr. Coleman back at the university. Thankfully he was in his office at the Natatorium. Mr. Coleman agreed to fax my paperwork down to the dive shop at the end of the day. Ron told me to call back tomorrow and check if everything was in order for me to finish my certification. Ed and I thanked him for his help and headed back to camp.

Hal and Tammy had volunteered to prepare supper for our first day. They made spaghetti. Add in a salad and a couple pies for dessert and it was a simple but tasty meal. The group cleaned up and changed into nicer clothes for the club that evening. The eight of us that came last year had no trouble convincing the rest of the group that Club le Couche de Soleil was the place to be on our beach during spring break.

We hung out at our campsite until nine o'clock. Each of us limited ourselves to single beer. We knew last year that the bouncers had banned drunks at the beginning of the week and hadn't let them in again during spring break. The club had good bands and plenty of space for dancing.

The queue outside the club was tremendous when we arrived. We joined the line and waited patiently as the bouncers IDed the partiers, took the cover charge and stamped hands "Drinks" or "No Alcohol". No one in our group qualified for the first stamp yet. Trevor was closest. He would turn twenty-one in the end of September.

We headed inside the big dance hall, picked up sodas and waited for the music to start. The 'Sunset Club' hadn't lost anything since last year. They had two live bands play that evening. Both were excellent. We danced, talked and thoroughly enjoyed ourselves.

Eric, Jeremy, Trevor and I all got recognized by fans from our respective universities. The fans were polite, most asking for autographs when they met us. Eric made a point of introducing Ed to the Gator fans when they stopped by. His reception was lukewarm at best. I saw firsthand what he told me last fall about his popularity on campus.

We headed back to camp around 11:30 pm. All fourteen of us gathered around our campfire, broke out some beer and enjoyed ourselves.

Kelly and I headed to bed just before one am. In spite of the late hour, Kelly and I made love twice before we fell asleep. It had been an enjoyable and relaxing first day of vacation.

Kelly and I woke up around 11:30 on Monday morning. Both of us were suffering from a bit of a hangover. Aspirin, a hot shower and a bottle of water fixed me up. Most of our gang slept in like us. Ed and I had to hustle some of our friends to get them ready to leave for our one o'clock parasailing session. We took my car, Ed's car and Brandon's Jeep down the beach front highway to get the boat.

The Adventure Group that we arranged our afternoon with set up two boats for us. Trevor, Steph, Brandon, Lindsey, Kelly and I ended up in the second boat. We drew straws to see who went up first. Trevor and Stephanie drew the short straw, so off they went.

The boat operator had a nice set up. He hooked you into the harness. Trevor was in back, Steph in front. They stood on a platform on the back of the boat while one guy launched the chute into the wind as the driver gunned the engine and flew across the bay.

The parasail lifted Trevor and Stephanie cleanly off the back of the boat. I snapped pictures as they flew up into the sky. Their huge smiles told me they were having a blast. We signed up for the three mile ride with 1200 foot of tow line, so Trevor and Steph got a good long ride.

After ten minutes they reeled Trevor and Steph back down to the boat. The crew winched them right onto the fantail platform again. Our friends gushed about how spectacular the whole thing was.

Brandon and Lindsey graciously let me and Kelly go next. The crew strapped us into the harnesses and helped us up onto the platform. The captain gunned the engine and the boat roared away from us as Kelly and I flew into the sky. It was a total adrenaline rush as the water dropped away and the chute dragged us into the sky.

Kelly had put her hair in a ponytail before we took off – thankfully for me. I didn't have her bright red locks billowing in my face. The view as we rose was breathtaking. Miles of bright white sandy beach stretched on our right. The sea was aquamarine close to shore and subtly changed shades to a deep blue further out to sea. The water was so clear we could see the bottom from our height in the air.

When we rose to our full height we could see over the peninsula that Thomas Drive followed. The Grand Lagoon behind the peninsula was an uninviting greenish-blue color. We could pick out golf courses as the boat pulled us west. We even spotted the big water slide at park beside our campgrounds.

Kelly and I had to almost shout to be heard as the wind whipped past our heads at thirty or forty miles an hour. We only talked occasionally, mostly just staring and enjoying the spectacular view.

The boat slowed and started to winch us in much too soon. In a couple minutes they pulled us down to a gentle landing on the back of our boat. A crewman recovered the parachute as the boat slowed to a stop. Trevor used my camera and Steph used Kelly's to get pictures of us.

When we were unharnessed, the crew helped Brandon and Lindsey get set. A couple minutes later the boat flew down the bay again, lofting our friends into the sky. Kelly and I took lots of pictures for our friends as the experienced the awesome ride. Too soon their parasailing experience was over and the crew was winching them back into the boat. We gave our friends on the other boat a wave as they passed us when we headed back to the dock.

We hung out at the dock for about twenty minutes while we waited for the rest of our group to return. We left our crew nice tips. They had done a great job for us that afternoon.

The whole group went back to camp and changed into swimsuits. We had a couple hours until it was time to start our dinner. We hung out at the beach, tanning and playing volleyball with a group of kids from North Carolina.

I called the dive shop later in the afternoon and confirmed that they had all needed paper work so I could finish my dive certification Wednesday. Mr. Coleman was very helpful and had everything in order for me to dive with Ed, Eric and Trevor Wednesday afternoon.

Kelly and I took our turn at cooking dinner that evening. It was simple food – hamburgers, hot dogs, macaroni and cheese, and cake for dessert. Everyone limited themselves to one beer over dinner. We didn't want anyone turned away at the door of the dance club.

Our group was meshing nicely. Trevor and Stephanie fit in well with the group. Tammy, Kathy, Penny and Kelly made Lindsey, Nicole and Shelby feel a part of our group too. Jeremy and Trevor hit it off from the start. Their similar defensive minded temperaments helped them get close quickly.

Penny and Kelly got along well too, to my relief. I didn't need my ex-girlfriend and my current girlfriend fighting for a week. Odd man out was Penny's boyfriend Harrison. The rest of the guys in our group were athletes or at least outdoorsmen. Harrison was neither.

We tried not to laugh yesterday when he went down to the beach in the afternoon wearing white pressed khakis and leather shoes. He was out of his element camping with us. He gamely joined in with any game or contest we did. In spite of this Harrison earned our respect.

Harrison's intelligence stood out. The guy is smart. The eight of us who from Paradise all ranked in the top ten percent of our graduating class so weren't slouches in the brain department. It stood out even in our company.

Harrison's obvious love for Penny was the other thing that made it easy for us to accept him into our group. We all cared deeply for Penny and she was very much in love with Harrison. Harrison obviously returned the love from the way he doted on Penny. I was happy for her. She deserved a nice guy to be with. Our relationship may be done but I still cared deeply about her happiness.

Later in the evening we headed back to Club le Coucher de Soleil for music and dancing. It was wet T-shirt night at the club. None of our girls were interested in participating in the contest. We guys mostly behaved ourselves while we watched the contest.

These girls were hot! Shelby reprimanded Ed once when he ogled a little too long. I got a couple disapproving looks from Kelly too but she kept her mouth shut most of the time. Things went back to normal when the first band started playing.

Kelly and I danced as many times as possible, taking occasional breaks for sodas and rest. Eric, Jeremy, Trevor and I all had fans stop by to talk with us and get autographs. Every one of them was polite and friendly.

Our gang had enough of the club around 11:30. We loaded up in our three cars and drove back to the campground for our private party. Jeremy broke out the cooler full of beer for most of us. Ed and Eric served screwdrivers to any and all who were interested. We sat up, talked and told stories for an hour and half. We tried to keep the noise down, not that it mattered much. Virtually all the campsites in the campground were rented to college students like us. No one was in bed early in the campground.

Kelly and I were a little unsteady on our feet when we finally went to bed. Unsteady but not too drunk to have some fun together before we went to sleep.

Kelly and I both woke up with terrific headaches Tuesday morning when we finally got out of bed. A hot shower, aspirin and rehydrating helped, but neither of us was interested in a big breakfast. The rest of our group wasn't much better than us. The group threw me for a loop when everyone gathered around noon time.

We planned to play mini-golf in the afternoon. Everyone agreed, over my strenuous objections, that it would be more fun to play a round of golf instead of putting a ball around a cheesy little course. Kelly coaxed me into agreeing to play a round with the rest of the group. I agreed reluctantly. I hadn't played golf since gym class in high school and I wasn't very good then.

We split up into foursomes with a spare pair at the golf course. Trevor, Steph, Kelly and I made up one of the foursomes. My skill didn't improve with time. I hooked balls off into the trees. I sliced them into the water hazards. I sucked at golf!

My three friends had fun in spite of all my hacking. The golf course was a par 74. Trevor, who played on his high school golf team, scored a 73 for the afternoon. Kelly posted an 81. Steph, who also took golf at Penn State, scored an 82. My score was 109. I swore when the day was over that I would never, never, NEVER set foot on a golf course again.

Even our anti-jock, Harrison, did much better on the golf course than me. He scored an 83. The rest of the group posted respectable scores in the high seventies or low eighties. I was glad when we left the golf course.

It was Trevor and Stephanie's turn to cook that evening. They made pork chops, mashed potatoes, and peas. I was pleased to see my future roommate had some talent in the kitchen. That would be good to know next year.

We hung out for awhile and then got ready to go out dancing. The club was packed when we arrived. We grabbed some sodas and hung out until the first band got going. We stayed for a couple hours, leaving around eleven pm.

We needed to leave for the dive trip by nine am in the morning. No one was going to enjoy diving with a hangover so we limited our alcohol consumption back at camp that evening. Kelly and I had one beer a piece before we went to bed. Well, went to our tent. It would be hell to dive with a hangover. Diving when you're a little tired isn't so bad. Kelly and I shared our bodies with each other twice before we finally cuddled and fell asleep.

The alarm on my watch woke us at eight o'clock Wednesday morning. Kelly and I dragged our tired butts out of bed. We walked around the campsite making sure everyone was awake and getting up for our big day. We grabbed showers and some breakfast before we headed off for the dive shop.

Everyone filled out liability waivers when we arrived at the dive shop. The clerk behind the counter processed the ten people in our group doing the Intro to Scuba short course and sent them out to a van. They were heading for a local pool to learn the basics of scuba and to get comfortable underwater in shallow water. We would join them later in the afternoon when they went for their open water dive.

The clerk, who had a name tag that said 'Bob', turned to us. "I understand three of are already certified to dive. I need to see your NAUI cards."

Ed, Eric and Trevor fished out their wallets and pulled their cards. Eric showed his first. Bob noted, "Eric Peters... OK" Ed showed his card next. "Ed Fritz?"

Bob eyed my friends carefully for a second. "You guys play football for the Gators, don't you?" he asked. It wasn't a hard connection. Both guys were wearing T-shirts that said 'University of Florida Athletic Department' on the front.

"Eric Peters!" Bob repeated. "THE Eric Peters. I loved that touchdown you caught to win the game over Vanderbilt, that was a thing of beauty."

"Thanks," Eric replied.

"And you are Ed Fritz, Elijah Carter's backup this season," Bob said as he faced Ed. Ed bristled slightly, preparing himself for the usual negative response from Gators fans. Bob extended his hand to Ed to shake. "You had a rough debut this year, didn't you?" Bob added as Ed shook his hand.

"That's putting it mildly," Ed agreed. "I stank against LSU"

"You're a freshman, right?" Bob asked.

"Red shirt freshman," Ed corrected.

"By my figuring, you were two and two when you came in for Elijah Carter," Bob answered. "You rallied our team to beat Central Florida in the fourth quarter. You lost to LSU but there is no shame in that. Elijah couldn't beat them in a neutral site so you shouldn't have expected to beat them at their home. You played well against Kentucky. The defense lost that game. You beat Ole Miss. That's always a good thing."

"Thanks for saying that," Ed replied. "Not many fans feel that way about me."

“I played high school ball,” Bob said. “I wasn’t good enough to play in college but I know what to watch for. I’m looking forward to this season. I’m curious to see how you do.”

“Thanks for saying that,” Ed replied.

“I guess I should introduce myself proper,” Bob said. “I’m Bob Smallwood, UF class of 2008.”

“How’d you end up behind the counter here?” Eric asked.

“Jobs in oceanography are few and far between,” Bob explained. “Anyway, they pay me to go diving every day. How can you get better than that?”

“I guess that is pretty cool,” Ed agreed.

Bob looked over at Trevor and me. “You two have to be football players too.” We nodded yes. “You don’t play for the Gators. You’re shirts are the wrong shade of blue.”

Trevor and I both happened to wear dark blue Penn State T-shirts with the Lion and Nike swoosh logos on the front.

“We play for Penn State,” I said. “Nittany Lions,” Trevor echoed.

“Ah, I see,” Bob replied. “Yankees, I won’t hold that against you.” Bob turned to Trevor. “Let me see your dive card.” Trevor handed it to Bob.

“Trevor Conwell,” Bob said as he handed the card back. “I watched a couple of your games last fall. I can’t say I remember you. What position do you play?”

“I start at defensive end,” Trevor replied.

“Opposite Washington,” bob said. “I do remember now. You’re a pretty good player.”

“Thanks,” Trevor replied.

“That must make you Kyle Martin,” Bob said as he turned to me. “The almost certified diver that I’m taking on his first open water dive.”

“That’s me,” I agreed.

“You’re the receiver that Hayes throws all those deep balls too, aren’t you?” Bob asked. I nodded yes. “This is going to be a fun day. I get to show off our piece of the Gulf and dive with some top football players. It is going to be fun. Let’s get you guys outfitted so we can catch the boat for this morning.”

Bob took us to the next room and outfitted us with wet suits, fins, masks, snorkels and BCDs. We put together our weight belts in the next room. Bob led us out to the dock after we had our wetsuits on. We stowed our gear and lunches on the boat.

It turned out that Bob wasn't just a clerk at the store. He was one of their boat captains. Bob introduced us to his assistant, Jesse. I guessed Bob was around twenty-five or twenty-six based on his college graduation class. Jesse looked to be younger, maybe twenty or twenty-one.

We settled into the horseshoe ring of seats in the back of the boat while Bob and Jesse got us to sea. Bob explained that we were going to dive on two wreck sites near the dive center, come back for lunch and then hook up with our group for an afternoon dive or two.

Bob quizzed me on diving while we sailed out to the first dive site. I understood. If I did well on the open water dive, he would be the one to sign off on my dive card, not Mr. Coleman back in State College.

It took us an hour to get out to the first dive site, the wreck of a coastal barge. Ed, Eric, Trevor and I put on our mask, fins, snorkel, weight belt and buoyancy vest while the crew anchored us near the wreck. The set up on the boat was cool. The air tanks were on benches along each side of the ship. You sat down in front of one and Jesse or Bob would strap it into your vest.

Bob gave us our dive briefing before he suited up. Bob and his employer did not believe in the "Same Day, Same Ocean" buddy system. He definitely expected more than we would be in the same ocean on the same day as our dive buddy. We had to stay within ten feet of our buddy at all times.

Ed, Eric and Trevor were to stick together as buddies. "Kyle, you're with me for this dive," Bob explained. "You need to stick to me like glue this dive if you want your certification. I won't be prompting you on what to do. I expect that you already know it from the information your dive instructor faxed us. Is that clear?"

"I'm ready to go Bob," I answered.

"You go first Kyle," bob replied. "Show me what you know."

I flopped my way over to the gap in the side rail, trying not to trip on my fins. I took my snorkel in my mouth, put my mask down and held it in place. I stepped off feet first and let my weight carry me into the water. I sank down three or four feet and then bobbed back to the surface. I made the OK signal as I blew the water out of my snorkel.

Bob was smiling when I looked back up at the boat. "Good entry Kyle," he said. "Move off about ten feet and hang out while I get the rest of the guys in the water."

Ed, Trevor and then Eric jumped in one at a time. Each performed the entry exactly the same way as me. Bob was the last one into the water. He swam over to me. "Are you good?" Bob asked. I nodded yes. He spun around and faced the rest of the group. "Divers, you can head for the wreck now. Surface if you have trouble and signal Jesse. He will come pick you up in the dinghy. Otherwise, have fun. Remember this is a forty-five minute dive. You should be starting for the surface at 10:50 am. Any questions?" My friends didn't have any. They swam for the wreck, about 150 yards off the starboard bow of our ship.

Bob turned his attention to me. "We're going to go down to 10 feet for a bit Kyle," Bob explained. "I want to check you out and make sure you are ready for more." I let air out of my BCD and sank down until my depth gage read 10 feet and then neutralized myself again. I cleared my ears and waited for Bob. He came down behind me. The first thing he did was shut off my air. Calmly I turned him around and took his spare hose so I could breathe with his air.

Bob gave me a thumbs up and yanked at my mask. It came loose and filled with water. I pulled it back in place and bled the water out exactly the way Mr. Coleman taught me back at the Natatorium. That got me another thumbs up.

Bob held up three fingers on one hand and used his thumb and index finger to form a zero. He pointed down when I nodded in agreement. Both of us bled more air from our vest and descended to thirty feet. Bob motioned for me to follow him. I nodded agreement again and followed him over to the wreck.

Bob explained at the on-the-surface briefing that this was an inter-coastal barge that foundered about thirty years ago. It had carried agricultural products, which were now gone. The barge had gone down by the head and broken in half when the bow hit the bottom before the stern.

The sea bottom was barren sand all around the ship. The ship itself had become an oasis of sea life over the years. Coral was attaching itself to the ship. Schools of small fish darted here and there around and through the wreck, confident they could hide from the predators.

I followed Bob around the wreck. We checked out the topside, looked in the now uncovered hatches and swam along the sides of the ship to the bow. Both the marine life and the structure of the barge demanded my attention. The forty-five minutes flew by. I could see Bob was comfortable with me underwater too. He paid less attention to me as time passed.

We caught up with Ed, Eric and Trevor. The five of us explored to our heart's content. I was disappointed when Bob tapped me on the shoulder and pointed to the surface. All five of us ascended carefully in stages. I was totally pumped when we popped up on the surface a couple hundred yards from our ship. We swam back against the current. I was tired by the time I clambered onto the back of the dive ship.

Jesse helped us aboard one at a time. He sat us down on the air tank bench, secured the tank and then released the connection to our vests. Trevor, Ed, Eric and I burst out talking, trying desperately to tell each other everything we observed while we were down below. Diving was just too cool.

I envied Trevor's experience doing this when he was in scouts. I could only imagine what it was like to spend a whole week diving in the Bahamas. I needed to talk to Joe Baer when I got home after this semester. Our crew needed to consider doing more things like Trevor's scout troop.

When everything was stowed away, Jesse started up the boat and headed off for our next dive site. Bob sat with us and talked about the kinds of marine life we had seen on the wreck. It was a fascinating talk. It took forty-five minutes to reach the next dive site.

Bob briefed us on this site. It was an old scallop boat that sank in the late 1940's. Plant and sea life had overtaken much of the boat so we wouldn't see much of it. He described the fish and plants we would see. Bob told us to get suited up when he finished the briefing.

I was pulling on my fins when Bob sat down beside me. "As far as I'm concerned you're a certified diver now Kyle," Bob said. "I will fill out your card and complete the other paperwork when we get back to the dive shop. Buddy up with one of the other guys for this dive. You don't need to stick with me."

"Thanks Bob," I replied.

"If you see the instructor who taught you, tell him he did an excellent job," Bob replied. "I have had certified divers out here that didn't know half of what you knew."

"Thanks for the compliment Bob," I said. "I definitely will see my instructor again. He's my boss too. I lifeguard at the university's swim center in the winter."

"That explains the 'lifeguard' on your swim suit," Bob said.

"No, that is from my summer job," I replied. "I lifeguard and teach canoeing and rowing at a Boy Scout camp."

"I see, you're a water rat," Bob answered. I nodded in agreement. "Go have some fun Kyle."

Trevor and I decided to buddy up for the dive. Jesse and Bob got the four of us set up and then let us into the water. Bob waved us on towards the wreck when all four of us were in the water and ready. This time the wreck was on the port side, off the stern of the ship. We descended down to around forty feet and then swam for the wreck. Bob caught up to us before we reached the wreck.

This site teemed with sea life. The fish came in brilliant hues of red, green, yellow and blue. Some fish swam solo. Others stayed in big schools, swimming in perfect synchronization. Trevor and I found a lobster hiding near the wreck. We checked him out for couple minutes. He looked like he would have been tasty, if we came armed and this had been the proper season to catch him. We spent every one of the thirty-five minutes allotted to us exploring this undersea world. Reluctantly we obeyed when Bob signaled it was time to surface.

Words burst forth from all four of us like candy from a piñata as we tried to convey our wonder at the foreign world under our boat. Bob told us we could have lunch while we motored back to the dock. Jesse called ahead and found out that everyone in our group passed the tests. They would be joining us on another dive this afternoon.

The lunches included in our day's package featured tuna fish sandwiches, chips and fruit for dessert. It took us an hour to get back to the docks. All our friends were waiting near the end of the dock in wet suits, waiting to come aboard when our boat tied up. Two more dive instructors came aboard with our friends – Jose and Jill.

I helped Kelly aboard and showed her where to stow her gear. We gave each other a hug and a kiss when things were away.

“You’re all wet,” Kelly commented when we broke the hug.

“Well, of course,” I replied. “I’ve been diving.”

“Was it fun?” Kelly inquired.

I proceeded to tell her all about the fantastic things we had seen on our two dives. Kelly seemed to get excited about the prospects as I told what lay under our boat. When I finished my story I asked, “What did you think of scuba?”

“I wasn’t real sure if I would like it at first,” Kelly replied. “I just about freaked in the pool when Jose shut off my air. Once I calmed down I realized that this wasn’t so bad. I did fine by the time they made us take our masks off to practice clearing them.”

“I had to do that today too,” I said. “Bob needed to see if I really knew what I was doing underwater. I passed all his tests today. I get my certification card when we get back to the dive shop.” “That’s wonderful,” Kelly replied. It also earned me a hug and kiss.

Bob drove the boat east this time, opposite from the sites we dove on in the morning. It took half an hour to get to the site. We were in closer to the coast than in the morning, in shallower water.

Ed, Eric, Trevor and I were allowed to explore the wreck in buddy pairs. The rest of our group needed to stay with their instructor throughout the dive. Bob explained that the

learners were limited to no deeper than fifteen feet. The rest of us could go deeper if we wished.

Ed, Eric, Trevor and I helped our friends get suited up and equipped. Jill demonstrated the proper entry into the water. Bob motioned for Ed, Eric, Trevor and I to go in the water on the opposite side of the boat. We didn't need to waste time listening to the instructors. We were allowed up to an hour on the bottom since this was a shallow dive. The four of us took off while the learners entered the water one at a time.

Bob explained that this dive site was a recently wrecked barge in very shallow water. It had broken loose as a hurricane came through three years ago. This was the spot it ran aground. A few sea creatures used the wreck as shelter, but not nearly as many as we saw on the last wreck.

The two groups of newbies joined us a few minutes later. The seventeen of us explored around the wreck. This dive site was OK compared to the ones we had seen in the morning. Some fish used the wreck as shelter from the currents and the predators. We did spot one barracuda prowling for dinner. Everyone stayed well clear of him.

We headed back to the dive boat after forty-five minutes underwater. Trevor and I helped Jill get all the newbies onto the granny line so they could pull their flippers off before climbing back on the dive boat.

Jose and his newbies surfaced and hopped on the granny line before Trevor and I had a chance to climb aboard. We helped Jose get Hal, Tammy, Harrison, Penny and Lindsey aboard before we climbed aboard. Ed and Eric hopped on just before Bob.

Our friends gushed about how much fun they had diving. Ed, Eric, Trevor and I were a little surprised. This had been a little bit disappointing from our perspective.

Bob announced that this completed the normal resort course introduction to scuba. We would head back to the docks. He also suggested that if we wanted he could take us on one more dive that afternoon for an additional \$20 a person. All the newbies instantly agreed to the additional dive. Ed, Eric, Trevor and I looked over at Bob. He gave a wink and mouthed 'We save the best for last.' The four of us agreed to one more dive.

Jesses piloted the boat a half hour away from our first dive site. He reviewed the safety procedures for the dive. The newbies would have to stay with their dive instructor again. They were not certified to wander around alone. Ed, Eric, Trevor and I were welcome to explore with our dive buddy.

This dive site was at an old cargo ship. The superstructure was sticking out of the water. Bob briefed us on the wreck of the Emerald City. The ship had been caught in a violent storm while at anchor. It broke loose and had run aground nearly sixty years ago. Much of the structure of the ship had rusted away. It provided excellent cover and habitat for

aquatic life. The coastal side of the ship was covered with sea grass. This provided more cover for small fishes. Bob said the sea life would be abundant.

The four of us went off the port side of the boat while our trainee friends went off the starboard side. The four of us signaled Jesse we were OK and then descended down fifteen feet to the bottom. We swam over to the wreck.

The four of us saw what Bob had briefed us on when we were on deck. The coast side of the old freighter was in 15-20 feet of water. The seaward side of the wreck was on the edge of a drop off that went down to fifty feet or more. The wreck was teeming with life, plants and sea creatures. We explored around the bow then along the seaward side of the ship.

The old ship was in poor condition from rust and battering from storms over the past 70 years. Much of the steel sides had rusted away leaving gaping holes in the sides of the ship. You could look in at the boilers, engines and other machinery in the interior. No one went inside. Bob had strictly forbidden us from doing that. We went around the tail end of the ship and checked out the propellers.

We bumped into one of the groups of newbies as we came around to the shallow side of the wreck. I spotted Kelly, so I swam over to join her. She paused beside me and gave me a thumbs up. The mask and regulator couldn't hide her smile or the sparkle in her eyes. My girlfriend was enjoying herself.

Trevor and I hung with Jill's group, including Kelly, Steph, Jeremy, Kathy and Brandon as they explored the shallow side of the old ship. Even though this was our fourth dive, Trevor and I could feel the sense of wonder and discovery our girls were feeling as they explored this underwater world.

We were a few feet off the bottom swimming along when I noticed a dark shape on the bottom flap and start to move. I tapped Kelly just in time for her to see this huge Manta Ray swim away just before we swam over him. Kelly shook her head and smiled in amazement.

Jill led her charges back to our boat much too soon for my taste. Trevor and I glanced at our watches. We only had five minutes more bottom time, so we followed the newbies back to the boat.

All our friends gushed about how much they enjoyed their dive and the amazing sights down below while Ed, Eric, Trevor and I took off our bottles and other equipment. This last dive was worth far more than the \$20 we spent for it.

Bob turned the boat back towards Panama City Beach as our group relaxed in back and talked about our experiences. Everyone left generous tips for the crew before we exited the boat. It was after six o'clock when we arrived back at the dock. We turned in all our equipment and met outside. A quick conference among the members of our group

produced a new plan for the evening. It was kind of late to go back to camp and cook dinner and then get the club in time for the bands. We decided to scope out the local restaurants for our dinner. We choose Pineapple Willy's along South Thomas Drive. The food had been good there last year and it was close to the dance club.

The waitress seated us on the cabana overlooking the ocean and left us menus. The food looked interesting and not too expensive. The spare ribs that were barbecued for eight hours and served with Jack Daniels sauce caught my attention immediately. Kelly wanted to try their New Orleans Po Boy Sandwich. She decided to have the one with shrimp. Jeremy saw the prime rib and had to have it. The rest of my friends choose anything from the Caesar salad to seafood platter to Harrison and his French dip sandwich.

The place was crowded and our food took awhile to arrive. We hung out, talked and enjoyed the awesome ocean view while we waited. The food was delicious when it finally arrived. It provided a good apex to a spectacular day.

We headed down to the sunset club after dinner. We smelled slightly of the sea, but not too much. We showered off at the dive shop after we turned in our wet suits. The line wasn't as long at the door as usual since we were an hour ahead of the first band's start time.

The doorman IDed us, stamped our hands, collected our cover charges and sent us inside. We found seats nearer the stage than usual and ordered drinks. We spent the next hour talking about all the spectacular things we had seen and done that day. Everyone agreed that another dive trip would go on the plans for spring break next year.

We started dancing when the band started up. We danced through the first set with occasional breaks. Our entire group was hanging out together downing sodas while the band took a break. As happened every night, some Florida, Notre Dame or Penn State fans recognized and stopped by to meet us.

This time it was two drunk Florida fans in orange and blue T-shirts. They both looked to be our age but either had good fake IDs or were actually over twenty-one. The more inebriated of the two lurched over and exclaimed, "Peters!" Eric turned to look at them. "You're Eric Peters!"

"Yes, I am," Eric replied.

"That touchdown against Georgia Tech at the Orange Bowl," the drunken Gator fan said. "I couldn't believe you caught that one." He handed Eric a piece of paper. "It was fucking awesome. Could I get your autograph?"

"Sure," Eric agreed. The drunk scanned around the group while Eric signed his name. The drunk's gaze stopped at Ed.

He cocked his head and stared. “Fritz!” he spouted. “You’re the worst God damned quarterback ever.”

“You are wrong about that,” Eric replied. “Ed is a good QB.”

“Eight fucking interceptions when he played!” the drunk’s buddy added.

“I think you should leave,” Eric said. The autograph was not offered back to the drunk.

“We should have been fucking champions this season,” the first drunk insisted. “You fucked everything up, starting with the game against LSU.”

“Just leave now,” Eric said as he crumpled the autograph.

Jeremy nudged Trevor in the side. They stepped up to the two drunks, towering over them. The drunks were averaged sized – maybe 5’-10” and 165-170 pounds. My two defensive friends were 6’-2” and close 250 pounds each. “GO!” Jeremy commanded.

The two drunks backed off slowly, trying to save a little face with bluster. “Fritz, you suck!” they called out as Jeremy and Trevor crowded them away from our group. They turned and left after another thirty seconds of face off.

“Welcome to my world,” Ed said glumly.

“They’re a bunch of drunken idiots,” Hal said.

“They have no idea what they’re talking about,” Eric added.

“You... you... and you,” Ed said as he pointed at Jeremy, Eric and me. “You guys are heroes to your fans. You don’t know what it feels like to be treated like a bumbling quarterback who couldn’t find an open receiver even when he’s alone on the field.”

“The fans had high expectations this season,” Eric replied. “They expected to compete for the national title now that Elijah had experience. Of course you didn’t play as well as a fifth year senior. No should have expected you to.”

“There is no shame in getting beaten by LSU at their home stadium,” I said. “Zack Hayes said he didn’t think he could have won that game.”

“They worship Elijah on campus,” Eric added. “He couldn’t beat the Tigers in a neutral stadium. He wouldn’t have won that game in Baton Rouge. You rallied us to win in that abortion of a game against Central Florida. We should have won against Kentucky. You had the game won until the defense fell apart in the last two minutes of the game. You beat Ole Miss. That’s always good.”

“I expected better of myself than I was able to do,” Ed replied.

“You shouldn’t doubt your abilities as a quarterback,” Jeremy said.

“Hell, I don’t doubt myself,” Ed replied sharply. “I KNOW I am going to be a good quarterback when I get a proper chance. Bet on it!”

I was happy at my friend’s reaction. The Ed I knew was a fighter. He didn’t let things get him down for long. I knew the Gators fans would warm up to Ed when he became the starter for their team and won some games for them.

The MC announced the second band for the night. Tonight was their first appearance at the Club le Coucher de Soleil. Their music was OK at best. I wouldn’t place a bet on them making a second appearance at the club. We danced to a couple songs before Ed announced, “Let’s blow this place. I think it’s time for a good stiff drink.” The rest of our group agreed readily.

We headed back to camp. Hal and I built a campfire while Ed and Jeremy got out snack food and coolers of drinks for everyone. We gathered around the campfire, talked and drank until well after midnight.

I knew the encounter with the Gators fans had affected my best friend more than he wanted us to know. He hit the screwdrivers harder than most nights. Eric and I had to help Shelby put Ed to bed around 1 am. Who am I to judge Ed? I hit the beers pretty hard that evening too. Kelly and I were too out of it to have fun in bed that evening. We cuddled together and fell asleep before we had the chance.

There wasn’t much morning left when our group straggled out of bed couple by couple. Everyone was dragging when they got up. Our original plans were to go to the water park next door on Thursday, but no one was up to it. We decided to go down to the beach instead. Lying out and taking in the sun down there sounded like a better choice given our conditions.

Later in the afternoon after we worked off our hangovers and general malaise, we played some ultimate Frisbee and volleyball. We headed back to camp around five o’clock, ready for dinner. It was Penny and Harrison’s turn to cook. Harrison wasn’t very handy in the kitchen so Kelly and I helped them get dinner ready.

This was our big night for dinner. We had New York strip steaks for everyone in our cooler. Penny and Harrison grilled them. I grilled portabella mushrooms Trevor had picked up when he went through Kennett Square back home on his way south to Florida. Chester County was noted for the best mushrooms around. Kelly made a potatoes au gratin side dish. Jeremy and Kathy prepared a pair of Jello instant cheese cakes for dessert. It was the best meal of our trip.

We hung out at camp after dinner and talked for awhile before we got ready to go the club. The sunset club held their foam party on Thursday nights. We showed up early dressed in our swim suits and T-shirts. The party was held out on the deck by the pool. Close to a thousand college students partied and got doused with foam during the evening.

Seeing Kelly with a soaked T-shirt plastered to her breasts, her nipples showing plainly, got me horny that evening. My hard-on never went down was danced and drank our sodas. The music was good but the two of us were too worked up to stay at the party as long as our friends. Ed and Shelby weren't much better. We said good bye to our friends and I drove the four of us back to camp early.

Kelly kept rubbing my tummy and thigh, inching closer to my manhood as I drove us back. I don't know how I managed not to cum or to wreck the car on the way back. From the sounds in the back seat, I think Shelby gave Ed a blow job on the way back. Kelly and I were too wrapped up in each other to notice much.

Kelly and I headed straight for our tent when we got to camp, as did Ed and Shelby. The two of us stripped down in seconds. Kelly lay back and spread herself open for me. I took her in seconds. We fucked furiously working off the pent up hormones. I couldn't hold off cumming before Kelly orgasmed. I went down on her to bring her relief. The two of us cuddled and rested after that.

We could hear Ed and Shelby going at it six feet away from us in the next tent. Shelby chanted, "Go Eddie... GO!" I had to laugh. Ed hadn't allowed anyone to call him Eddie in six years. I guess a woman can call a guy most anything if she has his cock embedded in her pussy.

Kelly and I cuddled a bit and then started making out. We made love the second time – gently and with passion. The two of us dressed after we were satisfied and went outside to relax. I made us a small campfire and we enjoyed beers. Ed and Shelby joined us fifteen minutes later.

Our friends came back from the club around 11:15. We all sat around the fire and enjoyed some drinks. All of us were careful that night. No one was interested in going through a hell like this morning a second time. Kelly and I turned in around midnight and went to sleep after a little cuddling.

Friday morning I woke up earlier than usual – around 9:30 am. I had to go to the bathroom, so I dressed and took care of business. I went back to bed. Kelly was still dead to the world but I couldn't get back to sleep. I got up after half an hour of laying there, dressed and headed outside.

I toasted myself a bagel after my shower and relaxed listening to tunes by the cold fire ring. Penny crawled out of her tent about fifteen minutes later carrying her shower things. I gave her a cheery, “Good Morning!”

“Morning Kyle,” Penny answered. She headed off to the showers to clean up for the morning. Penny returned about twenty minutes later and sat down in the chair beside me.

“Harrison still sleeping?” I asked as I pulled off my ear buds.

“Dead to the world,” Penny answered. “I couldn’t sleep anymore so I decided to enjoy the morning air.”

“I know,” I replied. “Kelly is sleeping soundly too.”

We talked about school for a few minutes. We talked about our families a bit. Eventually the conversation turned to our personal lives.

“You and Kelly are great together,” Penny commented. “You two seem so happy with each other. Are you planning a future together?”

“We’ve talked about it a little,” I replied. “I’m not ready to get engaged tomorrow but both of us hope for marriage in the future after we graduate from school and we get our careers going. I’m not in a big rush anymore to plan out my whole life. We know how that worked out, don’t we?”

“Not as well as you and I hoped,” Penny agreed. “It’s probably wise to just enjoy today right now.”

“How about you and Harrison?” I asked. “You two seem happy.”

“We are,” Penny agreed. “Harrison’s personality meshes well with mine. He makes me laugh. He’s smart and good looking.”

“And you have the hots for each other,” I teased.

“There’s that too,” Penny admitted after a giggle. “It took a little training but he very good in bed.” She winked and added, “Dating you spoiled me. No other guy has ever managed to get me going the way you used to. It takes awhile to get a new guy up to my minimum standards.”

“Sorry for spoiling you,” I replied. “But remember I was as much a virgin as you were five years ago. What we learned, we learned together.”

“True... very true,” Penny agreed. “Harrison has been willing to learn and has turned into a wonderful lover. It’s been bliss. The last two months have flown by.” Penny leaned in close quietly said, “He told me he loved me a couple nights ago.”

“That’s good,” I replied.

“It wasn’t the ‘I love you. Let me in your pants,’ kind of off-hand statement,” Penny explained. “He meant it too. I think he may be the guy I make my life with.”

“I’m happy for you,” I said. “I really am.”

“He’s a funny, generous guy. Our personalities fit together,” Penny explained. “Our school and career plans fit too. He plans to do law school at Penn at the same time I’m in veterinary school there. I think once we complete school and get set professionally we could have a very happy life together.”

“I’m delighted things are working out for the two of you,” I said. “I wish I hadn’t caused you so much pain two years ago.”

“Hmmmph, stop apologizing for that Kyle,” Penny replied. “You didn’t handle the break up well but I didn’t handle the whole long distance relationship thing well either. We were just two dumb high school kids who thought they were in love with each other. We’ve matured a lot since then. You have a strong relationship with Kelly now and I have Harrison. Everything from high school and our break up is history.”

“I won’t argue with you about that,” I agreed. “I’m glad we can sit down and have a friendly conversation again. I’ve missed that.”

Penny agreed. The two of us spent forty minutes talking together like we used to do. We reminisced about high school and Venturers, talked politics and history, we discussed books we’ve read, and caught each other up on what is happening in our lives at school. It was a comfortable conversation between old friends that we hadn’t shared in much too long a time.

Kelly, Jeremy and Kathy, Brandon, and eventually the rest of our crew got out of bed and joined us. We all had some brunch and then got ready for our visit to the water park next door.

We had been blessed with excellent weather all week, but Friday was the best of all. The sun warmed us under a crystal clear blue sky. Temperature climbed up into the low eighties after noon. It was perfect weather for us to get wet and have fun.

We played around in the wave pool. We rode the flumes and chutes, solely and in groups. We did the Tree Top Drop where you start sliding downhill in a big tube which goes almost vertical, dropping you into a pool at the bottom. The Pirate’s Plunge took you down a sixty foot high chute feet first into a big pool below. We took a break for some pizza after an hour and half. We went back and hit the chutes and slides again. The water park was a great way to wrap up our week of fun. We left when the park closed down at 4:30 pm.

Hal and Tammy cooked dinner when we got back to the campground. We had Chicken Cacciatore for our final dinner. The whole group headed over to Club le Couche de Soleil after dinner. We stayed for three hours, heading back to camp around 10:00pm.

Hal, Tammy, Brandon, Lindsey, Penny, Harrison, Trevor, Stephanie, Kelly and I were all heading back to Pennsylvania early on Saturday morning. We had a seventeen hour drive to get home.

Jeremy and Kathy were leaving later in the morning to return to South Bend. They planned to drive half way on Saturday, stay at a campground and then get back to school on Sunday. Eric, Ed, Shelby and Nicole didn't need to hurry. They could leave for Gainesville at lunch time and still be on campus for dinner.

We had a couple beers as we packed and said our goodbyes. I was pleased that Trevor and Jeremy exchanged e-mail addresses and promised each other to keep in touch in the future. Inviting him to come down and join our group was an excellent idea. Kelly and I went to bed around 11:30. We went straight to sleep.

Kelly and I rolled out of our sleeping bags at 5:30 the next morning. We showered and packed the last of our things in my car. The other couples heading for Pennsylvania did the same. Kelly and I were on the road a little before six o'clock.

We picked up breakfast at a McDonalds in Panama City and then headed north on Route 231. Route 8 took us over to Tallahassee where I picked up I-10. We grabbed lunch near Jacksonville and then headed north on I-95. Kelly and I swapped driving duties every three hours. We had dinner when we crossed into Virginia. Kelly and I broke out our sweatshirts at dinnertime. The temperature dropped as we went north and the sun set.

I crossed the Susquehanna River and got off I-95 a few minutes before eleven pm. I followed Route 1 north through southern Chester County and headed north for Gap. We pulled to a stop in front of my house a couple minutes after midnight. The house was dark. Kelly and I carried our luggage inside.

Mom left us a note. "Welcome home. Please lock the front door. We'll see you in the morning. Make sure you lock the basement door. I don't want the twins wandering downstairs and seeing anything. [wink... wink... nudge... nudge]."

Kelly and I were too tired for sex that night. We headed straight to bed without any funny business. The drive home had been exhausting.

My alarm woke me at eight o'clock. I set it in case I felt rested enough to go to church with my family. I felt good, so I woke Kelly too. We talked for a minute and decided we were up for church. I let Kelly shower first. The two of us headed upstairs twenty minutes later.

"Unka Ky!" one of the twins called as I stepped out the basement door. "Keh-EE!" the other chirped when he spotted Kelly.

"Hey guys," I said. The twins were in their high chairs pretending to eat pancakes. I kissed one twin on the forehead. He was covered from ear to ear with sticky maple syrup. "Connor?" My nephew looked up at me and giggled. I finally was learning to recognize the two apart.

"Hi Noah," I said before kissing my other nephew.

"Welcome home Kyle," Mom said. "I'm glad you're here Kelly." Mom continued feeding Hunter oatmeal as Kelly greeted the twins too. Dad was browsing through the Sunday paper as he ate his cereal. He grunted a perfunctory greeting. Dad always got wrapped up in the paper in the mornings.

Kelly and I decided to have bacon and eggs for breakfast. Mom, Kelly and I talked while I cooked and Mom fed Hunter. Liz came downstairs a couple minutes later. Kelly and I exchanged greetings with my sister.

"Mom-mom... done," Noah announced. "Done!"

"Down... down," his brother added.

"Liz, could you clean up the twins?" Mom asked as she continued feeding Hunter.

Liz cleaned up the boys' sticky hands and faces and put them down on the floor. Noah and Connor scooted off for the family room, most likely to play with their toys. As soon as the twins' feet hit the floor Hunter started fussing.

"Aaahh!" he grunted as he pointed towards his nephews. "Aaahhh!" Mom tried to give him another spoonful of oatmeal, without success.

"OK Hunter, I'll clean you up and let you go with the twins," Mom said. She did. Hunter crawled off as fast as a nine month old could go, trying to catch up to his bigger nephews.

"I see you let him loose now," I commented.

"We have no choice," Mom replied. "He fusses and screams until we let him go with the twins. He loves to hang out with them."

“That’s cool,” I commented. “What do the twins think of him?”

“The ‘Baby’?” Mom answered. “They tolerate him at best. He gets into their toys at times and that causes a commotion. They aren’t any different than you were at two and half and Andy was their age. Hunter will grow a little and they will get used to him playing with them. The three of them will be inseparable by this time next year.”

“Speaking of Andy, where is he?” I asked.

“He’s still sleeping,” Mom explained. “He has to help with lunch and dinner at the restaurant today. He’s skipping church.”

Kelly and I sat down and ate our breakfast while Mom cleaned up the high chairs. Liz made herself an omelet and joined Kelly, Dad and me at the table. I had a chance to catch up with my sister’s life. She hadn’t settled on a boyfriend to replace Alex yet, not from a lack of trying. She had been out on dated with three boys, all who would like to go steady with her. She enjoyed the active social life and wasn’t interested in being tied down just yet.

Kelly and I went downstairs again and dressed for church. We met the rest of the family upstairs just before it was time to leave. Kelly and I assisted Mom and Liz with the three boys. I ended up carrying Hunter out to his baby seat in the mini-van and strapping him in. Kelly and I followed Dad over to the church in my car.

The whole Martin clan filled a pew and then some. Kelly and I scanned the sanctuary when we found only one spot left in the pew for the two of us. We spotted Zack Hayes and Leigh Ann Bowman, so we joined them. Zack and Leigh Ann took turns when they were home from school, one Sunday here at our church, the next Sunday at her church up in Shaefferstown.

We talked quietly with our friends before the service started. Zack and Leigh Ann hadn’t done anything big for spring break. They spent the week going over wedding preparations with their families. Kelly and I told them about our fun down in Florida – parasailing, scuba diving and dancing half the night. They agreed that it sounded like we had fun.

The Rev’s sermon was up to his usual high standards. It felt comfortable to be home again, singing hymns and seeing friends. Kelly was getting used to the Presbyterian order of worship. I didn’t need to help her as much to follow along in the hymn book and bulletin.

Reverend Hollinger greeted us warmly after the service. He quizzed Zack and me about Penn State’s prospects next year and who would succeed Zack as the starting quarterback for our team. Zack and I agreed that we expected Jason Nicholson to be our starter.

“Not Winfield Brinton?” Rev asked. “You know he’s nice Presbyterian boy. I went to seminary with his pastor.”

“Chip is a good friend of mine and I know he’s Presbyterian too. We’ve gone to church together,” I explained. “He will get his chance eventually. Jay has a year and a half more experience in our system. I’m sure he will win the starter’s job this summer.”

The Rev quizzed Zack about what he expected when he got to the NFL. He talked with Leigh Ann and Kelly too. My pastor had the touch with people. I love football and college, but sometimes I wish I were still able to see the Rev every Sunday the way I did when I was younger.

Zack reminded me about helping him at Pro Day next Saturday before we parted. The four of us promised to catch up with each other when we got back on campus. Kelly and I headed back to my house. We beat Mom, Dad, Liz and the little kids back to the house.

Kelly and I had tator tots in the oven and hamburgers on the stove when the rest of the family came back. The twins dashed for the kitchen as soon they got in the door. “Unka Ky, eat?” Connor begged.

His brother sniffed and asked, “ ’urger Unka Ky?”

“Hey Mom,” I yelled. “The twins are begging for a hamburger. Is that OK?”

“Sure,” Mom agreed as she started upstairs to change. “Put a slice of cheese on one burger for the boys. Make sure you chop it up in small pieces before you give it to them.”

“You’re in luck guys,” I said to my little nephews. “Mom-mom said you can have a burger.” They danced around and cheered when they realized I would feed them.

Kelly took another burger from the freezer and I threw it in the pan with ours. The twins hung around us, begging and pestering us until we held them up so they could watch us work. Kelly held Noah and I held Connor as I cooked our lunch.

Mom and Hunter showed up a few minutes later. My little brother went straight to his high chair while Mom got lunch for the two of them. Mom warmed baby food for Hunter while Kelly and I finished cooking our lunch. She popped some frozen chicken corn soup from the fire company fund raiser in the microwave for her and Dad while she fed Hunter.

Mom had me give each twin a half a burger roll to go with their cheese burger. Mom allowed us to share a few of our tater tots with the boys after we mashed them up. The twins enjoyed their meal as much as Kelly and I did. I washed the boys up and put them down on the floor. They took off, closely followed by Hunter.

The boys played relatively peacefully together while Kelly and I read the newspaper. The boys did get into a small squabble when Hunter wanted to play with the blocks Connor was playing with. Mom decided it was nap time for the three boys so Kelly and I helped her haul them upstairs for their afternoon rest.

I got a call in the middle of the afternoon from Charlie Taylor. His mother is a nurse at Lancaster General Hospital and got an unexpected call to work. She wasn't able to drive him back to campus. I agreed to pick him up on the way back after dinner.

Liz joined us in the family room later in the afternoon after she finished a term paper for history. The three of us watched a movie. Around 4:30 the smell of Mom's wonderful pot roast wafted into the family room. It was the prime reason Kelly and I weren't in a hurry to get back to campus.

Mom served a feast fit for a king that evening. We had pot roast and dumplings, potatoes and carrots cooked in the beef juices from the roast. My topped off the dinner with one of my favorites – Boston Cream Pie.

The twins got plane rides after dinner before we left. Hunter had to settle for a hug and a kiss from me. Mom still didn't want him involved in rough stuff. Kelly thanked my parents for their hospitality.

We stopped off fifteen minutes later on Franklin Street in Lancaster to pick up Charlie. It was a tight squeeze, but we managed to shoe horn him and all his things into the back seat of my Golf. The drive back to campus was routine, if a bit uncomfortable for Charlie. I pulled into the parking lot near Hartranft and Beaver Halls at 9:30 pm.

Spring practice, helping Zack with pro scout day and two more months of classes awaited me. It should be an interesting spring.

(To be continued)

Chapter 36

I bumped into Jay Nicholson in the bathroom Monday morning before my first class.

“Hey man, no cast,” I exclaimed when I saw my friend. “You look good standing on two legs again.”

“I know,” Jay agreed. “It feels great to be free of that damn cast. I have to lose another fifteen pounds and then get myself in shape.”

“And rehab,” I added. “Don’t forget about it. It’s a royal pain in the ass.”

“Yeah, I know that,” Jay replied. “I was wondering Kyle, would you mind if I joined you, Chip and Damian when you do your passing drills. I need to work on my arm strength and accuracy.”

“I’ll talk to Damian and Chip,” I replied. “...but I don’t see why it wouldn’t work out. Two quarterbacks, two receivers – what’s not to work?”

I caught up with Damian in the afternoon and Chip at dinner. Both guys were agreeable to Jay joining us Tuesday and Thursday afternoon this week. We would stay late when spring practice started to continue our passing drills.

The school week was routine. My two history courses were excellent. Art and geography was good. Sociology was OK. Even Thursday, my busiest day, was a blast. I had three hours of art followed by an hour and a half of climbing at the YMCA. I had to eat lunch on the bus ride back to campus so I could make it to Sociology 1 without being too late. I finished off my day with an hour of passing drills with Jay and Chip.

I thought Damian was doing much better at catching passes, thanks to the months of work he and Chip put in. I enjoyed working with Jay again. Jay’s throws didn’t have the same velocity or distance that they had last fall. His timing on the routes was very good, considering that we hadn’t worked together in five months. I was confident Jay would get it back by summer.

Jen and her new boyfriend Mark Armstrong invited Kelly and me to go out for pizza and bowling on Friday night. Jen talked about Mark all week. Kelly met him briefly when he stopped by their room Wednesday night. I didn’t meet him until we met at Kelly and Jen’s room to go downtown Friday night.

Mark was 5’-11” tall with blond hair and blue eyes. He had an average build and looked like he weighed in the neighborhood of 175 pounds. Kelly and I got to know him better

as we shared pizza with him and Jen at Hi-Way Pizza. Mark was majoring in electrical engineering. He was a sophomore like the rest of us.

Mark and Jen hit it off on their first date on the Friday night Kelly and I left to go skiing in the Poconos at the beginning of the month. They spent almost the entire weekend together. Jen spent half a week of spring break at Mark's home in Nazareth, Pa. Mark spent the other half a week at Jen's home in Bryn Mar. I could see why Jen fell for Mark. He was handsome, friendly and a good conversationalist.

I offered to drive everyone. Mark offered too. We used his car since it was parked near his downtown apartment, not too far from the pizza place. We bowled three games before we were ready to call it a night. Mark dropped us off on Pollock Road near our dorms when we finished.

I found another reason to like Mark a lot then. Jen did not get out of his car. She planned to spend the night at Mark's apartment. I knew Mark shared a small two bedroom apartment with three roommates. The guy sharing Mark's room lived about an hour from campus and always went home for the weekend. Jen planned to stay over on weekends at Mark's frequently.

Of course that meant I got to stay over at Kelly's room frequently too. I definitely was going to like Mark a lot! Kelly and I stopped by my room to pack an overnight bag and to let a note for Damian.

Kelly and I had time to make love twice that evening before midnight. I did need to make sure I got some sleep that night. I had to be in good shape Saturday morning for the Pro Scout Day so I could help Zack Hayes impress the scouts.

Kelly was still asleep when I slipped out of her room around nine o'clock on Saturday morning. I needed to get moving to be ready for Pro Scout Day but Kelly didn't. I showered, dressed and grabbed a breakfast sandwich at the Mix on the way to the Lasch Building.

JT Hill, Angus Pitts, Jake Washington, Vlad Lazlo, Cuch, Karol Zizka, Steve Cobb, Zack Hayes, Shawn O'Conner, Evan Foster and Hassan Jackson were all in the locker room getting dressed and ready for their evaluations.

More underclassmen then me showed up to help with the event. Glenn Korbel, Shawn Byrd, Christian Hunsecker, and David McCall came too. Glenn would provide an extra arm to throw passes to the guys. Christian was there shag punts for Steve and to provide a receiver to cover for Cuch and Angus. Shawn and David were there to cover Hassan and Evan when they ran routes.

I was surprised when Anders Voight walked into the locker room a minute after me. “Anders, I thought you weren’t interested in turning pro?” I asked my buddy. “Are you giving up on grad school?”

“Of course I’m going to grad school,” Anders replied. “I’m here to help the coaches.” He gave me a wink and added, “Remember it’s ‘Coach Voight’ now.”

“Yeah, rrrrighttt...” I answered laughing. “Whatever you say Coach.”

It was going to be hard next season if he did become a grad assistant coach for our team. I suspected I would always think of him as my buddy first. Could I call Anders ‘Coach’ if Coach Burton hired him for the next season?

All of us suited up and headed over to Holuba Hall. Our practice fields still had some snow on them and weren’t really fit to use yet. Undoubtedly we would be working inside on Monday when spring practice started.

There were half a dozen of our coaches and thirty-five to forty scouts waiting for the group when we came out of the locker room. Ten players’ agents stood along the sidelines too, waiting to see how their clients did today. Max was among the agents that I saw.

I recognized two other faces among the crowd. Gary Kubiak, head coach of the Houston Texans, was there. Jeff Baldwin from the Denver Broncos was present too. Baldwin was bigger in real life than I had imagined from seeing him on TV. I guess that happens when you are constantly surrounded by big football players in pads. Baldwin looked to be over six foot tall, maybe only two or three inches shorter than me.

Everyone stretched and got themselves ready first. We extras hung out on the sideline as the potential draftees ran the 40, did various shuttle drills and demonstrated their leaping ability. The whole crowd went over to the Lasch Building when the seniors demonstrated their bench press abilities.

JT Hill benched an amazing 41 repetitions with 225 pounds on the bar. Zack did an excellent 21 repetitions, only a few less than Karol’s and Jake’s totals. We went back to Holuba Hall after that.

Our coaches ran Evan, Shawn and Hassan through a progression of passing routes while Zack and Glenn threw to them. Coach Burton sent me in to run a progression of routes for Zack after that.

I tried my absolute best to run precise routes for Zack. I didn’t want my mistakes to make him look bad. We went through short and medium routes. Coach Adams told me to cut loose on the deep routes. I flew down the field on fly, flag and post routes. Zack hit me in stride on all of them. My friend threw brilliantly.

The coaches sent Evan, Shawn and Hassan out to catch against Angus, Karol, Shawn and David's coverage. They even sent Jake out to cover Shawn on some shallow pass routes. I assume the coaches wanted to demonstrate his versatility. Draft pundits speculated whether Jake would play as an undersized, fast defensive end or as a big, fast linebacker. I thought Jake had the skill to do either.

I was hanging out along the sidelines with Christian and Anders when one of the team officials walked up and stood beside us. I glanced over and saw it was Coach Baldwin from Denver.

"I guess you gentlemen have played with Hayes for a couple seasons now," Coach Baldwin said. "Any observations you care to share with me about catching his passes?"

"I played with Zack three seasons," I explained. "We played together one season in high school and two here. I watched your team enough last season when we were cheering on Antwaan to know you are here looking for a good quarterback. You won't go wrong if you pick Zack."

"Why is that?" Coach Baldwin asked.

"Zack has size, mobility and good arm strength," I replied. "That is a small part of his skills. No one works harder on our team than Zack. He is a tremendous leader and has football savvy. No member on our team is better at X's and O's than him. Have you checked out our stats after the loss to Ohio State?"

"Not personally," Coach Baldwin replied.

"He pulled us together after that loss and gave our team focus," I explained. "He was determined to show the world how good our team was. We blew every team away that played us after that. The scores only tell part of the story. Zack's stats look OK over that stretch. They are eye popping when you realize he often was benched before halftime in most of those games."

"Interesting," Coach Baldwin commented.

"Forgive me if I am being presumptuous but you need to pick a new quarterback this year," I said. "You're undoubtedly looking at Zack, Brady Rasmussen and Elijah Carter. Elijah Carter is a good quarterback. I know. My best friend is Elijah's backup this season. I know Brady personally. I caught passes with him when I was being recruited for college. I consider him a friend. He is a hell of a quarterback too. Still, I believe you will fall in love with Zack when you get to know him. No one in college today is as good as him."

"The Maxwell Club agrees with your evaluation," Coach Baldwin said. "What do you think Mr. Hunsecker?"

“I agree with Kyle completely,” Christian responded. “It has been a privilege playing with Zack the past two years.”

“Thank you for the insight gentlemen,” Coach Baldwin said. He got a grin on his face and gave me a wink. “You wouldn’t consider going pro this year, would you? I could use a wide receiver to go with my next quarterback.”

“Sorry, you’ll have to wait,” I replied. “I’m only nineteen and not eligible. Anyway, I won’t be leaving Penn State until I have my degree in hand two years from now.”

“I’ll keep you in mind then,” Coach Baldwin said. “Thank you for talking with me.” The coach moved on down the sideline and rejoined the crowd of scouts and team officials watching the workout.

“Do you think I sold him on Zack?” I asked Christian.

“We’ll find out in the end of April when they do the draft,” Christian answered.

Coach Burton sent me back in again later in the morning. I ran random routes that the coaches called against Shawn Byrd. I gave the scouts a chance to see exactly how Zack could handle coverage. Shawn defended some of the passes but Zack and I completed more. I thought the two of us put our friend in the best possible light for the scouts.

My part was done before lunch. Zack thanked me for helping out. After lunch the scouts and coaches were doing IQ testing and interviews. Zack invited Kelly and me to join him, Leigh Ann and Max for dinner tonight. I accepted my friend’s generosity.

Zack decided to try something different with us on Saturday night. He took us to Herwig’s Austrian Bistro. Herwig’s served authentic Austrian food so the menu looked a little foreign to us. I choose the Bauernschmaus, a platter featuring roast pork, bratwurst, sauerkraut and a knödel (bread dumpling). Kelly decided to try the Kässpätzle, miniature dumplings sautéed in butter after they were cooked with caramelized onions and then served topped with cheese.

Max went with the Wiener schnitzel, Zack had the Tyrolean Gröstl, a hash of meat, potatoes and caramelized onions. Leigh Ann decided to have Rosmarin Schweinsbraten, pork roasted with rosemary.

Herwig’s was a tiny restaurant, seating on twenty-four people. Brandy, Mr. Brandstetter the owner, took excellent care of us. His food was excellent. In some ways it reminded me of Pennsylvania Dutch cooking but more cosmopolitan. I guess that makes sense. The food I was used to back home was simple farmer’s food. The Austrians, particularly the Viennese, considered themselves to be more refined than that.

Max’s conversation was interesting. We talked art, history, politics and of course, football. Max recited a list of teams he thought would benefit from Zack’s services.

Naturally we came to no conclusion about where Zack would play next season. We would have to wait five weeks until the NFL draft to find out that information.

Max promised to keep in touch with Zack about once a week. He didn't expect much action until the end of April. The teams with first or second pick in the draft often contacted agents about deals before the draft but not any teams with lower picks. Kelly and I thanked Zack for our meal and Zack thanked Max for his and Leigh Ann's dinner.

Zack, Leigh Ann, Kelly and I walked back to campus together. Zack's apartment was dark when we got there. Jake, Evan and JT all went out to dinner with their agents too. Kelly and I helped Zack and Leigh Ann set up for the night's party.

We needed about twenty minutes to get things in order. The beer was on ice in coolers. The bar was set up in the kitchen. We had snacks in the living room for everyone to enjoy.

The first guests began to arrive a little after eight o'clock. Half a dozen people were there when I answered the doorbell the next time. Karl Weaver, my high school teammate and fellow wide receiver was there when I opened the door. Karl was a semi-regular at Zack's parties. Karl and I had made varsity together Zack's last year in high school.

"Welcome Karl, come on in," I said. Karl stepped inside and I saw the guest behind him. "Jason! I didn't know you were on Main Campus," I exclaimed as I saw Jason Harting, another former teammate from Paradise.

"I invited Jason," Karl said. "I bumped into him in the Willard Building last Thursday. I suggested he stop by with me tonight so he could see you and Zack."

"I hope no one minds," Jason added. "I feel kind of weird – like I'm crashing the party. Zack probably doesn't even remember me. I never played football with him."

I barely started to reply when Zack spotted the new guests. He boomed out a greeting, "Hey Karl, glad you could make it." He spotted Jason next. "HARTING! It's damn good to see you. It's been ages."

Zack, ever the courteous host, made Jason feel welcome and comfortable at the party. I introduced Kelly to Jason and we visited awhile as we enjoyed the good brews Zack stocked for all his parties.

Jason had commuted to Berks Campus in the fall and had been extremely lucky to get a spot on Main Campus so quickly. It took most students a couple years to switch to Main Campus. Jason wanted here as early as possible. He was studying agricultural engineering and all the ag facilities were here at this campus. He didn't mind getting a room out in the hinter lands – room 719 in Sproul Hall at the northern end of East Halls.

I introduced Jason to a few of the available freshmen girls at the party before Kelly and I went on to mingle with other guests. I lost track of him later that evening. I don't know if he got lucky and took a young lady back to his room or if he just got bored with the party.

Kelly and I hung out with our friends enjoying the freely flowing beer and good company. We headed back to Kelly's room around midnight. We did a little role playing that evening. I was the stern school teacher and Kelly played the seventeen year old siren seducing the older man. Kelly really got into it. I wondered if she had a crush on one of her teachers when she was in high school. I had two good cums that night. Kelly had more.

Our football team's spring practice opened at 3:45 pm on Monday, March 21st. I was psyched about it. I hadn't played football in almost three months. It was time to go again. Coach Burton started us off with fitness tests, weigh-in and equipment pickup the first day.

The coaches had us doing flexibility and fundamentals drills on Tuesday and Wednesday. We finally started practicing plays on Thursday. The coach's depth chart wasn't clear in the beginning. Chip and Glenn split time with the first team. Chip ran the second string when Glenn ran the first, and vice versa. Colin O'Shea and Jon Stafford split time running the third string offense.

Aidan Nagy and Alex Majerowicz were stuck strictly in the second string. They had been reinstated with the team in mid-January but were still in Coach Burton's dog house. I didn't see them advancing until August, at the earliest. By default Christian Hunsecker and Tanner Riggs took the flanker and slot receiver spots beside me on the first string.

Damian and Wyatt Smith split time at tailback between first and second strings. Jibril Sloan and Amir Lee split time as the first string tight end.

On defense Josh Bruno slid over to the middle and took Karol Zizka's old spot. Tony King and Jarrell Cook split time in Josh's old outside linebacker spot. Denzel Hunt took over Vic Samovitz's left cornerback spot opposite Shawn Byrd.

One surprise was at free safety. The coaches switched David McCall from cornerback to free safety behind Tyler Madden. I suspected that had to do with his speed. No one would ever go deep on us with David lined up at free safety. He was fast enough to cover the whole backfield, sideline to sideline.

Our practice was a little ragged the first day. We got better on Friday afternoon. The coaches planned a Saturday morning scrimmage for the next three Saturdays. The fourth and last Saturday of spring practice would be the annual Blue and White game. We would entertain a big crowd of our fans in Beaver Stadium on April 23rd.

Mark and Jen went out with Kelly and me Friday night. We went to Baby's for burgers, fries and shakes. We caught a movie afterward. I liked Mark a lot because he invited Jen to his apartment on weekends, leaving Kelly and me privacy too. He was a genuinely nice guy and Jen seemed to be crazy about him.

Mark invited Kelly and me to come to his frat's party on Saturday night. We thanked him for the invitation but declined. Kelly and I already agreed to help Zack set up for his party that evening. We promised Mark and Jen we would go with them the following Saturday night.

Saturday morning's scrimmage was fun, if a little ragged. Chip ran offense for the first quarter. I broke one kick return for a fifty-five yard gain. I made our punter, Mitch Jackson, look bad on a punt return when he was forced to tackle me. The only thing that stopped me from scoring on the play was getting run down from behind by Dave McCall when Mitch slowed me down.

I ended up with five receptions for 94 yards and two touchdowns in my half of play. I was very pleased for Damian. He did a good job running the ball in the first half, carrying ten times for 53 yards. He caught a couple flare passes out of the backfield and made a great catch on a slant route.

Damian got a step on Tony King. Chip led him a little too much but Damian pulled the ball into his chest without breaking stride. He ended up gaining thirteen yards on the play. Coach Schroeder and Burton had to be impressed. No way would he have made that catch last fall. His time spent working with Chip and me was paying off.

I spent Saturday afternoon lifeguarding at the Natatorium. I needed to earn some money so I had cash. Spring break was fun but had cost way more than I had budgeted for it. Dad was understanding about my financial situation, but still I didn't want to spend my first year out of college paying off my debt to Dad.

Zack invited Kelly and me to join him and Leigh Ann for dinner at his apartment that evening. Zack set up a small charcoal grill in front of his apartment. I helped him grill up steaks for the four of us. Kelly prepared baked potatoes and a salad for dinner. Leigh Ann called home and got her mother's cherry cobbler recipe.

Zack and I sat outside and watched our steaks as the girls worked inside. We were fortunate that the weather was nice. The thermometer peaked above fifty degrees that afternoon. Most of the snow in State College had melted, except for the big piles left from clearing streets or parking lots. After enduring almost two months of sub-twenty degree weather this winter, the day's fifty degrees felt like summer.

Kelly and Leigh Ann came outside and joined us when their dishes went in the oven. We relaxed and talked as our dinner cooked. Zack reviewed the highlights of the day's scrimmage.

He wasn't a team member anymore and hadn't participated in the scrimmage. Still he was out on the sideline in the morning in khakis and a blue Penn State football sweatshirt like the coaches. He stood with Coach Schroeder and Coach Burton and conferred with them occasionally as the scrimmage continued. My friend was going to make a hell of a football coach someday when he finished playing football.

We took our steaks back inside when they were finished. Steaks, baked potatoes, corn and salad made an excellent dinner. Leigh Ann's cherry cobbler smothered in vanilla ice cream topped the meal off perfectly.

Kelly and I stayed around to help Zack and Leigh Ann set up for the party. Jake and Keneisha came back from her apartment when they finished their romantic dinner together. JT and Evan arrived later with beer, wine and liquor they picked up from the state store.

The party got going around eight o'clock. Everyone was in good moods. The football scrimmage was just the thing to get rid of the winter blues. Evan decided to play bartender again that evening. The drink of the night was Long Island Iced Tea. Everyone knows how much I like iced tea. By the fourth one I was not in any shape to keep count. I know I had more than that but I have no idea how many more.

JT found Kelly and me dead to the world on Sunday morning, sprawled on the couch in their apartment. JT was kind enough to get us aspirin and bottles of water. He helped us head back to Kelly's room. We collapsed on her bed and slept until noon on Sunday. Kelly and I skipped brunch and stayed in her darkened room until we recovered from our Saturday night debauch.

I received a call from Zack Sunday after dinner commanding me to appear at his apartment. I tried to circumvent the temperance lecture I knew was coming when Zack answered the door.

"I'm really sorry about Kelly and me crashing on your couch last night Zack," I said.
"We had a little too much to drink." I gave my friend a wink. "Evan makes a pretty good bartender."

"Jesus FUCKING Christ!" Zack exclaimed. "Is that all you have to say to me?"

"What?" I asked. I wondered why Zack was so worked up.

“That’s what you think this is about?” Zack queried. “Sleeping on my sofa? God! You’re worse than I thought. You have no memory of tripping and landing on the table? You knocked chips, pretzels, and things everywhere.”

“I don’t remember,” I replied.

“You and Kelly tried to sing along to the music last night,” Zack continued. “I’ve heard you sing when you’re sober. You aren’t very good. You are God awful at singing when you are drunk.”

“Sorry,” I replied weakly.

“How about throwing up in the bathroom at 1:30 this morning?” Zack asked crossly.

“I did?” I answered. “I’m sorry Zack.”

“That’s it?” Zack growled. “‘I’m sorry.’ You’re a fucking disaster. Do you think Evan and I wanted to clean up your puke in the middle of the night?” I shook my head no. “You’re like a fucking piece of dynamite. Everyone knows you’re going to blow up sometime. The only thing we’re wondering is who you are going to take out when you blow up.”

“Am I that bad?” I asked. My mentor’s harsh words were a slap in the face.

“You commented how stupid you thought Alex, Max and Aidan were last fall when they got busted for drinking,” Zack said. “Max got his ass thrown off the team. I had this exact same conversation with him last year. I sure as hell hope you wise up better than he did.”

“I’ll do better in the future,” I promised.

“Talk is cheap Kyle,” Zack countered. “You prove it.”

I didn’t argue with Zack. I had gotten carried away on Saturday night. Still, my friend was overreacting. He had always looked out for me over our years together. I was almost twenty year old and was capable of looking after myself. I wasn’t the only guy around who got drunk at the parties. I would be all right.

I was fully recovered from the weekend on Monday. Some trends were starting to become clear with three practices and a scrimmage under our belt. Glenn Korbel knew our offense best of the four quarterbacks on the field. His athletic talents limited his effectiveness. He couldn’t run certain deep pass plays because he didn’t have the arm strength needed. Glenn could be a little shaky on accuracy sometimes too.

Chip could deliver the ball with power, velocity or touch – whatever was needed. Chip had learned most the plays in the playbook but needed more practice to perfect them. We were a more explosive offense with Chip running things but we were prone to making mistakes. When Glenn ran things, we were steady but unspectacular.

Both choices were unattractive to me. Our team was spectacular last season so it was disappointing to see us make mistakes with our offense. I felt the answer to our difficulties was standing on the sideline. Jay came to every practice dressed in street clothes and stood with Coach Peterson, Coach Schroeder and Anders. He talked with the coaches, observed and commented on the plays.

Jay had the right mix of arm strength, experience, and drive to run this team near the level that Zack did last season. All we needed was for Jay to rehab his leg and to get himself into playing shape again. Hopefully he could do that by August.

I watched the third string occasionally when someone came in to take my place on first string. Colin O’Shea ran the offense efficiently. He was not the most graceful or athletic player around but he got his job done.

His job on our team was to run the scout team and to tutor the young guys on how our offense ran. This was his third season with the team and he was getting good at his job. I liked the how he worked with the younger guys, particularly Jon Stafford.

You could see the athleticism and physical gifts that earned Jon his scholarship here. He was so raw and inexperienced. He made a mistake on nearly every other play. Anders and Colin patiently explained things to him. To Jon’s credit, he rarely made the same mistake twice. In a few years I expected Jon would be an excellent quarterback. That would be after I graduated. I expected there was little chance the two of us would ever play a meaningful game together here.

Our defense looked good as I played against them. Josh Bruno was proving quite capable of replacing Karol at middle linebacker. Shawn Byrd continued his outstanding performance at cornerback. Trevor now was the leader on the defensive line. His group looked solid. Next season we wouldn’t need to score as many points as we did last season in order to win games. That was fortunate. Our offense wasn’t able to score as fast or as efficiently without Zack at the helm.

Wednesday evening I got a call from my brother Will.

“What’s up big brother?” I asked when I recognized his voice.

“How would you feel about feel about working at the pool this summer?” Will asked.

“I could do that if you want,” I agreed. “Are you sending Trent back to the boat yard?”

“No, that is why I’m calling,” Will explained. “Trent can’t work at camp this summer. He got an internship that fits his major.”

“That’s good for him,” I said. I was disappointed that I wouldn’t spend one last summer with Trent before he graduated from college. “Who are we going to send to the boat yard if I work at the pool?”

“I thought Eric and Dustin could handle it the whole summer,” Will replied. “They did a nice job after you left for football last summer.”

“Which one will be the assistant director?” I asked.

“Both of them I think,” Will answered. “...assuming John [our camp director] approves that. That is how they handled things last summer. They work great together. I don’t see any reason to promote one over the other.”

“That’s cool,” I said.

“There is one other piece of camp business I wanted you to think about,” Will said. “We are short one aquatics staffer now. Let me know if you think of anyone we can hire to fill the spot. I can put an extra CIT at the pool for the first few weeks to fill the slot. I’ll promote one of the CITs to paid staff when I find out who does the best job.”

“That will work,” I agreed.

“I’d rather have someone with a little more maturity to help you at the pool,” Will said. “You know how chaotic things can get when we have 80-100 kids there working on swimming, lifesaving, lifeguarding all in one period.”

“I hear you bro,” I agreed. “I’ll keep my eyes open and see if I can recruit anyone to help.”

Will and I talked for a few more minutes about our lives. Classes were going well for him and Abby. I told him how things were for Kelly and me.

The next morning I tried to recruit Christian Hunsecker to work at scout camp. No luck, he had a real job that paid good money lined up already. I would need to keep looking if I wanted to keep my sanity this summer.

The Cellblock, the dance club downtown on College Avenue, was having an under twenty-one night on Friday night. Mark, Jen, Trevor, Stephanie, Kelly and I decided to catch dinner downtown and then hit the dance club. The six of us stopped off at the Penn State Deli for sandwiches and salads before we went dancing.

The Cellblock was crowded, loud and a lot of fun. We danced for hours, mostly with our partners. Trevor, Mark and I swapped partners occasionally so I danced a few dances with Jen and with Stephanie. The evening was a blast. I wished the Cellblock did their under twenty-one nights more often.

The one downside to the night was that Mark's roommate Kurt Thomas didn't head for his home in Altoona like usual. He spent most of the evening at the library completing his research for a term paper that was due on Monday. He wasn't leaving for home until tomorrow morning.

Jen returned to her room with Kelly and I had to go back to my own room with Damian. Kelly and I were both horny as hell from dancing and not having sex since the previous Friday night. Football, school work and my lifeguarding had taken up too much time for us to hook up during the week.

Saturday morning's scrimmage went better than the one the previous week. I broke a kick return for a touchdown and caught another TD against Shawn Byrd in spite of his tight coverage. Coach Burton complimented me on my run blocking. That was gratifying. Damian continued to impress the coaches with his pass catching skills.

Christian Hunsecker had an excellent scrimmage. Chip hit him for two touchdowns. Tanner Riggs made a couple good catches in heavy traffic over the middle. One of the hits Josh Bruno put on Tanner looked like it should have loosened the fillings in his teeth. Tanner held onto the ball anyway and made a first down on the play. Aidan Nagy and Alex Majerowicz were going to have a hard time earning starting spots in the fall if Christian and Tanner continued playing the way they were.

Kelly and I had lunch together. I headed over to the Natatorium to lifeguard for the afternoon while Kelly relaxed back at her room. We had dinner in Pollock Commons at evening. RigaTony's, the on campus restaurant in Pollock Commons, was having an Italian night. That was good for me. My finances were a little depleted and a free dinner was attractive.

Kelly and I headed back to our own rooms to shower and get ready for the evening. We had promised Mark and Jen that we would attend Sigma Tau Epsilon's party that evening.

Mark was a member of Sigma Tau Epsilon but he didn't live at the off campus frat house. Sigma Tau wasn't a rich kid's frat, the members were just average guys who did some community service, lived in a modest frat house and enjoyed socializing. We arrived around 9 o'clock.

Mark's brothers greeted us warmly. They had a nice spread of snacks in the dining room. The beer, wine and other spirits were in the kitchen. The four of us grabbed beers on arrival and mingled with the other partiers. The guys had stocked up with some good imported beer, not the cheap stuff. Jen and Mark found some friends to chat with. Kelly and I mingled too.

Some of the brothers figured out that I was THE Kyle Martin. I spent a lot of my time at the party talking about the football team. I answered most of the usual questions – Would Jay be ready to play when the season started? Could Chip take over the team if he couldn't? Could we improve on last year's record? What was Jacob Washington really like? None of the guys knew a millionaire. Jacob wasn't rich yet, but he was projected to be a top five NFL draft pick. He was expected to sign for somewhere between \$20 and \$30 million dollars after the draft. I answered the questions to the best of my ability between bottles of beer.

Kelly and I finally got away from the football fans. We talked with Jeff Howell. Jeff was a history major that Kelly and I both knew from a couple of our history classes. Jeff, his date Melody, Kelly and I talked and enjoyed the music while we put away more beers.

I had six or seven by then. Kelly was only one behind me. We weren't totally wasted yet. We had a nice relaxed mood happening, thanks to the alcohol. Jen and Mark found us. Jen said, "We're heading back to Mark's room now. It's getting late. You guys are welcome to use our room for some fun. I won't be back until brunch tomorrow."

Kelly glanced at her watch. "Shit! I didn't realize it was this late. Kyle, it's 11:30." Kelly slipped her hand around me and placed it on my ass. She stared up at me. "If we're going to have some fun tonight, we better get going too."

I asked, "You're sure I won't be putting you out Jen?"

"NO. It's fine. Mark's roomie Kurt left for home this morning. You two can have privacy in our room." Jen suggested.

We headed out and walked back towards our dorms. Jen and Mark headed north for his apartment after we crossed College Avenue. Kelly and I took the walk across campus in front of Old Main to get us back to Beaver Hall. Kelly used her ID card to swipe us in the door to the fire stairwell. It was the normal way for a girl to sneak a guy into her dorm room on a Saturday night.

Kelly and I were both quite horny. We hadn't made love since the previous Friday. Our schedules had been too busy. We stripped out of our clothes quickly and got down to making out on her bed. I had my tongue pressed down her throat when we heard a knock at the door.

"Kell?" a female asked. "Kell – it's Jen." We pulled apart and I groaned.

“I wonder what’s wrong. I have to see Kyle.” Kelly said as she climbed over me and went to the door. She pulled her robe around herself before she cracked the door open. I heard her ask “What’s up Jen?”

I couldn’t make out more as the two girls whispered at the door. After a minute Kelly turned to me and commanded, “Put your boxers on Kyle. Mark and Jen are coming in.”

I silently groaned. My prospects of getting some pussy that evening were evaporating. Kelly explained, “Kurt came back. He had a fight with his parents. He interrupted us just as Mark was ready to put it to Jen.”

“Man, I’m sorry.” I said. Sure – come back and ruin my night too – let’s share the misery.

Kelly explained her thinking. “Kyle, would it bother you if Jen and Mark were here in the room while we made love?”

Jen added, “I’m sorry to ask Kyle. I’m really desperate. I’ve got to get this thing in me.” She patted the bulge in Mark’s pants. “I mean, like, it’s not like we haven’t seen each other before.”

I hesitated for a second. I didn’t think Mark knew about Kelly, Jen and I having threesomes before he started dating Jen in February. Kelly understood what I was thinking. “It’s all right Kyle. Mark knows about our three-ways.”

Mark confirmed, “That was all before I dated Jen. It’s OK. I understand. I’ve had a couple three-ways myself.”

“Well, I guess.” I allowed. The alcohol was probably clouding my judgment, but if it allowed me to get my cock buried in Kelly’s velvety inner sanctum, what the hell.

Mark said, “I understand you’ve had some three-ways in high school too. Was it you and a couple girls?”

This guy had learned too much about me. I allowed, “It was two guys and a girl both times.”

“That’s cool. I did it with another guy and a girl too sometimes. It’s a real turn on for me.” Mark replied.

Jen had stripped while Mark and I talked. Kelly dropped her robe too. They sat down on Kelly’s bed and put their arms over each other’s shoulders. Kelly asked, “What are you boys waiting for?”

Mark's shirt flew off. I dropped my boxers to the floor, exposing my seven inch erection for Jen's, Mark's and Kelly's inspection. Jen planted a big kiss on Kelly's lips while I watched and Mark finished disrobing himself. Kelly thrust her tongue into Jen's mouth as they embraced each other.

Mark exclaimed, "Shit! This is so hot. I didn't know..."

"Our girlfriends are bisexual." I confirmed.

"Damn Kyle. Would you object if we just uh... you know had a big party together?" Mark asked.

The six or seven beers helped erase my memory of the feelings I had after I shared Penny with Brandon two years earlier. My libido was in over drive and the sight of Jen and Kelly making out furthered my urge-to-merge. "What the hell Mark. Girls... What do you think?"

We got a muffled "Hell yeah." and a "Fuck yeah" from our girlfriends. Mark and I pulled Jen's mattress onto the floor. Neither bed was going to be big enough for four college students fucking each other.

I suggested, "Girls, you need to get up. We're going to put Kelly's mattress on the floor too so we have room for some fun together." Kelly and Jen stood, continued hugging and kissing while Mark and I prepared our sexual play pen.

Kelly and Jen dropped onto the center of the two mattresses, kissing and rubbing their hands over each other's bodies. I lay down beside Kelly and kissed her neck and shoulder. I rubbed my hands along her thigh and ass. Mark started off doing the same with Jen but switched to her right tit quickly. Jen reacted immediately. Mark had a damn fine idea. I sucked Kell's left nipple into my mouth and suckled. We did this for a few moments.

Jen demanded, "Ram it to me Markie. I need your meat now!" Jen let go of Kelly and rolled on her back. Mark climbed between Jen's legs and positioned his cock at her opening.

Mark wasn't a big guy – maybe 5'-11". He was well armed for doing the horizontal dance with Jen. His cock was as longer than mine and maybe slightly fatter. The disproportion between his meat and his body made it look huge. Mark penetrated her and then drove himself home. Jen sighed and clutched at his back.

Kelly reached up and gently grabbed my cock. "I need you too Kyle." I climbed between Kelly's legs and felt her slot. She was dripping. I slipped my finger up and rubbed her clit once. "Jesus! Fuck me already." I obliged her. I placed my hardness against her hole and speared her.

Mark and I screwed our girlfriends enthusiastically side by side. Mark's knee and leg rubbed against mine as we did it with our girls. The beer eased my inhibitions. When Ed and I did Jessie years ago I was weirded out by touching another naked guy. I felt the same way when Brandon and I did Penny almost two years ago at the beach. I didn't feel anything gay about us touching while screwing our girlfriends that night.

Mark brought Jen to orgasm first. She thrashed around and moaned to Kelly's and my amusement. Mark fucked her for thirty more seconds before he orgasmed too. Mark pumped a load of sperm into his lover and then collapsed beside her.

I concentrated on getting Kelly off. I ground myself on her clitoris each time as I thrust. Thrust and grind; in and out. Kelly lasted maybe a minute, not much more. She squealed and came hard. I continued pumping while her pussy throbbed around my cock. I thrust and thrust until my balls tightened up. Mark and Jen snickered at our show. I shoved my cock in deep and blasted a week's worth of jism inside my lover. Squirt after squirt of fertile baby juice up against the entrance to her womb. It was fortunate that Kelly had overcome her religious scruples and got on the pill. The two of us would have made a whole family of babies by now if she wasn't on birth control.

My mood was disturbed by giggling. I rolled off Kelly and ended up between her and Mark. Jen said, "I'd give the show a 9. What do you think Markie?"

"I liked Kyle's hot little ass bobbing up and down." Mark answered. Strangely I wasn't offended by his comment. I guess I'm getting more comfortable around naked guys.

Mark and I turned away from each other and started kissing our girlfriends again. We kissed and felt them up for a couple minutes. Mark had gotten Jen worked up again. She asked, "Kell, would it upset you if I borrowed Kyle for a little bit? I'd like to ride his rod again."

Kelly answered, "As long as I can have Mark." Kelly stared into my eyes. "Is that OK boys?"

What the hell? I knew a four way would involve Mark screwing my lover. I had the prospect of tapping Jen's tight little pussy. "Sure. Why not?"

Mark added, "OK" Mark and I climbed over each other. Jen pushed me down on my back while Mark climbed on top of Kelly.

"I'm on top Kyle. Is that OK?" Jen asked. Before I could answer she climbed on top of me and lowered herself against my cock. She held the tip in position and impaled herself on it. She wiggled her butt on my cock. "I love your rod Kyle. This will be fun."

Jen rose up and dropped herself down on my seven inches vigorously. I glanced over at Kelly and Mark. Mark had mounted her and was enthusiastically humping and thrusting

into my girlfriend. Kelly cooed and rubbed Mark's back while he bumped bellies with her.

I reached up and played with Jen's tight titties while she fucked herself on me. Jen bucked and rode me for five minutes. I moved my hand down to play with Jen's clit while she screwed. I brought her to a little orgasm, then another followed by a third. Jen continued pulling up and impaling herself on me. Finally the stimulation and heat were too much for me. I bucked my hips up as Jen drove herself down. Our pubic areas clapped together hard. I pumped a load of sperm up into my friend.

Jen slumped down on my chest, my now semi-hard cock still inside her. I glanced over at Mark and Kelly. They had finished before us. They were cuddled together exchanging kisses. I kissed Jen's shoulder, neck and cheek in appreciation for her loving.

I wondered if we were done for the night. Jen wasn't. Jen asked, "Kell, can I lick up Markie's sperm. I love the taste."

"How about a little 69? I'd like to clean Kyle off your pussy." Mark and I stood up to make room for the girls. They positioned themselves, Kelly on the bottom, Jen kneeling above her. They went right to work licking our sperm and their juices out of each other's holes.

Mark and I stood side by side watching the girls drive each other crazy. Mark asked, "Would you be interested in a three-some? You, me and Kelly?"

"Sure. A sandwich would be fun. Dibs on Kelly's pussy." I answered.

"Perfect. That's just what I had in mind." Mark answered.

The girls brought each other to climax as Mark and I discussed our idea. They lay down on the mattresses when they were done. I said, "Kelly, are you up for a three-way with Mark and me? We thought that would be fun."

Kelly smiled answered, "Yeah, that'd be cool."

Jen rolled away to give us space. Jen said, "That's OK as long as I get a shot too." Mark and I agreed. I positioned myself over Kelly and drove my now fully erect seven incher into her hot sloppy pussy. Kelly smiled and sighed when I hit bottom. I said, "Kelly's got some lube in her closet for you Mark." Jen got it for him. I thrust in and out a few times to keep Kelly warmed up.

Jen got behind me while Mark lubed up his thick cock. She slipped a finger into my ass. She knew how much I enjoyed ass play from our times together with Kelly in the past. I shuddered when she hit my prostate. I continued humping Kelly slowly while Jen stimulated my ass and prostate. She pulled her finger out but soon replaced it with two. She went straight for my prostate. I saw stars as she rubbed it vigorously.

“Oooohhh.... Ooohhh yeahhhh!” I groaned from the stimulation. I don’t think I was thrusting much for Kelly. She didn’t complain. I let Jen work my ass thoroughly for a couple minutes.

I suggested, “Let’s do the sandwich now....” Jen pulled her fingers out. “I’ll....” Roll Kelly over so Mark can get in her asshole I thought. I couldn’t say the words. Jen had pulled away and now had three fingers stuffed in my ass. All I could do was groan.

Three fingers was a lot. She was really stretching my asshole tight – much tighter than I had ever felt before. She slowly slid them deeper into my gut. I gasped when they hit my prostate again. Jen pushed them deeper yet.

What the hell? Are Jen’s fingers this long? I felt two hands grasp my ass cheeks. Two large hands. The fingers? They continued sliding deeper into my ass. Inch after inch. Something was wrong – very wrong. This wasn’t fingers. It was...

I saw Jen move around beside Kelly and me. I froze. She asked, “Do you feel all right Kyle?”

SHIT! I finally knew what was stuffed up my ass. Mark’s fucking cock! Jen said, “Mark’s pretty thick. You took him better than I did the first time.”

Mark drove his cock home as his belly slapped against my ass cheeks. “WHAT THE FUCK?” I demanded. I squirmed and tried to pull away from the invading organ. Mark pulled out a little and thrust hard again, jamming his big cock across my prostate another time. I shuddered from the sensation.

Mark had me pinned between him and Kelly. “GET THE FUCK OFF ME YOU HOMO!” I screamed.

“What?” Mark asked as he pulled his big tool out of my body. I shuddered as he withdrew it.

“YOU FUCKING QUEER! WHAT IN THE HELL ARE YOU DOING?” I demanded as I stood up. I backed away from Mark.

Mark was flustered. He sputtered, “I... You said... you and me would get it on while you screwed Kelly. You know, you said you wanted a sandwich.”

“I’m no God damned homo. I don’t take cocks up my ass!” I balled up my fists. This cocksucker need to learn a lesson.

Kelly got between us. “It was a mistake Kyle. Mark didn’t understand. Calm down.”

Mark added, "I'm sorry man. I didn't know what you wanted. I thought you had done it with guys before. I'm sorry. I'm fucking sorry."

Mark's apology and Kelly's soothing words helped me regain control of my temper. I relaxed my fists.

I said, "I wanted you to do Kelly in the back door not me."

"I'm so sorry man. I thought you wanted me to do you. You presented your ass to me and said you wanted to do a sandwich. I thought you liked being in the middle." Mark offered.

"I've never done that. All my three ways have been with the girl in the middle." I explained. I realized I had been accusing Mark of being gay. Was he? I asked, "Are you gay or something?"

"No. I'm straight mostly. I guess I'm really a little bisexual. I've only done a guy before when I was doing three ways that included a girl." Mark explained.

"You took it up the ass before?" I asked,

"One time. The other two times I was on top. I actually enjoyed it when my friend fucked my ass. He kept hitting my prostate. It was cool."

"I'm no queer." I glanced at Kelly's clock. It was after 1:20 in the morning. "I'm going to take off Kelly. This night has been a bit too much for me." I gave Kelly a kiss. "Why don't we do brunch? Give me a call in the morning when you're ready Kell." I gave Jen a kiss. "Thanks for a fun night Jen." I pointedly didn't thank Mark. I wasn't feeling charitable or forgiving at the time. I headed back for my room.

I thought as I walked the few minutes it took to reach Hartranft. Was I gay? I took a guy's cock up my ass. What I hated admitting to myself was I didn't dislike it. When the tip of Mark's cock rubbed my prostate it felt awesome. What the fuck did that mean?

I climbed the steps when I got to Hartranft to work off my nervous energy. I spotted the hanger on the door of my room as soon as I turned into the hall. Damn! Of all the nights for my roommate to get lucky. I thought maybe I could sneak in and sleep in my bed if they were asleep. I approached the door and listened. I heard Damian grunting as he fucked his girl.

Shit! I headed down the hall to the study room. I wasn't going back to Kelly and Jen's room after what had happened. I lay down on the floor and stretched out. That was the best I was going to do for a bed that night. Fortunately I fell asleep quickly.

(To be continued)

Chapter 37

[Writer's note: This chapter contains some very blunt language as Kyle wrestles with his feelings after his encounter with Mark the previous evening. Please do not turn away because of the frank, homophobic comments Kyle makes initially. Please have faith in the decency and overall compassion of the character as he tries to sort out in his head what happened.]

I woke up around 6:30 on Sunday morning, stiff, sore and cold from sleeping on the study room floor. I shuffled down the hall to the bathroom to relieve myself of some of the large quantity of beer I had consumed last evening. The hanger was still on the door to my room, so I went back to the study room.

I sat down on one of the chairs in the lounge and flipped on the TV. I watched a couple anchors prattle on about March Madness, only half way paying attention.

I brooded about last night as I sat there. Why had Mark come to the totally mistaken impression that I would have anything what-so-ever to do with gay sex and would allow a guy to stuff his cock up my backside? Not that there is anything wrong with being gay... BUT I'M NOT A FUCKING HOMO!

I found out years ago when Penny and I explored each other's bodies how pleasant it was for her to finger my asshole, massage my prostate and give me a rim job. I never felt conflicted in any way when I did that with her, with Julie, with Kelly or with Jen. It was just another way to make your partner happy.

I spent a third of my life in locker rooms with semi-naked and naked guys. That didn't turn me on. I heard all manner of crude jokes about fags and queers. I'd told a few myself. What did taking a cock up the ass mean?

The thing I knew and hated to admit was... what Mark did felt good. I didn't expect it to or want it to feel good... but it did. Did this make me gay?

I brooded and mulled over these thoughts, barely paying attention to the blathering anchors on the TV. I fell asleep without reaching any resolution or finding comfort.

“Kyle?” a voice asked. I shook my head to try to clear my mind. “Kyle, are you all right?” I opened my eyes to see Christian staring at me.

“What time is it?” I asked groggily.

“It's 9:30 in the morning,” Christian answered. “Are you all right?”

“Yeah, I'm OK,” I responded.

“Did you sleep out here?” Christian asked.

“Damian was entertaining a lady last night,” I explained. “I left Kelly’s room when Jen came back. I didn’t have anywhere else to go, so I slept here.”

“You look awful Kyle,” Christian said. “I’m meeting Bev at the Mix in a few minutes. Why don’t you catch an hour or two of sleep in my bed? It would be good for you.”

“Wouldn’t I disturb GJ?” I asked.

“No, he is at mass right now,” Christian responded. “He and his girl are going downtown after that for brunch. He won’t be back for hours.”

“Sleeping in a real bed would be nice,” I admitted. “Thanks for the offer. You’re a true friend Christian.”

“This is what friends do,” Christian replied. “You don’t need to thank me.”

I got up and followed Christian down the hall to his room. “Make yourself comfortable. Bev and I are going to brunch right after church, so we won’t be back until a quarter to one or one o’clock.”

“Thanks man,” I replied. “I appreciate this.”

I closed the curtains in the room and I stripped off my wrinkled and sweaty clothes and lay down in my boxers. I went back to sleep almost immediately.

I slept for hours. My watch said it was 12:17 pm when I finally woke up. I knew Kelly would be worrying about me so I called her immediately.

“Kyle! Thank god,” Kelly exclaimed when she heard my voice. “All of us have been so worried about you. No one knew where you went last night. Damian said you didn’t sleep at your room. What happened?”

“Melanie spent the night with Damian,” I answered. “I slept in the study lounge so they could have some privacy.”

“Jay looked there for you,” Kelly said. “I really started to worry when no one could find you. You didn’t answer your cell phone either.”

“I guess my batteries died,” I explained. “Christian saw me around 9:30 this morning. He let me use his bed when he went to church.”

“Thank God! I was afraid something bad might have happened to you,” Kelly exclaimed.

Like getting fucked in the ass by a queer. I left that thought unvoiced. “I haven’t showered yet,” I said. “Why don’t I call you after I get cleaned up? We can get some lunch.”

“That sounds like a plan Kyle,” Kelly agreed.

I took a shower and headed over to Pollock Commons to meet Kelly. She gave me a hug and a kiss when she saw me.

“I was so worried about you Kyle,” Kelly exclaimed as she squeezed me.

I returned the kiss and said, “Sorry I left so quick last night.”

Kelly laughed as she let go of me. “Left quick?” Kelly asked. “I think it was more like you stormed out.”

The thought hit me. I left my naked girlfriend with that Mark character minutes after he had fucked her. What in the hell was I thinking last night?

I snapped, “I’m sure you and Jen had fun with Mark after I left.”

Kelly’s jaw dropped and she stared at me in disbelief. “How could you say something like that Kyle?” she asked. “Mark left a couple minutes after you. I would NEVER do something like you are implying.”

“I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have said that,” I replied.

“I presumed our rules for threesomes applied last night to the foursome,” Kelly said. “I would not do anything with Mark after you left.”

We were at the head of line in the cafeteria, so we gathered our food in awkward silence. We found an empty table away from most people. That was best for continuing this discussion.

Kelly spoke first. “Mark is so sorry about what happened,” Kelly explained. “Is it OK if he calls you? He wants to apologize for his mistake.”

“Yeah, some mistake,” I growled.

“I understood what you had in mind last night Kyle,” Kelly said. “I was looking forward to seeing what it feels like to get sandwiched between two big hard guys. Mark didn’t know that is what you wanted.”

“I certainly didn’t want in the middle,” I grumbled.

“Of course you didn’t sweetie,” Kelly replied soothingly.

“I am not gay!” I responded.

“I would think not,” Kelly agreed. “Mark feels horrible about all this. Is it all right if he calls you and apologizes? He doesn’t want this to hurt his friendship with you. He values that too much.”

I was still very pissed off about what Mark did last night but Kelly was so earnest in wanting me to put this sorry episode behind me that I agreed.

“Yeah, I’ll talk to Mark if he calls me,” I allowed quietly.

That satisfied Kelly. She turned the conversation to other topics like everything was settled. I tried not to be too disagreeable. I had a long way to go before I could say, ‘Oh, you stuck a cock up my ass. No big deal. No harm, no foul.’ I’m not sure I can get over this that easily. I chose to keep my mouth shut. I didn’t need to bring Kelly down with my black mood.

I went through the motions as Kelly and I did our usual Sunday afternoon rituals – reading the newspaper together, keeping in touch with friends and family via e-mail, and sharing each other’s company. I tried to keep a cheerful front up but black ugly thoughts kept going through my head.

I took a cock up the backside like a fucking queer! It felt good too. What in the hell did that mean? I tried to work it out but I had no answers.

Mark Armstrong called later in the afternoon. Mark’s apology was so abject and heart felt that I had to accept it. After all he hadn’t intended to hurt me or force me into anything I didn’t want to do. It was a misunderstanding. Kelly was pleased when I hung up after talking with Mark.

Over the course of the next few days I tried to put what happened Saturday night out of my mind. I made my classes. I did my homework. I spent time with Kelly as usual. I attended practices and did my workouts. Jay, Chip, Damian and I worked on passing after practice to hone our skills. This week Jibril, Tanner and Christian asked to work with us too.

I came to some conclusions as I worked through my concerns over what had happened last Saturday night. I gradually accepted that Mark was sincere in his repeated apologies. He hadn’t meant me any harm. It was a misunderstanding. Kelly was concerned about my bad mood and did her best to bring me out of it.

One issue wouldn’t go away. I had taken a guy’s cock up my ass. That wasn’t a fact that I wanted anyone to find out. I knew Mark, Jen and Kelly would be discrete. Still, it had

happened. Worst of all, it felt good when Mark did it. I was supposed to feel grossed out at the thought. That is how guys are supposed to feel about gay things like butt fucking. Why in the hell had I liked it?

Kelly wasn't the only one to notice how quiet and introspective I had been. Damian repeatedly asked me if I was OK. I always told him I was fine. At various times Anders, Jay, Christian and Trevor also asked how I was. They all got the same answer as Damian.

I was working out at the Lasch Building Thursday after dinner when I bumped into Zack. Zack tried to strike up a conversation. I was uncommunicative. Zack tried to draw me out without success. I assured my buddy that I was fine and just had a lot to think about. Zack accepted my explanation.

Kelly and I went downtown on our own Friday night without our frequent companions – Jen and Mark or Trevor and Stephanie. Kelly treated me to dinner at Spats and a movie. She called it our own Sadie Hawkins Day.

Kelly and I spent the night in her room. We had sex but it wasn't up to our usual passion. I couldn't get the memories of Mark pressed on top of me last Saturday night as he rutted in my ass from my head as I fucked Kelly. I came too soon to bring my girlfriend off. I went down on her so she could enjoy an orgasm too. I begged off and said I was too tired for a second time when Kelly asked.

Saturday's scrimmage was a disaster for me. It would have looked like an April Fool's joke except it was on April 2nd, not the 1st. I dropped the first three passes Chip sent my way. I didn't see the ball a lot after that. I misjudged a punt, handled it poorly and fumbled it. The punt team scored a touchdown on it. Coach Ferguson chewed my ass out for that bone headed play. I was relieved when the scrimmage hit the second half and the younger guys played. I stayed in the back along the sidelines out of peoples' way until we were done.

Kelly and I had lunch together and then I headed for one sanctuary where no one bothered me – the Natatorium. I lifeguarded until five o'clock. It left me time to think more about my dilemma.

I had gay sex, albeit briefly. Maybe I could live with that. The thing that bothered me more was the fact that it felt good when Mark fucked my ass. Was I gay? Were all my attempts to build permanent relationships with Penny, then Julie and now Kelly a way to seem straight the way the world expected me to be? Was I overcompensating with all the sex I had with women when I really wanted to be with men?

I had wrestled with that question all week. Another four hours sitting on the lifeguard stand and pondering it had added \$48 to my paycheck but hadn't provided answers.

Kelly suggested we go downtown for dinner but I pleaded poverty. That was mostly true. The main reason I didn't want to go out was I didn't feel like running into crowds and fans. The dining hall was quieter on a Saturday night. Kelly and I separated and went back to our own rooms to shower and clean up for Zack's party.

Kelly and I headed over to Zack's party around eight o'clock. Partiers were arriving when we got there. Kelly and I headed for the kitchen to get a drink. Kelly grabbed her usual beer. I decided I was in the mood for something different so I poured myself a double shot of vodka.

I was content to sit and listen to music. Kelly coaxed me into mingling with the other guests. I didn't have much to say that night. I went back for a couple refills on the vodka as the evening went on. I was getting my fourth double shot when Kelly headed to the bathroom around 9:30.

I didn't make it to the kitchen. Zack and Anders intercepted me. "Come on," Zack commanded. "We're going for a walk."

"What about Kelly?" I asked. I knew something was up. This wasn't a social call. My friends were all business. They also had their coats on.

"Kelly knows we are going out for a bit," Anders answered. Zack handed me my sweatshirt. I followed Zack out the front door followed by Anders. We walked for a minute or two towards the Lasch Building and the stadium. Unsurprisingly the area was deserted on a Saturday night.

"What is going on with you Kyle?" Zack asked when we were past the last of the Nittany Apartments. "You have been surly and avoiding people all week."

"I'm fine," I insisted. "Really, I'm fine."

"Bullshit!" Zack exclaimed.

"And you sucked rocks today at the scrimmage," Anders added.

"I've never seen you play worse football than this morning," Zack said. "What is going on? All your friends are worried about you."

"I have something I need to work out," I admitted.

"Something happened last Saturday night, didn't it?" Anders asked. "You've been in a funk since Sunday morning when Kelly called me trying to find out where you went Saturday night. What happened?"

“Did you get drunk and do something stupid?” Zack asked. “You didn’t show up at my party. Did something happen at another party? Are you in trouble with the police or campus security?”

“No, it’s nothing like that,” I replied. “I did go to Sigma Tau’s party last Saturday night with Kelly’s roommate Jen and her boyfriend. We drank a little but we weren’t fall down drunk. We went back to Kelly’s room. Kelly and I had sex. I headed back to my dorm. Damian was entertaining so I crashed in the study lounge. That’s it.”

“What the hell is wrong with you?” Zack demanded.

“Did you and Kelly have problems in bed?” Ander asked. “Did you have trouble getting it up?”

“I did not have trouble getting it up,” I replied. “My sex life is none of your business. I have some things I need to figure out and I need to do it on my own.”

“We’re your friends,” Zack said. “You can talk about almost anything with Anders and me. It stays with us. What is going on?”

“Almost?” I replied. “There are a few things that I really can’t talk about with you guys. You have to let me deal with it.”

“You’re doing a damn poor job dealing with it now,” Zack responded. “You have Kelly worried sick about you. Your friends are concerned. Why can’t you talk to us?”

“It not something guys can discuss,” I answered. “It just isn’t.”

“If you have problems to work out maybe it would help you to talk to a psychologist down at Ritnour,” Zack suggested.

“I don’t need a shrink,” I declared.

“You need something,” Zack replied. “You won’t talk to your friends about your problem. You won’t talk to your girlfriend. You need somebody.”

“Residential Life has a peer counseling program Kyle,” Anders suggested. “You would sit down anonymously and privately with a student trained in counseling. It is all strictly confidential. No records of any kind are kept. Would you be willing to try that Kyle?”

“You need something buddy,” Zack added. “You need to get whatever is going on off your chest.”

I didn’t love the prospect of talking with a stranger about what I was feeling but that was less daunting than admitting it to my close friends. Zack and Anders were right. I wasn’t getting anywhere trying to resolve my problem on my own.

“OK, I guess I can do that,” I admitted. “How do I contact this peer counselor?”

“I will get you a phone number to call,” Anders replied. “Do you want to go back to the dorms with me now so you can call or do you want the number tomorrow morning?”

“I’ve survived the week,” I said. “I think I can last until tomorrow.”

“You can,” Zack agreed. “...as long as you knock it off with the double shots of vodka. I don’t want a repeat of two weeks ago.”

“I’ll stick to sodas tonight,” I promised. The three of us walked back down the street to Zack’s apartment together. Just the prospect of someone to help me with my dilemma improved my mood a little.

I grabbed a soda from the kitchen while Zack and Anders briefed Kelly about my decision to go to counseling. Kelly gave me a hug and a kiss when I came back out to the living room.

“I’m glad you listened to Zack and Anders,” Kelly said. “I don’t understand what is bothering you. Your friends and I just want to help you any way we can.”

“I don’t know if it will help,” I replied. “I’ll give this counseling a try.”

“That’s good Kyle,” Kelly said. “I hope this helps you.”

We went back to mingling with our friends. My mood wasn’t quite as sour as before. The prospect of someone to help me while I wrestled with my torment comforted me. I stayed with sodas the rest of the night. Kelly had a couple more beers before we left.

Kelly was a little tipsy when we headed back to her room. It was good I was there to help her out. We made out a little after we stripped for bed. I begged off having sex. I simply wasn’t in mood. Kelly accepted that. We cuddled until we fell asleep.

Anders caught up with me Sunday afternoon at my room while Kelly and I were reading the Philadelphia Inquirer. He gave me the peer counseling call-in phone number. I put it aside and went back to reading my section of paper. Kelly insisted I call right away.

A pleasant sounding guy answered the phone on the third ring. He introduced himself as Tom. He asked me for a fictitious name that he could use for me while we talked. I chose ‘Dave’, my middle name. Tom tried to draw out my reason for calling while we were on the phone. I wasn’t very revealing with Kelly sitting across the room from me. Tom finally suggested we meet in fifteen minutes in the student lounge in the HUB. I agreed.

Kelly left a few minutes later so I could head over to the HUB. I had one problem with the whole anonymous thing with the counselor. I had one of the most recognizable faces on campus. I hadn't gotten a hair cut in awhile so I pulled it back and tied it in a miniature queue in back. I brushed the hair on the sides behind my ears. I put on a Penn State ball cap and my sunglasses. I checked myself in the mirror. I wouldn't be completely recognizable, at least if people didn't look at me too closely.

I found a guy in the back corner of the upstairs lounge in the HUB as expected. I walked up to him and asked, "Are you Tom?"

"Dave?" he asked as he nodded that he was Tom.

"That's me," I agreed.

"Is this private enough Dave?" Tom asked. "This part of the HUB usually deserted this time of day on a Sunday."

I looked around the lounge. There probably weren't more than ten people in the huge room. The nearest was a girl that was fifty feet away absorbed in the book she was reading.

"Yeah, this will do," I replied. Tom indicated for me to have a seat.

"What seems to be on your mind Dave?" Tom asked politely. "You can get comfortable. Take your hat, coat and sunglasses off." He gave me a wink. "The sunlight isn't that dazzling in here, is it?"

"Um... I'll keep them on, if you don't mind," I replied. "This is supposed to be anonymous. I have a face that people recognize."

"OK, that's fine Dave," Tom answered. "What prompted the call to the peer counseling help line?"

"Some of my friends thought I could use someone to talk to," I responded.

"Why do they think that?" Tom asked.

"Well... I guess because of an incident last Saturday night," I explained. "My girlfriend, her roommate, the roommate's boyfriend and I went to a frat party..."

"...got drunk and?" Tom interjected.

"You've heard this before?" I asked.

Tom chuckled and answered, "Nearly every weekend. Tell me about this incident."

I proceeded to explain about the party, Kelly and I returning to her room and getting interrupted by Jen and Mark while we were having sex. Tom was very good at drawing information from me.

I had learned some things about counseling when I had leadership training in scouts. He used open ended questions to get the information from me. I was uncomfortable talking about all of this but Tom coaxed the story from me piece by piece.

Tom seemed mildly surprised when I explained about including Jen and Mark in a four way. He interrupted me as I was explaining.

“Was getting involved in group sex what you want to talk about?” Tom asked. “Is that upsetting to you?”

“Only indirectly,” I explained. “I have had group sex before, with my girlfriend and her roommate. It was before she started dating her current boyfriend.”

“Adding a guy to the mix, is that what is troubling you?” Tom asked.

“Yeah,” I admitted. “Yeah, that’s why I’m here.”

Tom continued asking probing questions. I talked about Mark and me getting naked together, having sex with our girlfriends near each other and then us swapping girlfriends for sex. Tom asked me how I felt about each of these things.

I explained about Andy and I having sex in the same room in adjoining beds when Tom asked if I was comfortable in with another guy in a sexual situation. I also told him about my three-ways with Ed and Jessie and also with Brandon and Penny. I wasn’t upset about having sex with another naked guy nearby.

I told him I wasn’t wild about Mark having sex with Kelly but I could live with it since I was present and a willing participant in the sharing. This perplexed Tom.

“We’ve been talking for forty minutes David,” Tom said. “You’ve done some pretty heavy, emotional things last Saturday night. You claim you are OK with being naked around another guy during sex and you’re OK with swapping girlfriends. Forgive me for being blunt, but what the hell is wrong? Are you being honest about your feelings?”

“I think I am,” I replied.

“How did things end that night?” Tom asked, clearly getting exasperated with me.

My face turned red and I hung my head. I wondered to myself if I really wanted to admit how things ended.

“David, what happened at the end?” Tom asked quietly. “This is what is upsetting you, isn’t it?” I nodded yes. He put his hand on my shoulder and asked, “Can you look at me David? I’m here to help, no matter what it is.”

I took a deep breath and let it out. Tom had understood and been non-judgmental the whole time I explained about the kinky things that happened that night. He didn’t know me. What did I have to lose telling him the rest of the story?

“Mark had....” I said quietly. “He had... sex...” I needed another deep breath to continue. “... with me.”

“Have you had gay sex before?” Tom asked.

“No,” I replied.

“How do you feel about having sex with another guy?” Tom asked.

“How do you think I feel about it?” I asked crossly. “I’m not a fucking queer!”

My sudden burst of temper surprised Tom. “I assume you didn’t consent to having sex with um... what’s the boyfriend’s name... Mark?” he asked.

“Hell no!” I snapped. I realized as soon as I answered the question that I forgot and mentioned Mark’s name. This was supposed to be anonymous. Why did I get so angry with that question? “I’m sorry I got mad.”

“That’s to be expected David,” Tom replied evenly. “It is common with rape victims.”

“Rape?” I answered, anger flashing in my eyes again. “I was NOT raped!”

“You gave consent for Mark to uh...” Tom replied. “Maybe we need to be more clinical. What exactly happened between you and Mark? Did he give you fellatio or anal intercourse?”

I felt my face flushing with embarrassment again as I replied quietly, “Anal.”

“You didn’t consent to having anal intercourse with Mark?” Tom asked.

“No,” I replied. “Definitely not.”

“David, it is normal to feel the way that you do about what happened to you,” Tom said. “It is very common for rape victims to deny it. It is part of your mind’s coping mechanism with the trauma. You are hurt. You’re angry. You’re supposed feel like you do.”

“It’s wasn’t rape,” I insisted. “It was a misunderstanding.”

“David, could I make a suggestion?” Tom asked. I nodded yes. “We are getting a little out of my depth here with what we are discussing. You would be able to get more help if you called the Rape Crisis Line.”

“I wasn’t raped,” I insisted again.

“Mark forced you into anal intercourse without your consent,” Tom said. He stared at me waiting for a response. After a few seconds I nodded in agreement. “That is a text book definition of rape. The Crisis Line is better equipped to help you than I am. Please give them a call.” Tom handed me a card from his wallet.

“What happened was a misunderstanding Tom,” I explained. “It wasn’t rape.”

“I’m trained in peer counseling techniques David,” Tom replied. “I think you will do better giving the Crisis Line a call. They can help you sort out your feelings about what happened much better than I can. Please consider calling them.”

“I guess,” I agreed after a couple more minutes of encouragement from Tom. “I can give it a try. Thanks for taking time to talk with me.”

“That’s no problem David,” Tom replied. “Give the Crisis Line a call. They will be able to help more. You can give me a call too, if you think it’ll help.”

I headed back to my room from the HUB. I thought about what Tom had said about rape. I didn’t feel like that was what had happened between Mark and me. I had learned from health class in high school and the various briefings here that rape was more about power than about sex. Mark wasn’t abusing me or trying to coerce me. It was just miscommunication about what we wanted to do that evening.

Kelly met me at Pollock Commons after I returned. We had dinner in privacy thanks to the early hour. None of our friends were there yet. Kelly was equally horrified as me at Tom’s description of what happened last Saturday as being rape. Neither of us wanted anything bad to happen to Mark. He hadn’t meant any harm when it happened.

The two of us talked things through over dinner. Kelly recommended that I call the Rape Crisis Line and ask questions without getting into names or specific details. I called as soon as we got back to Kelly’s room. She stayed with me for moral support.

“Rape Crisis Line,” the voice said when I called. “May I have your name?”

“Um... could I just ask a question first?” I asked. The lady on the crisis line agreed.

“If two people were in the middle of sex and things escalate...” I said.

“Can you be more specific?” the lady asked.

“You’re in the middle of intercourse,” I explained. “...and a guy starts into anal sex. Would it be rape if he stopped as soon as the partner said to stop?”

“How far did you go with the girl?” the lady asked. “Was there penetration?”

“This is a hypothetical question,” I insisted. “The guy pulled out immediately after the partner said to stop. That isn’t rape is it under those circumstances, is it?”

“Not necessarily if you... uh, he stopped immediately,” the lady said. “You should have the girl contact us. This can be traumatic for her even if you... uh, he stopped immediately.”

“I’ll pass that advice along,” I said before I hung up the phone. I didn’t like the way the call went at all. The lady on the phone was determined to make me the aggressor in this problem. She didn’t seem at all helpful.

Kelly and I talked about the phone call. We took encouragement from the lady’s statement that it may not have been rape since Mark pulled out as soon as I told him to stop. Still, the call wasn’t satisfactory to helping me resolve my conflicted feelings. That was apparent to Kelly too. She encouraged me to call Tom again to see if he would talk further. I called Tom and got his voice mail.

I headed over to the Lasch Building after that to do my daily workout. I had time to think while I worked out. I had been purposely vague with the rape crisis lady. I hadn’t been entirely forthcoming with Tom either. Could either of them help me if I hid the thing that bothered me most about this problem? I decided I would confide in Tom about my feelings when Mark took my ass. Admitting it felt good wasn’t going to be easy.

Tom called back until 9:30 that evening while I was in my room studying. He and I compared schedules. He could meet me tomorrow after dinner. I arranged to meet him at 7:00 pm at the HUB.

Coach Adams and Coach Ferguson chewed me out for my various gaffes at film study of Saturday’s scrimmage. I didn’t blame them. I sucked at the scrimmage. I was more determined after that ass-chewing to be forthright when I talked with Tom in the evening. Hopefully that would help Tom help me get over my problems. I didn’t screw up as much at practice that afternoon.

I headed over to the HUB after dinner hoping that Tom would be able to help me sort out my feelings and bring some sanity to my life. This time I would level with him, embarrassing as the details were.

I met Tom at the same spot as yesterday. Quite a few students were hanging out or studying in the lounge so the two of us went downstairs and outside to the patio. It was a cold evening for the 11th of April. The sky was cloudy and the temperature was around fifty-five. No one else was out on the patio.

“So David, did you talk with the Rape Crisis Line?” Tom said after we were seated.

“I did,” I confirmed. “I explained the circumstances and the lady I talked with agreed that it wasn’t necessarily a rape. Maybe I need to explain the details a little better than last night. I was vague because all of this is so embarrassing.”

“Maybe you better David,” Tom agreed.

I recounted the details of the encounter again, leaving absolutely nothing out this time. Tom listened carefully, nodding his occasionally as he followed my story.

“So, do you see why I don’t think what happened is rape?” I asked. “The boyfriend’s experience in past three-ways was guy doing guy doing a girl. I had three-ways the other way around, both guys doing the girl. I didn’t clearly explain what I had in mind.”

“I see,” Tom agreed.

“Here I am on top of my girl saying ‘go ahead’, presenting my backside to him,” I explained. “What else would someone with his experiences expect other than I wanted him inside me?”

“Uh-huh,” Tom said as he nodded.

“As soon as I realized what was going on, I told him to stop,” I explained. “He pulled out immediately. He apologized totally. I was pissed off but I will get over it. How could I ruin the guy’s life by bringing him up on rape charges?”

“That’s a fair point, given the circumstances,” Tom agreed. “My question is how does this affect you psychologically?”

“I have talked about this with the boyfriend,” I replied. “I’m not happy it happened and I doubt I will be double dating with him and his girlfriend anytime soon. I don’t want to beat him to a bloody pulp or anything anymore. I forgave him for what happened.”

“What in the hell is bothering you?” Tom exclaimed. “You say you aren’t jealous of him having sex with your girlfriend. You forgive him for anal rape. What is it?”

My face flushed. This was it, the moment of truth. Softly I said, “It felt good.”

“Excuse me?” Tom asked.

“It felt good,” I replied louder.

“And?”

“I liked it. Does that make me a queer?” I asked. “Regular guys don’t take it up the ass and like it.”

“David, could you use a less pejorative term such as homosexual please?” Tom said.

“Sorry,” I replied. “I don’t want to be qu... homosexual. I’m not supposed to like what happened.”

Tom smiled. “Is that what this is about?” I nodded yes hesitantly. “Answer some questions for me David. Do you ever check guys out in the locker room before or after a game?”

“NO!” I insisted. Then I realized what he said about me in the locker room before and after games. Did Tom recognize who I was? “How do you know I’m an athlete? Do you know who I am?”

“I don’t know your real name David,” Tom replied. “It was obvious from the moment I met you yesterday that you were an athlete. Your size, your sculpted physique, your attempt to disguise your identity – all of these things led me to conclude that you are an athlete on one of our university teams. I haven’t figured out if you play football, basketball, soccer, volleyball or track. Am I guessing correctly?”

“Your suppositions are pretty good,” I agreed.

“Do you ever check out what guys look like in the locker room?” Tom asked. “Does the sight of a guy turn you on? Answer honestly.”

“No, the sight of a naked guy does not turn me on,” I answered.

“Do you ever fantasize about sex with guys?” Tom asked.

“Never,” I answered quickly.

“Have you dated your current girlfriend a long time?” Tom asked.

“The two of us have been a serious couple for fourteen months,” I replied.

“Have you had other serious relationships with girls?” Tom asked.

“Two others,” I replied. I had my first girlfriend for half of ninth grade. I had a second girlfriend for most of tenth grade. I went back to the first girl for most of my junior year

and all of my senior year in high school. We tried to stay together while attending different colleges but that didn't work out."

"What from your life history would make you think you might be homosexual?" Tom asked.

"What happened – it felt good," I explained.

"That's it?" Tom asked. I nodded in agreement. He cocked his head and stared at me for a few seconds. He smiled and added, "You're not gay David. How much do you know about human anatomy?"

"A little I guess," I replied.

"The human anus has a high concentration of nerve endings," Tom explained. "You know that prostate massage feels good. You told me your girlfriend does that to you." I nodded in agreement. "From what you have told me about your sexual history, I believe you are sexually adventurous. You have had anal intercourse with your girlfriend, correct?"

"I have," I agreed.

"Your girlfriend enjoys it?" Tom asked. I nodded yes. "Why wouldn't you enjoy it too? You have the same nerve endings as her. In addition you have a prostate that feels great when it is massaged. Stop worrying about being gay if your only reason for suspecting you might be homosexual is that."

"You're sure?" I asked. "How do you know so much about being gay?"

"I am sure you aren't," Tom answered. "I know how much heartache and pain a truly gay person goes through when he or she realizes his or her identity. My older brother went through hell coming to terms with his homosexuality."

I broke into a big smile. "You're really sure I'm not gay?" I asked again. Tom smiled back and nodded. "Oh... what a relief. I don't know what my teammates would have done if they thought I was gay. It wouldn't have been pretty."

"You have gay teammates David," Tom said. "I almost guarantee it. It doesn't matter what sport you play – even basketball. Odds are that you have one, two, or maybe more gay teammates now."

"I find that hard to believe," I said.

"They are there," Tom answered. "They're probably hiding. You seem like a decent guy to me but you use offensive slang for gays like it is commonplace."

“I guess you’re right,” I said. “I’m just used to that around the locker room. That is how all the guys talk.”

“Show a little class,” Tom said. “Be kind to your gay teammates that are hiding in the closet.”

“I guess I can do that,” I said. “I’ve never really put much thought into gays – at least until now. Thanks for spending time talking with me. This really helped me sort things out.” I stood to leave. Tom motioned for me to sit down again.

“There is one more thing I think you and I should talk about David,” Tom said. I sat down again. “Do you do a lot of drinking?”

“A lot?” I asked. “Probably no more than any other college student.”

“I suspect this problem you had is tied closely to your drinking,” Tom said. “Do you think this would have happened if you were sober that night?”

“I don’t know,” I replied. Tom stared at me until I expanded on that. “Maybe it had something to do with it, though I’ve done some pretty kinky things when I was stone cold sober too.”

“Do you drink every day?” Tom asked.

“No,” I replied.

“How often do you drink?”

“Once or twice week,” I answered. “Usually at parties with my friends.”

“Have you ever been so drunk you passed out?” Tom asked. “Do you have nights you don’t remember the next morning?”

“Don’t most college students?” I responded.

“Has your drinking ever affected your performance in a game?” Tom asked.

“Never!” I responded immediately. “I’d never let that happen. Coach would kill me.”

“Any of your friends get on your case about drinking too much?” Tom asked.

“Now you’re starting to sound like Zac... uh, the team captain,” I said. “He has told me that quite a few times.”

“I don’t think you are an alcoholic David but I do think you are a binge drinker,” Tom said. “Binge drinking is almost as bad. If you want to keep your scholarship...” Tom paused and stared at me.

I slipped my sunglasses half way down my nose and peered over them at Tom. “You know who I am, don’t you?”

“You are David,” Tom answered. “You’re a college student who needs a friend to talk to.” He gave me a wink. “David, I think you need to cut down the drinking so you can stay on the field and out of trouble. I think most everyone in the university would like it if that happened.”

“You have given me a lot to think about Tom,” I replied. “Thanks for taking time to talk things through with me.”

“That is what peer counseling is for,” Tom answered.

“How did you get so good at this?” I asked as we rose from our table.

“A lot of psychology and sociology courses here,” Tom answered. “I think it will be good preparation for my career. I plan to go to med school in the fall. I want to be a psychiatrist.”

We shook hands before we parted. “Thanks Tom,” I repeated. “Thanks so much for your help.”

I headed over to the Lasch Building after I met with Tom for my daily workout. Half a dozen of my teammates were there but no one bothered me. I had time to think about everything we had discussed.

I was relieved that Tom didn’t think there was anything gay about my feelings when Mark stuck his cock up my ass. Gay, fag, queer, homo – those were all terms I heard around the locker room among my friends and teammates all the time. I never gave them a second thought until Tom talked to me about them. I decided to try to clean up my language a little bit. I had no issues with gays other than I didn’t want to be one of them.

Tom’s lecture on drinking made the biggest impression on me. He wasn’t the first to tell me that I should cut down on my drinking. I never considered it to be a problem. I never drank and drove. Well, just the one time after Aaron’s wedding.

Zack Hayes was my friend and mentor. He had never given me bad advice in all our years together. Anders was a good and trusted friend too. Maybe I should listen to them and use this incident as a wakeup call.

My talk with Tom on Monday evening put me in a better frame of mind than I had been in ten days. Damian, Christian, Trevor, and Cameron Miller all commented about my improved attitude. Kelly was delighted by my improved attitude too.

Football practice went better too. I didn't drop any passes or make mistakes running routes. I bumped into Zack Hayes in the locker room after practice and thanked him for pushing me to go to peer counseling.

Over dinner Tuesday night Christian, Bev, Kelly, Trevor and me discussed the idea of going camping some weekend this spring. We decided a trip down to Raystown Lake this coming weekend would be fun. Trevor and Christian could get in a little fishing. The rest of us could hike or just relax around camp. It would be a fun way to spend a Saturday afternoon, evening and Sunday morning before things got to hectic here at school.

Zack Hayes got an invitation from the NFL to go to Madison Square Garden for the NFL draft. It was quite an honor. Only those expected to be top draft picks during the first round of the draft were invited to be in attend. Commissioner Goodell would invite Zack on stage when a team picked him. Leigh Ann and Zack's family were invited to come too.

Football practices went well during the week. I hit my stride again and felt like I was the best receiver on our team. Damian drew repeated praise from Coach Goodwin, our running backs coach, and from Coach Schroeder with his play. I thought my roomie was making a strong claim to being our feature tailback next season.

Chip Brinton continued to improve running our offense. The coaches had him run nearly everything in the playbook, confident that he had finally learned all of it. Jon Stafford progressed too. He was extremely raw but showed flashes of brilliance. The whole team stopped and stared on one play where Jon threw a deep pass to Bruce MacCauley that hit him in stride. David McCall, normally an excellent DB one on one, was flamed on the play. The play promised a bright future in a few years when my classmates were gone.

Thursday after practice our usual lineup of Chip, Jay, Damian, Christian, Tanner, Jibril and me stayed for some extra passing drills. Jay was favoring his left leg, the one he hurt in the crash last fall. I hadn't noticed during practice when Jay stood on the sidelines.

Next time I came back after a pass I asked Jay, "What's up with the leg?"

"I tweaked it a little last night," Jay answered.

"You take care of it," I replied. "We need you on the field in the fall."

"Don't worry Kyle, I'll be there," Jay replied.

Jay was fanatical about doing his rehab and working out since the doctor cleared him a few weeks ago. He lost ten pounds that he gained while he was injured. My friend was determined to be ready to play in the summer when football camp started.

The other shoe fell for Jay on Friday. Mr. Burgess, the head trainer, noticed his limp in the afternoon when he was doing his rehab. Mr. Burgess took him straight over to the hospital for x-rays. Jay returned on crutches with his left ankle in a cast. He had a stress fracture between two of the screws holding his ankle together. Workouts, tossing the football around, even walking were off the table for Jay for three or four weeks.

All of us on the fourth floor of Hartranft tried to cheer our friend up. Jay took this setback hard. He was pissed off, mostly at himself, for pushing too hard too soon. He still vowed he would be ready to play when camp started in the beginning of August.

Trevor, Steph, Kelly and I went downtown for dinner Friday night and then caught a movie. We had a good time. We discussed our plans for the weekend campout we had planned too.

I had a great scrimmage on Saturday morning. Chip hit me for two touchdowns in the first quarter. I scored a third when I broke a punt return wide open. It was an excellent showing. Coach Adams and Coach Ferguson were pleased to see me perform at a high level after last Saturday's disaster.

Christian, Bev, Kelly, Trevor and I grabbed lunch at Pollock Commons after the scrimmage and then loaded our gear in my car and Trevor's car. Christian and Bev rode with Kelly and me. We followed Trevor over to Steph's apartment to pick her up. I followed Trevor down to Raystown Lake.

We checked into the park a little after two pm. We were able to get three adjoining sites in the Point Camp area. The sites were gorgeous, right along the edge of the lake with great view to the south. Trevor and Christian went fishing after we set up camp. Bev, Kelly and Steph decided to relax and gab. I put up my portable hammock and took a nap. It was a delightful afternoon.

We kept dinner simple – hamburgers, hot dogs, macaroni salad and a store bought cake. All six of us went for a hike along the side of the lake after dinner. We headed back to camp just around dusk, a little after eight o'clock. We made a small campfire back at camp and sat around and talked until bedtime.

Tyler Madden picked up a couple six packs of beer for Trevor. He shared them with the rest of us. I was surprised when Christian and Bev each took one. I held to my new resolve to take it easy on drinking. I stopped at two beers even though I could have had another if I wanted it. Trevor and Kelly polished off the extra bottles that Christian and Bev didn't want.

The six of us headed off to bed. Each couple took advantage of the semi-privacy provided by three separate tents to make love. Trevor and Stephanie had few inhibitions left after sharing a campsite with my friends last month. Christian and Bev had come a long way from the frustrated but virginal freshmen of a year ago.

They shared their bodies with each other, though quietly so as not to be overheard. Their religious scruples were assuaged by their intent to marry, as yet not formalized with an engagement ring. Trevor, Steph, Kelly and I had no problems with filling our needs and desires. Trevor demonstrated his love for S lustily. I was no less bashful with Kelly.

Kelly and I brought each other to climax orally before we mated. I brought Kelly to a second orgasm with my tongue while she begged for my cock. It never hurts to have your girl begging for you when you are ready to penetrate her.

Kelly lay on her back and spread her legs wide for me. I crawled over top of Kelly, resting my weight on my knees and elbows. I gave my impatient lover a kiss and rubbed my big, hard cock up and down her wet slit.

“Do know that Raystown Lake is a special place for my parents?” I asked. Kelly shook her head no. “Mom and Dad camped here twenty and a half years ago, a couple months before they married. Mom was twenty years old at the time, just like you.”

“Really?” Kelly asked as she wrapped her arms around my back and pulled me closer.

“Dad forgot to pack condoms,” I said. “You know who showed up nine months later.” Kelly giggled and smiled. “You do have your birth control ring in, don’t you?”

“Of course sweetie,” Kelly answered. “No repeating history tonight. We’ll wait a little longer before we have our first child.”

“Excellent!” I sighed as I speared my seven inches into Kelly’s hot, velvety tunnel. I made love to Kelly gently at first, gradually picking up speed and power as our feelings intensified. Kelly pushed back to my thrusts in perfect synchronization. We made love for a good ten or twelve minutes before Kelly climaxed, followed twenty seconds later by me. My semen burst out and filled my satisfied lover.

The two of us lay back and relaxed after that exquisite release, the sleeping bag pulled tight around us to ward off the cool early spring air. Kelly fell asleep in minutes but I lay back and pondered the future.

Mom was virtually the same age as me when I was conceived. Back when I was in middle school a school year seemed to take forever to pass. Kelly and I were weeks away from finals and the midway point in our college career. Our time in college was flying by. Two years from now we would be leaving school and setting out into the world.

I knew I wanted Kelly at my side when I left here. I considered for a bit how soon the two of us should formalize our relationship. Would I wait to ask for her hand until we were seniors the way Zack and Aaron had both done? Could I ask next year, the way my brother Will had done with Abby?

I didn't decide before I fell asleep. One thing I knew though – the day would come when I bought a ring and asked the red haired beauty sleeping beside me to spend the rest of her life with me. There was no doubt in my mind about that.

(To be continued)

Chapter 38

Easter was unusually late in April that year, not until April 24th. Our annual Blue and White Game would be tucked between Good Friday and Easter. Coach Burton posted the assignments for the game after practice on Tuesday. The whole team huddled around the bulletin board to find our assignments.

Damian and I were delighted to find ourselves teamed with Chip Brinton on the Blue Team. Amir Lee, Aidan Nagy and Jared Cantrell filled the remaining offensive skill positions for our team. Trevor Conwell, Tony King and Josh Bruno headlined our defense. Colin O’Shea backed up Chip at quarterback. Etienne LeBlanc backed up Damian at tailback.

Glenn Korbel would lead the White Team with Christian, Tanner Riggs, Bruce MacCauley and Alex Majerowicz at wide-out. Jibril Sloan and Wyatt Smith would fill the other skill slots on the White Team. Charlie Taylor backed up Wyatt at tailback. Unquestioned leader of the White Team was our free safety Tyler Madden.

Trevor and I looked over the list of people on our team. No obvious juniors stood out as leaders for our team. The two of us exchanged a knowing look. We were the biggest names on the Blue Team. We would need to provide direction and drive to our team. No other candidates were obvious among our teammates.

Chip and I were showering Wednesday after our post-practice passing drills. Chip casually asked, “Do you have a summer job lined up Kyle?”

“Yeah, I’m going working at scout camp again,” I replied. “How about you?”

“I thought I had one lined up until lunchtime today,” Chip said. “My boss from last summer called and told me he isn’t hiring any summer help. Things are too slow for him.”

“That sucks,” I said. “What are you going to do?” An idea popped into my head before Chip had time to reply.

“I have no idea,” he responded. “Do you know of anything?”

“Yes, actually I do have an idea,” I answered. “You were a Boy Scout. How would you feel about working at the pool at my scout camp this summer?”

“Scout camp?” Chip replied. “I hadn’t thought about trying for a job there. Anyway, I’m probably too late. When I was a CIT at Horseshoe years ago, I seem to remember applying in the fall, being interviewed over Christmas vacation and being hired in January. Would the camp still have openings?”

“I know we do,” I answered. “My brother told me a few weeks ago that we’re short one person at the pool. Christian’s cousin was supposed to work there but is doing an internship instead.”

“What would I be doing?” Chip asked.

“You would be working for me at the pool,” I explained. “I have a staff of ten that will work for me, mostly fifteen or sixteen year olds. I need someone older to help me keep the kids in line and focused on their jobs.” Chip nodded his understanding. “Do you have BSA Lifeguard?”

“Uh... sort of,” Chip replied. “I got it when I was fourteen. I’m sure it’s expired by now.”

“We can fix that during staff week,” I replied. “Recertifying you won’t be a problem. All aquatics staff review all required skills during staff week to satisfy my brother that they remember what to teach scouts the rest of the summer.”

“Your brother?” Chip asked. “Andy is in charge?”

“No, my older brother Will is the aquatics director,” I said. “I’ll get Mr. Holloway, the camp director, to send you an application.”

“How’s the pay at your camp?” Chip asked. “I remember Horseshoe didn’t pay their staff much.”

“The pay is crappy...” I replied. “... but it beats not having any job. The other benefit is you and I will have loads of time for passing drills. A group of us practice every day after lunch and on Sunday mornings after the Cub Scouts go home.”

“You’re right. Crappy pay is better than no pay,” Chip agreed. “How many guys do you practice with? Are they umm... How do I say this without be a snob?”

“Are they capable of playing at our level?” I asked. Chip smiled and nodded yes. “Ed Fritz is one. Is the #2 QB at Florida good enough?” Chip nodded yes quickly. “The rest of them are talented high school players. I think most of them have the potential to play in college. One of the receivers is Christian’s younger brother Josh. Three more are among the best players on my high school team.”

“In other words, the level of play is pretty good,” Chip said.

“Exactly,” I answered.

“OK, you sold me Kyle,” Chip replied. “Anyway, it will be good for me. Working on pass routes with you for half a summer has to improve my chances of being the starter.”

“You know you’re a long shot to win the job?” I asked.

“I burned a year of eligibility for the team last season,” Chip answered. “Coach is giving me a shot to be the starter this fall. I am going to do my absolute best to win the job. I don’t plan on sitting on the bench for three years and watch Jay lead the team.”

“I guess you have a point,” I agreed.

“Get me the application,” Chip said. “I’ll fill it out and see if they are interested in hiring me.”

“If I tell Will and Mr. Holloway to hire you, you will have the job,” I said.

“Cool! Thanks for looking out for me Kyle,” Chip said.

Will was enthusiastic when I called him that evening to let him know I had found another person for our staff. Will guaranteed that Mr. Holloway would hire anyone for the spot that he or I recommended. The paperwork was a mere formality.

Trevor, Stephanie, Kelly and I went downtown Friday night for dinner. We had a nice dinner at the Penn State Dinner. Downtown was hopping with students, fans and alumni. A lot of people came on Friday night to avoid the horrible traffic backups on Route 322 on Saturday.

Trevor and I kissed our girlfriends good night after dinner. We had a game plan to study. Coach Schroeder, head coach for the Blue Team, had drawn a regular game plan for tomorrow.

In addition to being a scrimmage, a chance for young players to learn and a PR event for our fans, our coaches put great stock in besting their opponents. I had overheard Coach Schroeder numerous times teasing Coach C about losing last year’s game. Trevor and I would do our best to do our jobs.

We spent a couple hours studying the playbook and the game plan. The usual Friday night pregame poker game started up after that. The lounge at the Lasch Building cleared out around ten o’clock when Tyler, Trevor and I sent our teammates to bed. The

university expected as many as 80,000 fans to attend the game and watch us perform tomorrow afternoon. Everyone needed a good night's sleep.

The team breakfast was at the Training Table at 8:30 on Saturday morning. The Blue Team assembled in the auditorium in the Lasch Building, thanks to our win last year. The White Team crowded into one of the smaller meeting rooms down the hall. The coaches reviewed the game plans just like any other fall game to help us be ready for the afternoon.

We spent time in the locker room after the team meeting preparing ourselves mentally and physically. Jay huddled with Jon Stafford, reviewing plays with him. Anders and I sat down with Chip and went over the game plans item by item. I wanted my friend to play well and get the ball off to me so I could look good too. Some guys studied, other listened to music and gabbed. Others played cards while a few guys meditated.

The whole team grabbed an early lunch at the Training Table before returning to suit up at the Lasch Building. Buses took the White and then the Blue Team over to the stadium. The atmosphere at the stadium was electric, no different than real games in the fall.

Mobs of fans crowded the barricades by our entrance. Trevor and I worked the line of fans, thanking them for their support and signing autographs. Chip was pleased too. Quite a few fans yelled out his name. He stopped and signed the first autographs of his college career. Chip was upbeat as we headed into the locker room.

We headed out to the field for warm-ups. The stadium was filling as we prepared. I stopped by and talked with Kelly, Jen, Bev, Cindy and Mark. They were seated in their usual spot with a Christian's Crew and Kyle's Krazies signs. I stopped off and talked with the guys from East Halls that had the other Kyle's Krazies sign too. They wished me luck in the game.

The Blue Band and the cheerleaders warmed up the crowd before the game started. The Blue Team took the field first to the cheers of the near capacity crowd. The White Team received an equal welcome when they took the field.

The White Team received first possession according to Coach Burton's plan, so Chip, Damian and I stood on the sidelines and watched things begin. Tanner Riggs took the kickoff and picked up twenty-four yards, a decent return.

Trevor, Josh, Brendan and the other seven guys in the defensive front stopped White's running game cold. Glenn was forced to dump off short passes to Christian, Tanner and Jibril to move the ball. His team gained a couple first downs before we turned them back.

I huddled up with the punt return team and reviewed the return right play Coach Ferguson had called for us.

“Make your blocks count guys,” I lectured. “We’re going to take this one all the way.” I grabbed Matt Frye’s facemask and pulled him closer. “Matt, make damn sure you block Byrd. No one else can catch me.”

“You got it Kyle,” the freshman answered. Matt nearly equaled Shawn Byrd, David McCall and me in foot speed.

Mitch Jackson boomed a beautiful deep punt that forced me to backpedal half a dozen yards. I settled under the ball, caught it and then scanned my blocking. I made one step to the left and then cut right. The guys were forming a screen between me and the right sideline as planned. I started forward. Matt engaged and pushed Shawn Byrd away as I cut behind his block.

I smiled to myself. Matt was turning into a good football player. I turned on the jets and flew down along the sideline. The first White player with a clear shot at me was the punter, Mitch. I juked Mitch out of position and flew by. I had clear sailing the rest of the way to the end zone. The Lions faithful cheered and applauded my feat.

I noticed Matt and Shawn climbing up off the ground about ten yards behind me. I helped both guys off the turf before we jogged back to our respective sidelines. I saw on the big screen that Shawn had nearly caught me when I faked out Mitch Jackson and had pursued me the rest of the way down the field until Matt blocked him and knocked him down just before I scored. I congratulated Matt on his work. The kid was turning into a good football player.

“Automatic” Andrew Perkins booted the PAT to give Blue a 7-0 lead. I stood on the sidelines with my idle offensive teammates. Tanner Riggs had another nice kick return, picking up twenty-seven yards.

Glenn and the White offense stayed conservative. They moved the ball with quick, short passes – a lot of flares, outs and curls. Wyatt carried the ball occasionally to slow down Trevor’s pass rush. They made a couple first downs and continued their patient progress towards the end zone.

The next play was an uncharacteristic. Christian did a hitch like it was another out route. His roommate, GJ DeLuca bought the fake while Christian turned and ran down the field. He scooped in Glenn’s heave twenty yards downfield and turned on his jets. Most of my teammates didn’t know about Christian’s break away speed since we rarely used him that way on the team.

They found out what I knew from high school. It is hell to catch Christian and bring him down in the open field. David McCall did catch him and knock him out of bounds, but only after Christian picked up forty-two yards.

White had the ball on our 18 yard line. Coach Keller, our linebackers coach normally and Blue defensive coordinator today, managed to stop White from scoring a touchdown.

Jared Gray, our freshman kicker, booted an easy field goal from the 12 yard line to put the score at 7-3 Blue's favor.

Jared boomed the ensuing kickoff deep into the end zone so I took the touchback and gave my team possession at our 20 yard line. I met my offensive teammates in the huddle to begin our first drive. The first quarter was half gone.

Coach Schroeder had no need to send me on a deep pass early in the game. Coach C and the White Team were well aware of my deep threat. Our team concentrated on running the ball and mixing in short passes. Damian did his job well. Jared Cantrell lined up outside on the weak side while I took the slot. We moved the ball steadily down the field in four to six yard chunks.

The defenders edged closer to the line after each play, as we wanted. When we pushed the ball across mid-field, Coach Schroeder cut us loose. I ran a post pattern out of the slot covered as always by Shawn Byrd. Tyler Madden came flying up for deep support as I sprinted for the goal post.

I anticipated Aidan Nagy would be open underneath me and get the ball since Tyler and Shawn had me blanketed. I was shocked when the ball came my way anyway. I leaped and tried to catch the ball. Shawn went up too. He managed to get a hand between me and the ball and pry it loose when I grabbed it. Ball incomplete.

I chimed, "Hello, I wasn't open," as I gave Chip a tap on the helmet. "Aidan should have been open."

"Yeah, I was," Aidan agreed. "I had beaten Marco." The White Team had put Marco Cuchiella in as their fifth DB on the play. Three years of experience should beat four weeks of experience every time.

"Sorry guys," Chip replied. "I'll do better next time."

Coach Schroeder called more conservative plays the rest of the drive. We used seven plays to push down the field and score. Chip tossed a nice fade pass to me in the corner of the end zone. Shawn and Tyler were plastered to me but I still managed to bring the ball down in the end zone. Andrew Perkins booted the extra point for our team. Score: 14-3 Blue.

Andrew boomed the ball down a couple yards into end zone on the next kickoff. Tanner Riggs decided to bring the ball out in spite of his location. Tanner has been insisting for the past two years that he is as capable of returning kicks and punts as I was. He used this opportunity to prove his point.

Jared Cantrell couldn't fight off his block and lost contain. Tanner scampered by him and accelerated through the crease in our defense. Tanner made a couple tacklers miss before he was confronted by Andrew Perkins. Tanner tried to stiff arm Andrew but it

didn't work. Jared is only 5'-11" and 180 pounds but he outweighs Tanner by five pounds. He slowed Tanner enough for a couple other tacklers to catch him and smash him to the ground.

This play was bad for the Blue Team but excellent for the Nittany Lions. Tanner was expected to be the primary kick returner next season. Coach Ferguson expected to use me only in the big games or for emergencies.

Glenn and the White offense took the ball on our 44 yard line. Coach Adams found a gap in our defense on the last series. This series he exploited it. We were soft to medium passing – over the linebackers' heads and in front of the defensive backs. Glenn hit repeated passes to Christian, Tanner and Jibril in the twelve to fifteen yard depth. When Josh, Brendan and Tony dropped deeper to stop the passes, White ran Wyatt or Charlie up the middle on us.

Distressingly quickly the White Team moved down into our red zone. Our defense tightened again when they tried consecutive runs up the middle. They did a faked a run up the gut again, locking the linemen and linebackers to the front. Glenn fired the ball to Christian as he crossed across the back of the end zone. Jared Gray added an extra point to narrow the score to 14-10 Blue's favor.

Coach C adjusted the White defense and slowed us down more on our next drive. Shawn Byrd and Tyler Madden dogged my every step of the way across the line of scrimmage. Two more deep attempts failed. We had to make do with short passes and Damian's running to move the ball. Our drive stalled near White 38 yard line. Andrew Perkins tried a 55 yard field goal. He missed just slightly to the left of the upright.

Both defenses were adjusting to their opponents respective strengths and weaknesses. We traded the ball back and forth for the rest of the second quarter without score. There were two and half minutes left when Jared Cantrell caught Mitch Jackson's punt to our team. Jared's blockers gave him a nice crease. He squirted through it and picked up seventeen yards to give us good field position at our 39 yard line.

We advanced the ball with pounding running by Damian and some short passes. We tried a play fake after we crossed midfield. Tyler Madden bit on the Damian's run fake, leaving Shawn Byrd to cover me one on one. I streaked downfield closely pursued by Shawn.

Chip launched a beautiful high pass my direction. I had to pause and time my leap to get the ball. I out jumped Shawn, got my fingers on the ball and wrestled it to my body while Shawn tried to knock it loose. Tyler Madden blasted into us, intent on separating my head from my body and the ball from my various body parts half a second later as we landed on the ground. The three of us thudded into the turf. I rolled away from the collision, dazed but holding the ball. The referee placed the ball on White's 24 yard line. I had picked up a cool 23 yards.

Coach Schroeder had Damian pound the ball downfield. Four runs later we were on White's 5 yard line. Chip's fade pattern to me on the next play was too high. Amir Lee dropped a pass to him on the goal line on the next play. On third and goal we flooded the end zone with receivers. No one was open. Chip threw the ball to Damian in the flat since everyone else was covered.

Damian pulled the ball into his body and smashed over Jarrell Cook, the linebacker trying to tackle him, and ran for the end zone. Shawn Byrd had the next shot at stopping my roommate. He just bounced off Damian. Tyler Madden dove and tried to trip Damian before he crossed the goal line. Damian high stepped over Tyler and danced into the end zone to the delight of the crowd.

Chip, Aidan, Jared, Amir and I celebrated with my roomie as the crowd cheered him. Six months ago my buddy would most likely have dropped that pass. His months of work were paying dividends.

Damian was hard to bring down between the tackles. If he can get the ball in the open like this consistently he is going to terrorize linebackers and defensive backs in the Big Ten. He is nearly impossible to tackle in the open.

The big smiles on Coach Schroeder's and Coach Goodwin's faces when they welcomed him back to the sidelines told me they were thinking along the same lines as me. Our team has a fantastic weapon that is going to keep defensive coordinators awake at night.

The Blue Team went inside at half time leading 21-10. Coach Schroeder announced that Chip, Damian and I were done for the afternoon. Colin O'Shea would lead the second and third string players on the Blue Team in the second half. He would face off against Jon Stafford and the younger players on the White Team.

I hung out on the sidelines in the second half with "Coach" Voight and "Coach" Hayes. Both of my friends were invited to be on the sidelines to help Coach Schroeder run the Blue Team. I enjoyed bantering with them and listening to their commentary on the game.

The level of play in the second half was uneven. Colin O'Shea didn't make many mistakes but he didn't move the ball well either. He managed a field goal in the second half.

Jon Stafford showed flashes of brilliance. He tossed an eye popping long touchdown pass to Bruce MacCauley. He also threw two interceptions. Charlie Taylor did a good job running in the second half, picking up 67 yards on fourteen carries. The final score was 24-17 in the Blue Team's favor.

TV stations from Philadelphia, Lancaster, York and Harrisburg all interviewed me. Mr. Montgomery from the Lancaster papers as well as the sports reporter from the Philadelphia Inquirer's Penn State beat interviewed me too.

It wasn't surprising. My seven receptions for 98 yards made me the leading receiver for the day. Christian followed me closely with seven catches for 87 yards. Tanner Riggs and Damian tied for six catches each. Chip was buoyant about his performance. His 17 completions in 29 passes for two touchdowns and no interceptions was an excellent job. The only question mark about Chip's work was, 'What would Jay have done?' if he hadn't been standing on the sideline with his ankle in a cast. We wouldn't get to compare them head to head until August.

I called Kelly when I got back in the locker room to make arrangements to meet afterwards. We coordinated times. We would meet outside the Lasch Building at 5:15 pm after I had time to shower and change into street clothes. Steph and Bev were outside with Kelly when I came outside. Jay met his date, Molly Reed, outside while we waited for Christian and Trevor. The guys joined us a couple minutes later.

The eight of us decided to go downtown for dinner together. We ended up at Baby's for burgers and shakes. We bumped into Chip, his best friend Austin Dilworth and their dates, a couple girls I didn't know, outside Baby's. We asked the waitress to seat us together when they finally found room inside. The downtown and every restaurant was crowded with fans looking for fun after the game.

Trevor and I had a lot of fans stop by to talk while we had our meal, nothing unusual. Chip was delighted to be interrupted repeatedly by fans complimenting him on his game that day. This game was his coming out party, so to speak. He had been anonymous among our fans until today. He seemed to love all the attention.

Chip introduced us to his date, Whitney Vang. Whitney was a short freshman of Asian descent with short silky black hair. Austin was dating her best friend Shannon Elliot. Shannon was much taller, around 5'-9" with reddish-brown hair and milky white skin. Both girls were studying nursing.

The dozen of us headed back onto campus after our leisurely dinner for Zack Hayes' party. Partiers were arriving at Zack's apartment when we got there. Evan was playing bartender again. The concoction this weekend was screwdrivers. Kelly and I each took one. We mingled and talked with our friends while we enjoyed our first drinks.

Kelly offered to get me another drink when we finished our first. I passed. I did remember my vow last week to curtail my drinking. Kelly went back for another screwdriver.

Jay was in a bad mood that evening. A football game was played and he couldn't be in it. Molly did her best to bring him around. Chip was effervescent that evening. He was undoubtedly top dog among the four quarterbacks that played that day. It gave his campaign to be next year's starter credibility. Chip's performance and attitude didn't improve Jay's mood.

Chip and Austin did their best to woo their dates into the bedrooms in the back. I had to admit the two friends did have a way with women. They rarely went home from one of Zack's parties unsatisfied. Chip did coax Whitney upstairs to JT's room later in the evening. Austin scored with Shannon downstairs in Evan's bedroom before the night was over.

Jen was spending the night with Mark at his apartment, so Kelly and I were in no hurry to find a bedroom. We had all night back at her dorm room. I grabbed a beer later in the evening. Kelly went through four screwdrivers before she switched to beer.

Kelly wasn't feeling any pain as the party wore on. She was laughing at odd times and talking much too loud.

"What do you say we head back?" I asked. I gave her bottom a gentle pinch. "Isn't it almost time for bed?"

"The night is young honey," Kelly countered. "I need another beer. You need one. You hardly had anything to drink tonight."

"I'm fine," I replied as Kelly broke away and headed to the kitchen. Kelly returned a minute later with two bottles of amber ale.

"Here you go honey," said as she handed a bottle to me. She took a big swig before I could reply.

I took a few polite sips as Kelly downed her bottle. I stood behind her and wrapped my arms around her waist. "Honey, I can't wait to get back to your room," I whispered in her ear after I nibbled her neck and ear lobe.

"Finish your beer lover," Kelly agreed quickly. I took a couple more sips from the bottle while holding Kelly with my free hand. My cock turned hard as I held her. I rubbed it against her bottom. "Mmmm... someone is ready for some fun. Finish your beer quick. Let's go."

"I'm ready now," I said setting my partially empty bottle aside. We headed back to Beaver Hall and some fun.

Kelly was a little tipsy as we walked back. My cock was hard as steel, pressing a bulge in my pants as we walked back. Kelly nearly tripped on the curb crossing Pollock Road but I caught her. I helped her up the fire steps when we got inside.

Kelly and I stripped down and hopped in her bed. We kissed for a few minutes and then I kissed my way down to my lover's breasts. I kissed, nipped and suckled at them to increase Kelly's desire. Kelly demanded I flip around so we could do some 69 before we joined our bodies together.

Kelly lay on her back and I straddled her. I dipped my head down and started licking. Kelly's pink, puffy inner labia peeked out. I ran my tongue over them while Kelly licked my hard cock shaft.

I needed about five minutes to bring Kelly close to climax. Usually my lover is quite adept at giving head but not that night. I wasn't close to cumming yet. I licked up and down her slot, tongue fucked her and then licked back up to her clitoris. A few nibbles and licks pushed her to climax.

Kelly bucked and twitched as she enjoyed her orgasm. Kelly spit my cock out as she writhed. I climbed off Kelly and lay down beside her as slowly calmed. I cuddled with Kelly and rubbed her belly as her panting slowed to normal breaths. I kissed her shoulder as I rubbed my steely cock against her back side. I was horny as hell and ready to bury my cock in her hot, velvety pussy.

Her breathing returned to a quiet in and out as she recovered.

"Kelly?" I inquired as I kissed her neck. No response. "Kelly? Are you ready for me?" Still no response. I pulled myself up on one elbow and looked down on my lover. Kelly's eyes were closed.

"Kelly, are you ready to make love?" I asked quietly. I gave her a kiss on the cheek.
"Kelly?"

My lover was dead to the world. I groaned and lay on my back beside my slumbering bedmate. My cock pointed towards the ceiling and demanded immediate attention. I used one hand to shake my lover without luck.

Could I make love to Kelly when she was passed out? My poor cock demanded relief. I knew Kelly wouldn't mind me having sex with her if she woke up in the middle of it. I shook my head and put that idea out of my head. You just did not fuck a comatose girl unless you wanted to visit a police station.

I groaned again, grabbed my hard seven incher in one hand and stroked myself until I blasted away my pent up frustration and cum. I wiped myself clean with tissues from Kelly's box on her bolster. I cuddled with my comatose lover for a bit.

I woke up about 10:30 on Sunday morning. Kelly was dead to the world. Feeling lazy, I snuggled up and spooned with her. I enjoyed the warmth and comfort of holding Kelly. It also was nice to wake up on a Sunday morning without a pounding headache. I draped my hand over her side and rubbed her tummy gently.

My cock was trapped against Kelly's bottom. It inflated as I held myself against her soft, warm side. I was still horny from last night. A hand job just doesn't cut it when you were expecting bury your cock in a lovely juicy pussy.

I repositioned my cock after a couple minutes so it stuck between Kelly's legs along her labia. I rubbed along her breasts and slowly sawed my cock up and down along my lover's slot. I was gentle and Kelly didn't awaken. Within a couple minutes my stimulation was affecting Kelly even though she continued to sleep. Her nectar was coating my cock and making the feelings even better.

Kelly's breathing rate increased and she cooed softly as I rubbed against her. Undoubtedly from the extremely realistic erotic dream she was experiencing. Kelly stirred as her eyes fluttered open.

“Ooooohhh....” Kelly moaned as she awakened. I rubbed her nipple in greeting.

“Do you want a morning quickie honey?” I asked hopefully.

“Oooohhh... no,” Kelly groaned. “My head is throbbing.” Kelly rolled away from me. “Is the aspirin handy Kyle? I am dying here.”

I groaned and rolled out of bed. No morning delight for me. I grabbed a bottle of water from the refrigerator and handed it and the aspirin to my sweetie. She took the pills and drained the sixteen ounce bottle of water.

“I'm going to go get a long hot shower honey,” Kelly said as she slowly rose from her bed. “Meet you at brunch?”

“Sure thing Kelly,” I agreed. I headed back to Hartranft for a shower. Kelly was oblivious to my irritation at missing an opportunity to make love this weekend.

Kelly brought Jen, Cindy, Bev with her to brunch. Jay, Trevor, Christian, Damian, Billy, GJ and Shawn came along with me. Lunch with me friends was enjoyable. For once I was clear headed on a Sunday for brunch. I observed how my friends had fared last night.

Kelly was still a little under the weather thanks to over-imbibing. Jen must have partied hearty with Mark at his frat's party last night too. Christian and Bev were there normal cheerful Sunday morning selves. I don't think they ever had more than one drink when they attended parties. They missed about half our parties for other Saturday night activities.

Damian, Melanie, Billy and Sarah attended our parties sporadically. I think they hung with friends from back in Erie on weekends. The four looked pretty tired from last night, though not hung over. I knew Damian had entertained Melanie in our room last night. The room reeked of sex this morning when I came back for my shower and shave.

Jay was hung over too. He had quite a bit to drink while he was coaxing and romancing Molly into bed in JT's room last evening. Trevor and Stephanie had plenty to drink at the party last night. Trevor spent the night as he usually does at Steph's apartment. He had the blood shot eyes and hang dog look of a guy suffering from his evening's fun.

In contrast to most of my friends, I felt good. My eyes were clear. My head didn't have that awful dull throb from too much booze and too little sleep. Zack, Anders and Tom were right. I could have a fun Saturday night without drinking to excess. Why hadn't I listened to my friends sooner?

Kelly and I spent most of the afternoon at my room reading the newspaper and e-mailing friends. The Inquirer had a nice article on the Blue and White Game. I liked their beat reporter who covered us. He knew football and gave our team good coverage.

Kelly and I found Ed Fritz on line when we logged onto my computer. We IMed for awhile sharing stories of our final spring practice games. Ed felt positive after his performance yesterday. He went completed eleven passes in sixteen attempts and led his Orange team to two touchdowns. Terrance Williams, his competitor for the Gator's starting QB spot next season was nine for fifteen for three touchdowns and an interception. Ed was more accurate passing and didn't make any mistakes. I wished him luck in his competition for starter and told him that I would see him back home in three weeks.

I did my best to help Kelly through her hangover. She was feeling better by dinner time. We joined our friends at the dining hall for dinner. I went over to the Lasch Building to do my daily workout after dinner. Kelly went back to her room to finish her term paper for History 130. I had finished mine Thursday evening.

Monday afternoon I went over to the Lasch Building after my last class. I wanted to get my workout done before dinner so Kelly and I could concentrate on reviewing and critiquing each other's History 130 term papers after dinner.

I found Coach Burton had posted an updated depth chart on the team bulletin board based on his observations during spring practice and Saturday's Blue and White Game. It was no surprise that I retained the starter's slot on the weak side of the offense. Christian and Tanner were penciled in as the other two starting wide receivers. Jibril Sloan was listed ahead of Amir Lee at tight end.

Damian was listed as #1 tailback. I wasn't surprised. He was always a better blocker than Wyatt Smith. He was a slightly better ball carrier and was now a far superior receiver out of the backfield than Wyatt. It wasn't even a close competition between the two based on this spring's practice.

Chip was listed ahead of Glenn Korbel at quarterback. I wasn't surprised but I knew the competition between the two of them was tight. Each QB had strengths and weaknesses. Chip had a dynamite arm, strong and accurate but he made mistakes. Glenn was likely to make the right call but wouldn't get the big plays. The whole discussion about which was the better quarterback wouldn't matter once Jay healed and was back in shape. Jay's arm matched Chip's and he knew the offense as well as Glenn.

There weren't any surprises on the defensive line. Tony King was listed behind Jarrell Cook at outside linebacker. Salim Rogers was ahead of GJ DeLuca as the starting cornerback opposite Shawn Byrd.

I was still studying the chart when I felt someone slap me on the back. "Check it out," Chip said as he pointed a finger at his name on the depth chart. "Number one, right where I belong," my smiling friend chortled.

"For now," I responded. "We will see how long that lasts when Jay heals up."

"I'll worry about Jay in August," Chip answered. "Right now the only guy I could beat was Glenn and I did it."

"True," I agreed.

"Did I tell you yet?" Chip asked. "I got the contract back from your scout council. I will be working with you this summer at your scout camp."

"Excellent," I said. "I'm looking forward to it."

Tuesday afternoon I found a memo from Coach Burton and a ballot for team captains. Coach wanted us to choose two or three seniors that we felt would be good captains. Coach Burton promised to use our vote to guide in his choice of captains for next season. I voted for Tyler Madden. He was virtually guaranteed to be one of the captains.

I voted for Andrew Perkins. Andrew helped ride herd on the young players who covered his kicks while I made sure the young guys blocking for my returns did their job this season. I felt Andrew's excellent record as a kicker earned him recognition as one of our leaders.

The hard choice was for a captain from our offense. The only player on the list that made sense to me was Jibril Sloan, our #1 tight end. Jibril was quiet but he did a good job this spring stepping up to take Evan's place. Aidan Nagy might have been a good choice if it weren't for his suspension for drinking. You don't become a captain while you are third string and on probation. I voted for Jibril.

The seniors on our team were all anxious this week. We had ten guys with legitimate chances to play in the NFL. They all had different plans for how they would spend the draft weekend.

Zack and Leigh Ann were leaving for New York City after class on Thursday. Zack would do a few interviews on Friday and the couple planned some shopping. Saturday afternoon they would be at Madison Square Garden so Zack could take the stage when he was selected in the draft.

Evan, Jake, Shawn O'Conner and JT all decided to stay on campus to be with their friends. Kelly and I volunteered to help Jake and Keneisha with their draft party Saturday afternoon and evening. Jake's mom, Evan's parents and JT's parents and girlfriend were coming in for the weekend.

Karol Zizka and Cuch Cuchiella decided to go home and wait out the draft with their families. Karol was heading back to Frackville while Cuch went to his parent's place in Holidaysburg.

Hassan Jackson, Steve Cobb, our excellent punter for the last two years, and Vlad Lazlo, our fullback, hoped to hear their names sometime Sunday afternoon or evening. They were long shots at being drafted. A few teams had contacted them. They had outside shots at being drafted and good chances at being signed as free agents. All of them planned to stay on campus this weekend.

The academic pace picked up during the week. We had one week of classes after this and then a week of finals. After that the seniors would graduate and the rest of us could go home for the summer.

I spent a beautiful Tuesday afternoon outside in the bright sun on the lawn of Old Main sketching the building. It was the final out-of-class drawing for my Art 10 course. Ms. Cunningham had given me compliments on my work all semester. I would find out in a few weeks if the compliments carried over into good grades for the course.

I knew I would get A's in both history courses and my geography course. I was assured an A in my indoor climbing course too. I was a natural at it and had climbed many times with scouts while I was in high school. I was on the border between an A and a B in sociology. I would need to study hard for that final.

Kelly, Cindy, Jen and Bev completed their apartment hunting on Wednesday afternoon. They signed an agreement for a two bedroom apartment in The Lofts. The Lofts is a small apartment complex on the north side of University Drive a couple blocks east of College Avenue.

I teased Christian at dinnertime. "You and I are going to get a workout next fall when we visit our girlfriends."

“Yeah we are,” Christian agreed. “I measured the distance from the Nittany Apartments. It is almost a mile.”

“It could be worse,” I said. “There are a lot of apartments three or four miles from campus.”

“True,” Christian agreed. “Very true.”

Christian’s own housing situation had cleared up a couple weeks ago. Originally Salim Rogers was rooming with Shawn Byrd, GJ DeLuca and Denzel Hunt. He changed his mind. Shawn and GJ talked Denzel into taking Christian into their group. The foursome applied for one of the Nittany Apartments.

Mel Kipers and the other draft “gurus” ran through various scenarios with the NFL draft. All the drafts had Jake Washington picked early, within the first five picks. Zack Hayes was picked variously by Kansas City, Denver, Chicago and Green Bay. The “gurus” felt Denver was my buddy’s most likely destination.

All the seniors awaiting their fate were excited with a hint of dread. Would they make the cut or not? Most of these guys had dreamed of playing in the NFL since they were little kids. Would they end up in some sad sack franchise like Oakland or Detroit? They had their futures riding on a single weekend.

Kelly and I helped Keneisha, Jake, JT and Evan prepare for the two day draft party they were hosting. Zack and Leigh Ann flew off to New York City Thursday after class. Zack’s parents and Leigh Ann’s parents were joining the couple in the city for some touring and relaxation.

The first two rounds of the draft were on Saturday, starting at 4:00pm. ESPN’s draft coverage was playing already on the TV when Kelly and I arrived at two o’clock to help set up. The apartment was crowded with teammates and parents. Evan’s parents came down from Buffalo. Shawn O’Conner and his parents were watching the draft at the apartment too. JT’s fiancée Danielle and his parents came in from Pittsburgh. Jake’s mom drove up from Washington.

I prepared a casserole from a recipe I learned in scouts for dinner. Kelly made a nice peach cobbler to go with it. Evan, JT, Jake and Keneisha supplied sodas, beer and snacks for people to munch on.

The draft started promptly at four o’clock. One minute later, to no one’s shock, Commissioner Goodell announced that the Detroit Lions chose Adrian Pitts, a huge offensive lineman from Nebraska with the first pick. Everyone in the world knew they needed to get protection for their young quarterback from Georgia to have a prayer of winning games in the league.

The Oakland Raiders took their full fifteen minutes for their pick. They threw all the draft “gurus” mock drafts out the window immediately by choosing Elijah Carter. The camera panned across the stage to the six players invited to be at the draft. I saw the look of disappointment on Zack’s face as Elijah bounded up to the podium to join Commissioner Goodell. I knew my friend wanted to be the first quarterback taken.

Everyone was glued to the TV as the draft proceeded. Jake or Zack could be chosen anytime. Jake’s turn came first. The Chargers were on the clock with the fifth pick when Jake’s phone rang. All heads turned to watch and listen.

“Hello Mr. Spanos,” Jake said. After a few seconds pause he added, “Yes sir, I’m delighted.”

The room erupted in cheers as Commissioner Goodell announced, “The San Diego Chargers choose Jacob Washington, defensive end from Penn State with the fifth pick of the draft.” Things were chaotic for the next half hour with people congratulating him, phones ringing and TV crews appearing for interviews. Pittsburgh’s KDKA showed up first closely followed by Joe Knowles from ESPN. He was the same reporter that interviewed Aaron Morano after his selection last year.

By the time things quieted down the Denver Broncos were on the clock. The TV camera panned over the waiting area off stage, showing Zack, Leigh Ann and Mr. & Mrs. Hayes waiting. Brady Rasmussen, his girlfriend and his parents waited at the next table. Every “guru” expected the Broncos to pick a quarterback. I saw the tension on Zack’s face as he waited.

The Bronco’s fifteen minutes were nearly up when Commissioner Goodell came to the podium and announced, “The Denver Broncos select...” he paused dramatically. “... Brady Rasmussen, quarterback from the University of Southern California with the eighth pick of the draft.”

The camera switched back to the waiting room where Brady hopped up and hurried on stage to wave a Broncos jersey and greet the world. I saw the pained look on Zack’s face that he tried to disguise with a smile. I vowed I would never subject myself to this kind of humiliation when my turn came for the draft in two years.

I served my casserole and Kelly served the dessert as we sat and watched, waiting for someone to select our captain. The draft continued as we ate. The biggest snub came with the thirteenth pick when the Carolina Panthers choose Cody Wright, the quarterback from Brigham Young. No one expected him to go in the first round.

The Green Bay Packers ended my friend’s agony with their pick. Our room erupted with cheers when Commissioner Goodell announced that Zack would be joining the Packers. This team was an excellent fit for him. Wisconsin appreciated top quarterbacks. He would probably have a chance to play soon. Brett Favre’s bizarre end to his career had

reduced the pressure on his successors. Zack would do all right in Green Bay. My friend managed a genuine smile when he strode across the stage and took the Green Bay jersey from the commissioner.

The group continued watching while we talked about our friend's good fortune. We had three or four teammates hoping to hear their name called that evening: Evan Foster, Karol Zizka, Shawn O'Conner and JT Hill all had a chance.

It turned out that we had a long wait that evening. It was almost ten o'clock and Jacksonville was making their selection when Evan Foster's cell phone rang.

"Jacksonville?" JT asked.

Evan shook his head no as he answered, "Yes Mr. Loomis. It's good to hear from you."

The mystery disappeared while Evan talked on the phone. Jacksonville made their pick, a cornerback from Indiana. They made a good choice. It was the guy who covered me. He had done a decent job when we squeaked out a win against them last fall.

A minute after Jacksonville's pick, Commissioner Goodell announced Evan's name as the pick of the New Orleans Saints. My friend would be joining Sean Payton's high powered offense in the Big Easy.

Evan had to hurry to make arrangements to fly down to New Orleans in the morning. Jake's arrangements for his flight out of Harrisburg for San Diego were already set. The rest of us watched and waited as the draft continued. No more Penn Stater's names were called that evening. Shawn and JT were disappointed.

Evan's, JT's and Shawn's and Jake's parents all headed back to their hotel rooms. We cranked up the party after they left. I finally got to enjoy some of the beer that I had avoided all afternoon and evening. Kelly did too. I intercepted my lover when she headed to the kitchen for her fourth beer.

"Do you remember last Saturday night honey?" I asked sweetly. "You fell asleep before we could finish making love."

"Oh, just one more beer Kyle," Kelly answered.

I answered silently by grabbing Kelly and planting a devastating kiss on her. I groped her tits. Kelly responded by returning the kiss.

"We could go back to my room now if you want," Kelly said.

"I want," I answered decisively. "It's been two weeks since we made love. I need my Kelly."

Kelly and I thanked Jake, JT and Evan for their hospitality. We hurried back to Beaver Hall for some late night fun in bed. Neither of us was drunk this weekend so we had plenty of time and opportunity to share our bodies with each other. We made out, pleasured each other orally and then made love – twice.

It was after one am and many orgasms later that we lay cuddled and satisfied. “Wasn’t this better this weekend than last weekend?” I asked.

“It was wonderful lover,” Kelly agreed.

“It’s much better when we aren’t totally wasted,” I said.

“When did you start worrying about drinking?” Kelly asked. “Does this have something to do with your problem after the night with Jen, Mark and me?”

“It does,” I agreed.

“What did the counselor, uhh...”

“Tom,” I added.

“Tom... what did you talk about with Tom?” Kelly asked. “It certainly seems like he helped you sort things out.”

“It seems silly now,” I said. “I don’t know if I want to talk about it.”

“You can tell me anything,” Kelly answered. “We don’t have any secrets, do we?” Kelly needed a couple more minutes of coaxing before I agreed to reveal my big concern after our four-way.

“Don’t laugh about this,” I said. Kelly nodded her head yes. “When Mark stuck his cock up my ass... it felt good.”

“Well, duh!” Kelly replied immediately. “Why do you think I enjoy taking your big cock up my chute?”

“I was worried,” I explained. “I thought that it might make me gay.”

“Gay? You!?!?” Kelly spit out before laughing. “You are the least gay guy I’ve ever known.”

“I know it seems silly in retrospect,” I said. “That was the main worry I had after that night with Mark. The whole night made me take stock of things. I never would have agreed to share you with Mark that night if I hadn’t been so drunk. I love you too much to want to share you with another guy.”

“That’s sweet,” Kelly said. She snuggled up against me and gave me a deep kiss. “I don’t think having a few beers makes any difference. I lived with my parents’ rules for eighteen years. Now is when we’re supposed to have some fun and blow off steam Kyle. I intend to enjoy my time in college.”

“We will,” I agreed. It was late and I wasn’t interested in a temperance discussion at one am. We cuddled together and went to sleep.

We had wake up sex early that morning before going to sleep again. Kelly and I met our friends for brunch at Pollock Commons before heading back over to Evan, Jake and JT’s apartment for part 2 of the NFL draft. Shawn’s parents and JT’s parents and fiancée joined us for the afternoon.

Karol Zizka was the next Penn Stater chosen in the draft. The Vikings took him with their third round pick. Shawn O’Conner went a few picks later. Shawn was off to join the New England Patriots. He was delighted to join a team steeped in winning.

JT Hill was disappointed to still be available when the fourth round started. His concern increased as teams continued picking. His concern changed to delight when his hometown Steelers chose him with their fourth round pick. He was going to get to play for the team he cheered for since he was little. Literally, it was his dream come true.

The next to go just after dinner on Sunday was Dom Cuchiella. My favorites, the Eagles, took him with their sixth round pick. I was going to have a contact on my favorite team again. Kelly and I went over to Cuch’s apartment to offer our congratulations.

We got a surprise later that night. Vlad Lazlo, our little used fullback, was chosen in the seventh round by the Miami Dolphins. He was a good blocker that didn’t get a lot of playing time in our offense. Steve Cobb got a phone call shortly after the last pick of the draft. The Kansas City Chiefs wanted him to sign with them as a free agent. He did. Hassan Jackson got his chance Monday morning. The Cleveland Browns signed him as a free agent.

It was outstanding that our Penn State Nittany Lions had placed ten players into the NFL. It truly reflected our team’s record over the past three seasons. Our team won the national championship, placed fifth in the nation and then second in the nation in three year’s time. All ten of these guys had big parts in making that happen. Tyler, Damian, Trevor, Jay, Chip and me – we had a huge legacy to keep up next season.

(To be continued)

Chapter 39

Anders Voight got calls from a couple teams on Monday. They wanted to sign him as a free agent. He thanked them for their interest but passed on the opportunity. He was going to pursue his masters in geology. The seniors on NFL teams all headed off to their new work places to meet the media, their coaches and their teammates.

Coach Burton announced the team captains to the team and the press on Tuesday afternoon. As expected Tyler Madden was one of the team captains. Coach Burton and presumably my teammates as well agreed with my judgment. Jibril Sloan and Andrew Perkins also were named captains. I was pleased with the announcement.

Tyler ran into me at the Lasch Building that evening. He asked me to be prepared to help him lead the team. He was going to need Jay, Trevor, me and Damian to ride herd on our younger teammates next season. I readily agreed to help any way I could.

Dr. Barnes returned our final term papers for History 130 on Wednesday afternoon. I received my usual A+. Cameron Miller and Kelly each received an A- on their papers. I was a lock to get an A in his course. There was no way on earth I could screw up a final in Civil War history enough to drop my grade down.

The finals schedule came out. My schedule was excellent with a single exception. My first final was Sociology 1 on Monday at 8:00 am. History 130 was Tuesday at 10:10 am. My time was my own on Wednesday. Thursday I had History 21 at 10:10 am and Geography 45 at 2:30 pm. My escape plan was to load up my car and check out of the dorm Thursday morning before my first final. At 4:50 pm, or earlier if possible, I would depart for Paradise. ETA – 7:30 or so.

Kelly didn't have her first final until 4:50 pm on Monday. Her Spanish final, her last one, was Friday 8:00 am. Her dad wasn't able to come for her until Friday evening.

Kelly and I planned that I would come out to Pittsburgh to visit for a few days after Memorial Day. I received a letter from Chase Utley on Wednesday that changed our plans. He wanted to get us tickets to a Phillies Games sometime this summer as a thank you for getting him and his nephew into one of our games last fall.

Chase included a Phillies' schedule. Since I wouldn't have time after June 11th, when I had to report to scout camp for the duration of the summer, we would have to make it sooner. We looked the schedule over and decided that Sunday, May 29th would be best. Kelly would come in to Lancaster County for the visit instead of me going out to Pittsburgh.

I sent an e-mail home to Dad to let him know about the invitation. Chase invited my whole family. Dad replied that May 29th suited everyone. Mom, Dad, Will, Abby, Andy and Liz all wanted to go. Connor, Noah and Hunter were too young to enjoy a ballgame so they would go to Grandma's for the afternoon.

Zack and Shawn O'Conner returned from Green Bay and Foxboro on Wednesday. They did medical testing and met with the media in their new cities. The Packers and Patriots didn't have mini-camp for another couple weeks. Evan Foster returned Thursday. The Saints mini-camp wasn't until the end of May. The other seven guys stayed in their new cities through the weekend. Many NFL teams held their mandatory mini-camp on the Thursday to Saturday after the draft.

Zack, Evan and Shawn decided to throw an end of college blast to end all blasts on Saturday night. Zack and Leigh Ann recruited Kelly and me to help set up the party. We squeezed in preparations between time spent studying for next week's finals.

Friday after lunch on the way to our last class, History 130, Cameron Miller issued an invitation.

"You guys HAVE to come to Omega Chi's blast tomorrow night," Cameron exclaimed. "It is going to be biggest party this semester."

"I wish I would have heard about it sooner," I replied. "Kelly and I are helping Zack Hayes with his graduation party Saturday night. I don't know if we'll have time for both."

"Oh, we'll be there Cam," Kelly interjected. "We wouldn't miss one of your parties."

Kelly missed my disapproving look as she continued chatting with Cameron while we headed for the Ferguson Building. I guess I could put in an appearance at Omega Chi later in the evening after things were set up for Zack's party.

The Cellblock, the dance club downtown, held another under twenty-one night on Friday night. Trevor, Stephanie, Jay, Molly, Kelly and I went together. We had a fun evening. Jen was staying at Mark's apartment so I spent the night with Kelly in her room.

Kelly and I slept 'til noon on Saturday morning. After showering at my dorm, I headed back to be with Kelly. We spent most of the afternoon studying. Around 4:30 the two of us headed up the street to Zack's apartment. Zack, Leigh Ann, Evan and Shawn O'Conner were doing a finals weekend cookout. It wasn't fancy, just hamburgers and hot dogs, but the food was delicious and it was fun.

Zack, Evan and Shawn entertained us with stories about meeting stars on their new teams. Evan raved about how nice a guy Tom Brady was. He met Randy Moss, Wes

Welker and the rest of the crew at the Patriots. Evan was impressed with Coach Belichick too. He felt confident he would prosper in New England.

Shawn reported that Drew Brees befriended him when he arrived in New Orleans. Reggie Bush welcomed my friend to. Shawn was shocked at how complex Coach Payton's offense was. He was going to have to work overtime the next couple months to be prepared for the mini-camp.

Zack got to meet Bart Starr when he was in Green Bay. Zack got his first look at a West Coast offense playbook. He reported it was daunting. His brother Sam had played West Coast offense in Philadelphia and Seattle and had warned him about the complexity. Zack tried to explain the basic concept to me. He described the passing game as being a much more complex version of what he and I had worked on this season. Nearly every play had the quarterback and receiver adjusting routes based on the defensive set, pass coverage and blocking scheme.

I enjoyed hearing about my friends' experiences with their NFL teams. I hoped I got the same chance when my turn came and that I went to a good team. We cleaned up the cookout when we finished eating and then set up for the end-of-college bash my friends were throwing.

Technically this wasn't Zack and Evan's final party. They would probably throw one next weekend too but only seniors would be left on campus, awaiting Monday's graduation ceremony. This would be Zack's final party for most of his teammates so he wanted it to be special.

Zack, Evan and Shawn spared no expense this Saturday night. Zack was going to be worth millions in a month or two after Max negotiated his contract. Evan and even third round pick Shawn would be worth over a million dollars shortly too. Kelly and I helped Shawn direct the caterers when they came with the food for the party.

Zack, Leigh Ann and Evan took care of stocking the bar for the party. They put champagne on ice for later in the evening. Zack bought fine imported and premium beers for the night. He teased me about my expensive taste when he put the Troegs Amber Ale out.

This was the finest party Zack threw all year. The caterer's food was phenomenal, so much better than our usual chips, pretzels and nachos. The music and company was excellent.

Tanner Riggs was a little put out when he found out Chip and I were going to spend the summer together practicing every day. I offered to see if I could get him a job at the pool with us but he passed when I told him how little we were earning. Chip and I talked Christian into coming to camp for a week as a leader when his troop came to camp.

Chip and I teased Jay he should join us at camp too. He demurred. He was taking a couple classes during the summer semester so he could stay on campus, rehab and work out at the Lasch Building. It probably was best for him. He had a lot of work to do in July when he was cleared to train again.

The booze flowed freely and was top notch quality. I tried to limit myself to three of the big bottles of amber ale. The night was hot and the cold beer quenched me. I broke down and had a fourth bottle.

Around ten o'clock Zack called for everyone's attention. He broke out the bottles of champagne. We toasted to the success of our three hosts. We also toasted to the success of the seven graduating teammates that were attending NFL mini-camps this weekend. I reported that the Philadelphia Inquirer reporters said the coaches had been impressed with Cuch's play so far. They reported that Cuch would make a nice addition to the Eagles' secondary.

Evan turned the music back on after the toasts and speeches. The crowd got down to other business – pairing off and making out. It didn't take Kelly long to get my motor revved up. It was close to eleven when I suggested that we head out. We stopped to thank Zack for his hospitality before we left.

I was very horny and ready to ravish my lady as we walked back towards Pollock dorms. Kelly and I were a little drunk, but not too drunk for fun. I leered lasciviously to my girl and suggested, "Next stop third floor, Beaver Hall – licking, sucking and fu..."

"Not so fast loverboy," Kelly interjected. "We promised Cam and Joel we would stop by Omega Chi tonight. We can't miss their party."

"Sure we can," I replied. Kelly swatted away my hand as I tried to grope her.

"Behave yourself," Kelly said as she deflected my hand. "Turn your libido down a few notches for now. There will be time for that later tonight. Omega Chi always throws a hell of a party. We'll have fun."

I accepted my lover's suggestion. Another hour's wait wouldn't hurt. We headed downtown to the frat house. Thankfully my erection subsided as we walked there. Cole Sellers, the fraternity president, welcomed us warmly.

Kelly and I headed for the bar. I went for a soda but she handed me a beer instead. I downed the cold beverage. It felt great on that hot night. Kelly and I mingled with the brothers and sisters at the party. The crowd seemed to enjoy the stories I told about Zack, Evan and Shawn's baptisms in the NFL earlier in the week. Cole especially enjoyed my hearing about Shawn's meeting Tom Brady and Randy Moss. He was a huge Patriots fan. Cole made sure the beers kept coming for Kelly and me.

I don't remember a whole lot more about our evening at the frat. Things started to blur around midnight. I know we talked and drank more. I think Kelly and I danced some. I'm not sure.

The next memory I have is getting shaken awake. I tried to crack my eyes open. They were half crusted shut. I felt a heavy weight on my chest and a fierce throbbing in my head. I pried my eyes open only to get blinded by brilliant sunlight.

"Ooohhh..." I moaned. The weight on my chest, which turned out to be Kelly, shifted. Kelly let out a low groan too.

"Kyle, Kelly – are you OK?" Bill asked. I recognized the voice as belonging to Bill Johnson, a junior I knew slightly at the frat.

"Oooohhh... what a night," I groaned. I pulled my left arm out from under Kelly and shielded my eyes from the blinding sunlight. "What time is it?"

"It's after eleven o'clock," Bill replied. "Do you guys need anything?"

"No, just a little time to wake up," I answered.

"Where are we Kyle?" Kelly moaned.

"We're still at the frat," I replied.

Kelly and I needed a few minutes to pull ourselves together. We were sprawled on a couch in the main downstairs room of Omega Chi.

"Let me know if you need anything," Bill said politely when we were more alert. The sound of his voice fluttered my ear drums. It felt like they were connected to ice picks that led straight to the center of my brain. I shuddered from the pain. After a few more minutes I helped Kelly up and we dragged our beat, tired bodies back to campus.

I've been drunk plenty of times in my life but this was the worst. Every step back to campus sent waves of pain up my spine. The bright Sunday morning sunlight was roasting my eyeballs. Passing traffic on the streets sounded like a 747 taking off.

My tongue was swollen from dehydration. My mouth felt like it was filled with cat fur – wet cat fur that tasted sickening. I don't know how the two of us made it back to Pollock Dorms without keeling over from the pain and agony. I escorted Kelly the elevator in Beaver Hall and then headed back to Hartranft.

Aspirin, water and a hot shower barely dented my hangover. I felt like I needed to curl up in the fetal position on my bed and die. That would have put me out of my agony. Of course that didn't happen. I needed to man up and bull my way through the agony.

It was a quarter to one when I finally felt ready to face the world. I gave Kelly a call to meet me at the dining hall. Thankfully most of the thousands of student who ate at the dining hall had brunch already. The room was quiet and nearly empty. Kelly and I grabbed a couple things from the food line and settled down at an empty table. We picked at our food, neither of us really having much appetite. We grabbed a newspaper downstairs and headed back to my room. We spent an hour quietly reading. Slowly our pain subsided. Kelly handed me the last section of the newspaper as she finished it.

“You know Kelly,” I remarked. “We should have skipped the party at Omega Chi. We got totally trashed.”

“Nnnooooo!” Kelly replied. “The guys at Omega Chi have been so good to us this year we HAD to go. The dinner dance, the help with the Thon, the parties – we HAD to go to their party. Last night was the final party this year. Campus will be deserted next Saturday night.”

“The guys at Omega Chi have been good to us,” I agreed. “... but we could have made love last night and slept in a comfortable bed if we skipped the party. I’d much rather spend time alone with you than with the guys at the frat.”

“We had an obligation to our friends at the frat,” Kelly replied. “Anyway, Damian’s gone. We could put a hanger on the door and I could make it up to you now.” Kelly slid her arm around me and snuggled up against my body.

“Kelly!” I replied sharply. “I HAVE to study for sociology. My final is at 8 am tomorrow morning. I need to do well on this test. I have a real shot at straight A’s this semester. I don’t want to screw that up.”

“Oh, come on Kyle,” Kelly said as she nibbled on my ear. “You’ll do fine on your final.”

I pulled away. “Kelly, I REALLY NEED TO STUDY!” I said.

Kelly stood and asked, “Do you want me to leave Kyle?”

“It would be best,” I agreed. “Dr. Smith is notorious for ball buster tests. I think I will do better studying undisturbed.”

“OK, I’ll head back to my room,” Kelly responded. “Meet me for dinner at 5:30?”

“You bet honey,” I agreed. “I’ll give you a buzz on your cell when I round up our friends on this floor.”

“Deal,” Kelly replied. She gave me a deep kiss that nearly broke my resolve to study that afternoon. I steeled my nerves and went to studying my sociology notes and book.

I lay down on my stomach on my bed, propped my chest up with my pillow and elbows and started reading. I didn’t accomplish as much as I wanted. The aspirin and hydration didn’t help as much as usual. My head still throbbed from my hangover and I was sore and tired from sleeping awkwardly on the couch at the frat last night. I fell asleep before I covered the first third of the course outline.

“Hey, roomie...” Damian said as he shook me awake. “You coming to dinner with the rest of us?”

“Yeah,” I replied. “What time is it?”

“Twenty after five,” Damian said as I crawled out of bed and stretched.

“I’ll call Kelly and let the girls know we’re coming,” I said as I followed Damian out the door.

“Christian already called the girls and they’re on the way,” Damian replied.

Bev, Cindy, Kelly and Jen joined Trevor, Damian, Billy, Jay, Shawn, GJ and me for dinner, just like nearly every evening this term. Having the girls eat with us sure beat dinners at the Training Table with just the guys. Kelly and I talked for a couple minutes after dinner. I insisted that I needed alone time to study for my final tomorrow morning. Kelly was lucky that her first final wasn’t until late afternoon.

I headed back to my room for my books. I decided my bed was too comfortable to study in. I went to one of the study rooms in the Lasch Building for more quiet and less chance of falling asleep while I read the dry sociology text.

My tiredness and throbbing headache weren’t conducive to studying. I tried for three hours, slowly working my way through the text and my notes. I couldn’t concentrate and I had to go over each concept repeatedly for it to seep through the fuzz clouding my brain.

I was about two thirds of the way through the course outline when I gave up. It was around a quarter to ten. I was miserable, distracted and dog tired. I decided the best thing I could do for myself was to go to bed and get proper rest. I would be better prepared to take the final rested and refreshed than if I tried to cram the rest of the course material into my poor tired brain. I was guaranteed to do a bad job on the final if I showed up feeling worse than I did now.

I went straight to bed when I got back to my room. Damian graciously moved down to our floor’s study room so I could sleep. I had the best roommate around.

I had a mild headache at a quarter to seven when my alarm woke me. I took two aspirin and headed across the hall for a shower. I was feeling pretty good by the time I finished my breakfast at Pollock Commons. I could handle Dr. Smith's final. Still, I wish I had time to review the last few weeks' material.

Dr. Smith told us the final would be comprehensive and cover the whole course. The first couple pages of questions did. The remaining ten pages of questions were all from the last three weeks of the course. Dr. Smith's reputation as a ball buster was certainly well earned. I wracked my brain trying answer all the questions in the hour and fifty minutes allotted to us.

Normally I am very good at taking tests but not that morning. My spirits sagged lower and lower as the clock ticked towards 9:50 and the end of this horrible final. I knew I wouldn't flunk the final or the course but my hopes of an A were gone. I finished the last question a few minutes before dismissal. I started through rereading questions and checking my answers to make sure I didn't make any blunders. I'd only checked the first ten questions when the proctor called time.

I handed in my test and plodded outside wearily. This test had drained me completely. The exam was in the Willard Building. Kelly was probably still sleeping. I decided to soothe my addled brain with some comfort food – mint chocolate chip ice cream from the Creamery. I walked up the mall to the Pattee Library and then followed the walkway around the Paterno Library to Shortlidge Avenue.

How had I let this happen? I was confident that I did very well on the first third of the exam – the material I had time to study. The rest? I was real worried about it. Why had I drunk so much Saturday night? I KNEW I would have done well on the test if I hadn't been so worn out and hung over yesterday. Why had I been so stupid?

I picked up a dish of my favorite ice cream and went outside and had a seat at the wall. The treat did improve my state of mind a little. Still, I went over the sequence of events that had led to my blowing this final. I got roaring drunk and passed out at a frat party – that was why I wasn't prepared for this exam.

I reflected on my rather checkered college career. Time after time I screwed things up with my drinking. I cheated on and broke up with Penny because I was drunk. I risked pregnancy and STD's sleeping around with girls when I was drunk. I'd agreed to three-ways with Jen and Kelly when I was drunk. I liked Jen but didn't love her. I risked this great relationship I had with Kelly because I drank too much.

Mark had fucked me up the ass when I was drunk. When would I learn? All the bad things that had happened to me at college happened when I drank too much.

I could have had one or two beers and had fun on Saturday night with my teammates. I could have had another beer at the frat and enjoyed myself there too. Kelly and I could have gone back to her room and made love that evening. Both of us would have been well rested on Sunday. I could have studied all afternoon and evening for sociology and have been well prepared for the final.

Why was I so dense about my drinking? I sat outside pondering that question long after I finished my mid-morning snack. I resolved that Kelly and I MUST curb our drinking. My success and standing on the football field and our academic success required us to act responsibly.

I headed catty-cornered across the intersection of Shortlidge and Porter streets and stopped in at Mr. Coleman's office in the Natatorium. He gave me my final paycheck for the spring. He made me promise to help out next August with the freshman swim tests. We wished each other good summers.

I felt better as I walked down Porter Road to my room. I may have blown my A in sociology but I did have a game plan for correcting the problem. I hated to admit that Mom and Dad were right about drinking. A little is OK but don't get carried away. It could really screw up your life. Mom was divorced with a year old kid at nineteen. I guess Mom had learned this lesson the hard way.

I gave Kelly a call at a quarter to twelve to go to lunch. We met at the bottom of the steps to the dining hall. Kelly greeted me with a kiss and hug.

“How was your final honey?” she asked sweetly.

“Horrible,” I answered. “I was so wiped out yesterday that I crashed at a quarter to ten last night. I didn’t get through all my notes. Guess what topics Dr. Smith used for 70% of the questions?”

“The part you didn’t study,” I astute girlfriend replied.

“I can kiss an A in that course good bye,” I said as we headed upstairs to the dining area. “I just hope this final doesn’t drag my grade down to a C for the semester.”

We went through the line for our food and found an empty table where we could talk.

“Boy, I wish we had skipped Omega Chi’s party Saturday night,” I said. “I probably would have been able to finish study for sociology if I wasn’t so tired and hung over yesterday.”

“WHAT?” Kelly responded sharply. “Don’t go blaming me for you not being prepared for your final.”

“No... No, that isn’t what I’m saying.” I stared at Kelly in shock from her response. Her eyes flashed as she glared at me. “I’m just saying I would have been able to study better if I had spent the night in a comfortable bed with you instead of sprawled half on a couch at the frat house.”

“I am glad we went to Omega Chi’s party,” Kelly replied. “We needed to see our friends to say thanks. They have been very generous to us this year.”

I changed the subject. I wasn’t sure why but Kelly wasn’t receptive to my discussing our drinking. I offered to help her study for Poly Sci final later in the afternoon.

“I won’t be harming your studying for tomorrow’s history final, will I?” Kelly asked.

I chuckled and answered, “I’ve been studying for the Civil War history final for ten years. I can spare time to help you this afternoon.”

“That would be sweet of you Kyle,” Kelly agreed.

“Do you want to go out to dinner after your final tonight?” I asked. “I got paid today. We can go downtown, enjoy some good food and unwind after today.”

“That sounds like fun,” Kelly agreed.

Kelly and I talked about our plans for the rest of the week and for her trip in to Lancaster County in a couple weeks. We would be together in two weeks for a long weekend when she came in to join my family at a Phillies game as Chase Utley’s guests. We would be apart for four weeks and then have another long weekend at Zack’s wedding. Kelly planned to come east again at the end of July before I came back for football camp. We would be apart three weeks until she returned to campus for fall classes. Both Kelly and I thought we could handle our separations over the course of the summer with this many chances to see each other before the next school year.

We went back to Kelly’s room after lunch and spent three hours reviewing notes from Poly Sci. I told Kelly as much as I could remember from last semester’s final for the course. I had Dr. Hewitt last semester and Kelly had Dr. Armstrong this semester but the course and final couldn’t be too different. Kelly felt confident as I walked her to Forestry Resources Building. I went back to Pollock Commons and grabbed a dessert from the dinner line as a snack to tide me over until I met Kelly at 6:30 that evening.

I headed over to the Lasch Building and did my daily workout. I thought about Kelly’s reaction when I tried to talk about our binge drinking Saturday night as I worked the weights. I had to find a way to talk to Kelly about cutting our drinking back so we didn’t get so wasted in the future. I couldn’t keep going the way I had been. Too much was at stake for me to keep it up. Guaranteed I would end up embarrassing myself, my parents, my team and the university if I didn’t get things under control.

I decided to broach the subject with Kelly again while we had dessert this evening. Hopefully her final would go well and she would be in a mellow mood after a nice dinner.

I headed back to my room after my workout and spent time studying for Thursday's geography final. Damian and my other friends on the floor were surprised when I didn't go to supper with them until I explained about taking my girl downtown for a fancy dinner instead.

I headed up to the Forestry Services Building around 6:15 pm. Kelly used the full hour and fifty minutes of the final period for her Poly Sci final. She met me out front at 6:35.

"How'd it go?" I asked as I gave her a kiss and hug.

"You were a life saver Kyle," Kelly answered. "You asked me the perfect questions this afternoon when you reviewed things with me. Every single thing you reviewed was on the test."

I gave her a wink and said, "Gee... you'd almost think that I should be teaching politics and history."

"Let's just say I'm very grateful for your help," Kelly responded. "...and you definitely are on the right career path."

"I'm glad you approve," I replied. "What do you think of going to Spats tonight? Does that sound good?"

"Spats?" Kelly said. "Wow, you're really trying to impress me."

"No, I just think you deserve a good meal after working hard for your final."

The two of us walked across campus holding hands. We stopped briefly at Kelly's room to drop off her backpack of books and then headed down the hill to College Avenue. Spats wasn't busy when we arrived. The waitress was able to seat us immediately.

Kelly picked out the Creamy Mozzarella Brushetta and I chose Scallop and Mushroom Sausage with a potato pancake for our Tapas. We shared our small plates with each other as we speculated about what questions Dr. Barnes would put on tomorrow morning's Civil War final.

Kelly's Pan Fried Salmon and my Chicken and Shrimp on Cornbread Stuffing arrived twenty minutes later. We shared a little of our dinners with each other. The food was wonderful – as always. Both of us decided to try Spats' Apple Crisp with Ice Cream.

"Kelly, did you enjoy our dinner?" I asked sweetly as we pushed away the empty dishes that held our desserts.

“It was wonderful,” Kelly answered. “I’m glad we came here. I love eating at Spats.”

“I’m glad you enjoyed dinner and that your final was so easy,” I said. “I wanted to have some ‘alone time’ with you – just you. There is something serious I want to talk to you about.” Kelly smiled and leaned closer to me. I steeled my nerve and continued. “It’s our drinking.”

Kelly pulled away and tensed immediately. “I know you don’t want to talk about this but I think we need to,” I said. “We’ve been drinking a lot at parties lately. We need to watch ourselves. We are getting out of hand when we end up passing out and spending the night at a frat house.”

“That was just the one time,” Kelly insisted.

“How many Sunday mornings have we woken up on Zack’s couch?” I asked. “Too many. Zack, Anders, Evan – all my close friends among the seniors are telling me that we are out of hand. Aidan Nagy, Alex Majerowicz and Max Rosen will be seniors next year. You would expect them to be grabbing the starting wideout spots on the team. Instead Aidan and Alex are third string and Max was kicked off the team. All of it was for drinking. I can’t let something like that happen to me.”

Kelly gave me a cold stare and said, “You keep saying ‘we need to stop drinking’ and all you give me are reasons you need to stop. I enjoy the parties. This is the time in my life when I get to be a little crazy. I don’t see any harm in what we are doing.”

“Do you remember two weeks ago?” I asked. “I limited myself to three beers that night. You acted pretty wild that evening after you had too much. The way you acted embarrassed Zack and his roommates. After I helped you back to your room that night we tried to make love. You passed out in the middle of it. Does that sound like healthy behavior?”

“I thought Mennonites kids were allowed their wild times with when they’re teens,” Kelly countered, her voice rising. “You know, before they settle down. Leave it to me to get the one Yohnny who doesn’t want party when he gets the opportunity.” [Yohnny is a Pennsylvania Dutch pronunciation for Johnny, a derogatory slang term for a Mennonite or Amishman].

The comment pissed me off.

“You are talking about ‘Rumspringa’ and that is Amish,” I explained. “I’m not Amish and my family hasn’t been Mennonite for a couple generations. I don’t mind a couple beers at a party but the binge drinking HAS GOT TO STOP.”

Kelly pursed her lips and stared holes through me with her eyes. “I spent eighteen years taking orders from my too strict parents. I missed a lot of fun that normal high school

kids have thanks to their rules.” Kelly stood and pointed her finger in my face. “If you think you are going to order me around like my parents did.... THINK AGAIN BUSTER!”

She grabbed her purse, spun away and stalked out of the restaurant. “Kelly?” I pleaded. “Kelly... please?”

Everyone in the small restaurant was staring at me. I sat down again. That hadn’t gone at all the way I had planned. Thankfully the waitress brought me the check so I could pay it and get out of the spotlight in the restaurant quickly.

I walked west down College Avenue, away from my dorm. I needed time to think things through. I crossed the street and headed up the mall past Sackett Building and Old Main towards Pattee.

I KNEW I was right. Kelly and I did need to stop our binge drinking before either of us got hurt by it. Kelly’s reaction when I tried to calmly and logically explain myself perplexed me. Why was she reacting this way? I simply didn’t understand it at all. I probably wandered around campus thinking for forty-five minutes before I headed back to my room. I decided that the smart thing to do was to let Kelly cool down a little and then talk with her later in the evening before bedtime.

Damian was studying when I got back. I was in the mood for quiet and privacy so I grabbed my MP3 player, Civil War history notes and textbook and walked over to the Lasch Building. I grabbed an empty study room and settled in for the evening.

I listened to my MP3 player as I studied my notes. I tried to put myself in Dr. Barnes’ shoes and figure out what questions he would ask tomorrow morning on the final. I came up with eight good questions. I spent the next two hours preparing essay answers to my hypothetical questions with supporting facts, figures and quotes. I was loaded for bear if my questions were remotely close to Dr. Barnes’ questions on the final. I KNEW I would ace this final.

I studied at the Lasch Building until 9:30 pm. I called Kelly as I walked back to my dorm room. I figured I could stop by and wish her a good night assuming she had cooled down from our disagreement. Jen answered the phone.

“Hey Jen, it’s Kyle,” I said.

“Yes Joe,” Jen replied. “It’s good to hear from you.”

“No, it’s Kyle,” I said.

“I know,” Jen said. “Joe, let me go next door and borrow notes from Cindy.”

“What’s going on?” I asked. I heard the room door close as I waited for a response.

“I’m out of the room now. I can talk,” Jen asked. “What the hell did you do Kyle? I had to listen to a half hour diatribe tonight about what a controlling, manipulative prick you are. What did you do to make Kelly so mad?”

“I took her to diner at Spats,” I replied. “After dinner I tried to discuss how much we have been drinking lately. I’m worried about it.”

“That sure as hell isn’t what I got from listening to Kelly rant,” Jen replied.

“Can I talk with Kelly?” I asked.

“I don’t think that’s a good idea right now,” Jen said. “I think tomorrow would be a safer time to clear the air between the two of you.”

“Tell her I called,” I said.

“I’ll take that under advisement Kyle,” Jen replied. “I don’t want another rant like the last one. I am going to give Kelly time to cool off.”

“OK, thank Jen,” I said. I clicked the phone off. I wondered what nerve I had struck with Kelly to set her off like this. I had never seen my girlfriend remotely this angry in the last year and a half. I was mystified about what was wrong.

I lay down on my bed when I got back to my room, cranked up my tunes and tried to lose myself in my Civil War notes. I went to bed about an hour later. Damian and I both had finals in the morning and wanted to get a good night’s sleep.

I got up around 8:30 on Tuesday morning. Damian had gotten up and left quietly for his 8:00 am final. I bumped into Cameron Miller in the bathroom while I was showering and shaving. The two of us headed over to Pollock Commons for breakfast.

After we went through the line and found seats Cameron asked, “Where’s your better half? I figured Kelly would be joining us for breakfast too.”

“We had a fight yesterday,” I explained. “I don’t think she’ll be joining us.”

“What’s up?” Cameron asked.

“We had a fight about the party on Saturday night,” I replied.

“You did get pretty wasted,” Cameron agreed. “I guess Kelly was pretty pissed about that.”

“No, I was. We were so drunk that we passed out Saturday night,” I explained. “We woke up on the couch at the frat on Sunday morning. I’m too high profile to be doing

that. If the police nail you for underage drinking you go to a justice of the peace and pay a fine. If I get nailed, my name and picture show up in every paper in the state. I can lose my scholarship.”

“It sucks to be you,” Cameron said. “I guess the consequences for getting caught drinking could be pretty severe.”

“It doesn’t suck to be me,” I replied. “I get a free education here, I get to play football in front of a 100,000 people, my name is in the papers all around the state for the good things I do. My life is pretty sweet. I just have to be responsible about what I do here while I represent this college.”

“Now you sound like my dad,” Cameron said.

“Mine too,” I agreed. “They’re both right. I need to become a responsible adult. Kelly wants to party like most students.”

“What are you going to do?” Cameron asked.

“I have to make her understand why this is so important for me,” I replied.

Cameron agreed. Our conversation moved on to our final. The two of us speculated about what questions Dr. Barnes would ask. I enjoyed talking with Cameron. He was a good friend. I was going to miss eating meals with him next year. I would still be here at Pollock Commons. Cameron and Joel were going to be living at Omega Chi next fall.

The two of us walked together to our final. We took seats side by side when we arrived at the room. I scanned the students already there. Kelly hadn’t arrived yet. A couple minutes later my girlfriend walked into the room. I gave her a smile and a wave. She returned an inscrutable look and took a seat at the opposite side of the room.

I knew I had some work to do after the final to try and repair relations with Kelly. I would do whatever it took to get back in my lover’s good graces. I tried to organize my thoughts for what I would say after class was over. The proctor handed out the tests before I finished my thinking.

Dr. Barnes gave us a classic blue book exam – eight essay questions about the Civil War and its aftermath. My guesses and the questions Cameron and I talked about at breakfast were exactly correct. Dr. Barnes asked us to discuss causes of the Civil War, discuss the economic differences between the North and South and how they impacted the war, analyze George McClellan’s impact on the war, compare and contrast Robert E. Lee’s and Ulysses S. Grant’s generalship, discuss Lincoln’s and Jefferson Davis’ abilities as commanders in chief, describe Sherman’s march to the sea and its impact on the war, discuss the impact of the Union blockade of the south and discuss reconstruction and the aftermath of the war.

Ten years of reading and five months of study prepared my perfectly for this exam. I had the facts, the quotes and the arguments already prepared for my essays. I flew through the eight essays in an hour's time. I spent another half hour checking grammar and spelling so my answers would shine when Dr. Barnes read them.

I turned in my blue book and left twenty minutes before the final period ended. That was fine. I hung out outside the test room and organized my thoughts. I had to straighten things out with Kelly. I decided talking about our drinking could wait. Probably the stress of finals was putting Kelly on edge and my pushing wasn't helping her. I needed to be a supportive boyfriend right now.

Cameron Miller came out about five minutes after me. He had a big grin on his face. "That was easy!" he declared. "You want to head back to the dorms?"

"No, I have to stick around for Kelly," I replied. "I have to fix things between us."

"Good luck man," Cameron answered. "I'll see you around later."

Kelly stayed in the test room until the end of the final period. She came out after about half the class left.

"Kelly can we talk?" I begged as she came out the door. She stopped a couple feet from me and waited warily for me to say more. "I'm sorry for fighting with you yesterday. I don't want to dictate a bunch of rules for you."

Kelly relaxed her stern look a little. I stepped closer and said, "I love you and I'm sorry for making you upset." I held my arms out and offered Kelly a hug. She smiled and accepted.

"I love you to Kyle," Kelly said as she melted into my arms. I squeezed her tighter to my body.

"Let's not argue again," I said. "I missed saying good night to you last night."

"I missed you too honey," Kelly answered. We hugged and exchanged kisses appropriate to a public place like this hallway. All our disagreements were forgotten by the time we unclenched.

The two of us walked back to Pollock Commons for lunch talking about Dr. Barnes' final. Kelly felt she did well on the final. I KNEW I had aced it. Ten year of reading and study gave me that confidence. By the time the two of us reached the dining hall, it was like yesterday's fight had never happened.

Kelly and I went through the serving line and grabbed some lunch. Damian and Billy joined us a couple minutes later. Cameron Miller and Joel Peterson arrived a few

minutes after them and joined us at our table. Cameron gave me a smile and wink when he saw Kelly and I had made up. We enjoyed lunch with our friends.

We lingered at the dining hall after our friends split, enjoying relaxed time together. “Do you need to get back to studying honey?” I asked.

“My anthropology final isn’t until 2:30 tomorrow,” Kelly replied. “I’m in good shape for it. Did you know Jen has a 2:30 final today?”

“Really?” I said with a smile. “I don’t have any finals tomorrow. Maybe we could put that empty room of yours to good use.”

“That is an excellent idea,” Kelly agreed. “Make up sex is supposed to be awesome. Do you want to see?”

We ditched out dirty trays immediately, grabbed a newspaper at the Mix and headed back to Kelly’s room. We read the paper to kill time until Jen left for her final. The hour and fifty minute long final periods were excellent, much better than the normal fifty minute class periods. And yes, make up sex is awesome.

Kelly and I used a full two hours to demonstrate our love for each other in as many positions as possible. By the time Jen returned to her room at 4:30 it was like Kelly and I had never fought at all. I was as happy as possible... except sometime, well after all the stress from finals, Kelly and I would need to have the talk about curbing our excessive drinking. That could wait until another time.

Kelly spent Wednesday morning studying for her anthropology final. I slept in. It was great. Kelly and I had lunch together with our friends. After lunch Chip, Damian, Christian and I headed over to the practice fields and spent a couple hours practicing pass routes together. Jay came over to watch part way through our practice.

Jay’s hard cast on his ankle had been replaced with a soft one that morning. He had strict instructions from the medical staff to use his crutches for the next week. The soft cast would come off in a week and he would be allowed to put weight on his ankle. He wasn’t allowed to resume running or weight lifting until July. Jay was frustrated by his enforced inactivity but was absolutely determined come July to work himself back into shape and to be ready to play football when camp started.

Our usual crew got together for dinner at Pollock Commons. Jay, Shawn, Christian, Bev, Cindy, Jen, Damian, Billy, GJ, Trevor, Kelly and me all crowded around a couple tables at the dining hall. The girls and Billy would live off campus next fall so this would be our final dinner together. Most of the group was upbeat because a summer of freedom was nearly at hand. I was looking forward to that too but I was also a little melancholy about the end of our daily dinners together.

Kelly and I went over to Nittany Apartments right after dinner. We made our rounds visiting the seniors so we could say good bye. This really wasn't a final good bye. We would be seeing all these guys again next month at Zack's wedding.

When Kelly and I were walking back to our dorms she commented, "I wish you weren't leaving after your last final tomorrow. I'd like you to spend the night with me."

"I'd like that too," I agreed. "...but Jen will be in your room tomorrow night. Damian is in mine. We'll end up sleeping apart tomorrow night regardless whether I stay or go home. I haven't spent significant time with my family since January."

"That isn't different for me," Kelly replied. "... and I spent over a week at your house in January. Can't you stay?"

"It's the end of the school year and I'm crazy to get away from this place for awhile," I explained. "We'll be together in two weeks when you come in for the long weekend and we go to the Phillies game."

"I know," Kelly replied after sighing. "I was just hoping for company tomorrow night. I guess it's better if I spend that time studying for my Spanish final."

"It is," I replied. We stopped and I gave her a hug and kiss. "We can stand two weeks apart. It'll go by in no time."

"I survived Christmas time so I guess I'll survive two weeks without my sweetie," Kelly replied. "Do you want to study for History 21's final tonight?"

"I can spare an hour for it," I agreed. "I DO need to pack tonight if I'm going to get home and see the twins and Hunter before their bedtime tomorrow night."

"Deal!" Kelly replied enthusiastically.

We went back to my room and worked our way through the last third of History 21 course. We talked about Roosevelt, Churchill, Stalin and World War II, the Korean War, the Cold War, Vietnam, Kuwait, Iraq and the fall of the two towers.

I remember watching the towers go down on TV when I got home from school that Tuesday September afternoon. My nine year old brain couldn't comprehend the event then. I felt like I was watching a movie rather than real life. The passing years helped me understand the horror Will and my parents felt that dreadful day.

The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq weren't covered in the course. I marveled when I considered that I would be teaching about those topics ten years from now, when they were hopefully relegated to history instead of current events.

I headed back to my room around nine o'clock and got to work packing my things for the trip home. It was amazing how much stuff I had acquired over the course of the past ten months. I didn't get everything packed until 10:30 pm. I decided to get the car loaded then instead of waiting until tomorrow. The parking lot outside our dorm was deserted this time of night. I crammed the small trunk and the back seat of my trusty old Golf with all my possessions, except for an overnight bag that I left in my room. I turned in around a quarter to twelve that evening.

Damian and I were up at 8:30. Both of us had 10:10 am finals. Damian, Cameron, Kelly and I met at the dining hall for breakfast. The four of us walked across campus together. Damian's final was in Willard and our history final was in 204 Sackett Building. The four of us agreed to meet after our finals for lunch.

As expected Mr. Blanchard's final was an essay blue book exam. I barely broke sweat answering his questions. I guess that was to be expected. History 21 was my final introductory level history course. I was ready for more advanced work. I flew through the test in less than an hour. I went back and proofread my answers, polishing them to make sure I got the A that I was expecting.

I enjoyed the beautiful May morning sun on the Mall under the elms while I waited for Cameron and Kelly to finish their exams. Cameron joined me twenty minutes later. Kelly followed him outside five minutes later. We compared notes as we walked up the mall to the benches outside the Willard Building.

Damian wasn't as confident about his Finance 301 final when he joined us. We let our friend vent as we walked back to Pollock Commons for lunch. Joel Peterson, Cameron's best friend and roommate hailed us as we passed the HUB. We waited so he could join us. The five of us headed for lunch together.

We grabbed our food and found an empty table and settled in. We talked about our summer plans. Kelly was going to work as an intern again at a newspaper in her hometown. Damian was working for his dad at one of the restaurants. Cameron was a lucky guy. He was working at the park in Gettysburg this summer as an intern. It was a premium job for someone his age.

Joel had an unusual employer this summer – himself. He and a friend from high school had started a lawn care business four years ago. They were successful enough that the two of them had employees, Joel's younger brother Ethan and Ethan's friend Bill. I was astounded when Joel said his company paid for his pickup truck, a trailer, two riding mowers and two walking mowers from profits the past couple years. Joel and his partner expected to clear over \$5000 during the summer.

Joel's company grossed more in one week than I was paid for six weeks of work at scout camp. I had to admire the initiative of my friend. Damian, a business major here, was suitably impressed too.

The conversation turned to the fun we had this year. We reminisced about all the parties we had together. We talked about the Thon. Joel and Cameron wanted Damian, Kelly and me to know we were welcome over at Omega Chi any time next year. They hoped we would be able to get together often.

During a lull in the conversation Joel casually asked, "Kelly, did you and Kyle get everything worked out this week? I was stunned when you guys were arguing earlier this week. You guys just never do that."

Kelly answered before I had a chance. "Things are great again," she explained. "Kyle was feeling stressed by finals. He had this crazy idea that we were drinking too much. We all enjoy having some beers and partying. Isn't that silly idea?"

Joel nodded his enthusiastic agreement about us being fine with our level of drinking. Damian and Cameron knew my concerns about our drinking. They didn't agree or disagree. Kelly continued on.

"We're away from home and not under our parent's rules anymore," Kelly said. "That's part of being college students. I don't intend miss the chance for some fun. You understand now don't you honey?"

Eyes turned to me. I was embarrassed. I wanted to have this conversation about drinking but not here and now with an audience. I tried to put aside my frustration with Kelly's obstinacy on this topic.

"I don't think this is the time or place for this discussion Kelly," I replied.

I could see my girlfriend flush as she replied, "You said you were sorry for suggesting that we drink too much."

"I SAID I was sorry for arguing," I countered. "I never said I thought it was OK for us to get drunk every weekend. We need to cut...."

"GOD DAMN IT KYLE!" Kelly growled. "I've had enough rules for a lifetime. We DO NOT have a drinking problem."

"Let's talk about this later after everyone calms down," I suggested.

"I'M FINE!" Kelly spat out as she stood up. "I'LL LET YOU KNOW WHEN I WANT TO TALK!" She strode away briskly and dumped her tray in the return area and disappeared.

“Well, that went well,” I said.

“I’m sorry,” Joel said. “I didn’t know I was raising such a sore subject. I don’t think you two have a drinking problem.”

“You and I don’t have scholarships riding on this,” Cameron explained. “If we get caught drinking our names don’t appear in papers state-wide.”

“It’s OK, you didn’t know,” I replied.

“What are you going to do Kyle?” Damian asked.

“I’ll let Kelly cool down and then talk to her before I head for home after my final,” I said.

Conversation was subdued at our table after Kelly’s outburst. The three of us finished our meal and headed back to Hartranft. I stopped by Ander’s room when I got back. Anders took me through checkout. I carried my overnight bag along to Anders’ room after he finished checking my room. I signed the forms and turned in my room key.

“Good luck this summer man,” I said as I shook his hand good bye. “You going home to California until fall?”

“No man,” Anders replied. “Coach Burton liked my work this spring. He offered me the grad offensive assistant position yesterday. I accepted. He wants me on campus this summer. I get a couple weeks at home after graduation and then I come back in time to help with the football summer camps.”

“Have fun,” I said. “I’ll see you in August Coach.”

“Have a good summer Kyle,” Anders called back.

I headed back to my old room and popped my head in the door. “You have a good summer roomie. I’ll see you in August.”

“See you then Kyle,” Damian replied. “You have a good summer too.”

“Work on your pass receiving,” I said.

“That’s set,” Damian answered. “DeShaun is going to work with me. He thinks he has a good chance to be the starter for his team next season.” I knew DeShaun was the quarterback on Damian’s high school team. He played football at the University of New Hampshire. The two of us shook hands and then I headed out to my car. I dropped off my bag at my car.

I still had forty minutes until my geography final so I decided to kill some time by getting ice cream at the Creamery before heading over to Burrowes for the exam. I enjoyed my treat during a leisurely walk across campus. It gave me time to think about what I wanted to say to Kelly. I hung out on the steps in front of Pattee for about ten minutes while I composed what I wanted to say to my lover.

I called Kelly's cell phone when I was ready but didn't get any answer. I ended up leaving this message on her voice mail:

"Kelly, this is Kyle. Please call me and leave me a message while I'm in my final. I want to sit down and talk with you before I leave for home. We need to clear things up before I leave."

I headed inside and found the room for my Geography 20 final. Dr. McMahon's final wasn't too tough. I breezed through it, finishing about twenty minutes before the finals period was over. I used all twenty minutes checking my answers. I felt real confident. This exam was going to get me an A the course.

I checked my voicemail messages when I got outside the room. The message from Kelly was brief.

"The first words when you call me better be 'you're right and I'm sorry' Kyle or there isn't anything to talk about. Call me when you get out of your final. Kelly"

I walked down to the end of the hall where there wasn't any foot traffic and called Kelly's number.

"Hello Kyle," Kelly answered as soon as the phone rang.

"Hi Kelly, this is a terrible way for us to end things this semester. I love you and want to talk..." I began. I realized part way through the second sentence that there had been a click while I was talking. My phone said 'Call Ended 0:00:23'.

I called again and started talking as soon Kelly said "What?"

"Don't hang up. We need to sit down and talk rationally..." I stopped when I realized Kelly had hung up on me. Why in the hell was my girlfriend being so stubborn?

"God damn!" I cursed quietly to myself. "She can just call me the next fucking time!" I put my phone away and walked briskly back to the East Parking Garage and my car. I expected to get a phone call at any time when Kelly realized I wasn't going to chase after her. It didn't come before I reached my Golf. I hopped in and sped away from campus.

Traffic was heavy as university employees headed home from work. I didn't get my car over 35 MPH until I got through Potters Mills and Route 322 turned into a four lane

highway. I made a quick stop at the Mickey D's in Lewistown for dinner. The rest of the trip home was easy. Rush hour traffic was gone by the time I reached Harrisburg.

The two and a half hour drive gave me time to think. The more I thought about Kelly and her attitude towards drinking, the madder I got. We had spent too much time this year getting drunk at parties. Why couldn't I get Kelly to listen to what I was trying to say? Whenever I tried to discuss the subject calmly and rationally she flew off the handle at me.

The way Kelly stormed out at lunch time and wouldn't give me a chance to talk with her before I left campus really pissed me off. I tried to talk things through with her before I left campus but she hung up on me – twice! She actually expected me to apologize! I knew, absolutely KNEW, that I was right about us needing to cut down our drinking. It would be awhile before we talked if she expected me to apologize when I was right.

I calmed down some as I drove across northern Lancaster County towards Lancaster. I was looking forward to seeing my family again. I love my friends at college, I love Penn State and I love playing on the football team but it was going to be nice to be home again. I had ten weeks free from classes, lectures, term papers and exams.

I was going to be able to sleep late in the mornings, at least for the first month. I could catch up on my recreational reading. I would have time to play video games again. I was almost entirely devoid of responsibility for the next month. It was going to be grand.

This problem with Kelly was the only cloud on the horizon. This was our first real fight in fifteen months as a couple. I knew Kelly and I would work things out eventually.

I pulled up in front of my home around 8:15 in the evening, just as it was starting to get dark. I walked across the lawn, stepped in the front door and announced, "I'm home."

As I expected, two pairs of small feet raced from the kitchen into the foyer. "Unka Ky!" "Unka Ky home!"

"Hey Connor, it's good to see you," I said as I grabbed my closer nephew. I hoisted him up and gave him a kiss on the cheek. He threw his arms around my neck and hugged me.

Noah chirped, "Plane! Plane!" as he danced at my feet. Hunter scurried into the foyer on his hands and knees a few feet behind his bigger nephews.

I hoisted Connor over my head and zoomed him around the foyer quickly and then set him on the floor. I picked up Noah and we exchanged hugs and kisses too. Noah got his plane ride while Connor danced around me on the floor. I saw Hunter was sitting at my feet staring up at me, his arms outstretched to me when I set Noah down. "Eh.... Ehh..." he grunted as he begged for his turn.

“You want to say hi to you big brother, don’t you?” I asked. Hunter giggled when I picked him up. I gave him a hug, kissed his cheek and nuzzled his nose. Hunter giggled again. I started to set my brother down again when he squirmed and held his arms straight out the way Connor and Noah did when they took plane rides.

“You want a plane ride?” I asked.

“Ppp... ppp...” my baby brother answered.

“Don’t tell mom about this,” I said as I hoisted him over my head and zoomed him around the room. Hunter giggled and squealed the whole time. As soon as I set Hunter back on the floor, Noah grabbed a finger and pulled. Connor tugged at my leg, urging my down the hallway towards the kitchen. I let the twins lead me, little Hunter crawling behind us, trying to keep up.

“Unka Ky home!” the twins announced repeatedly as we headed for the kitchen. Mom and Dad were there sharing cups of coffee at the kitchen table.

I gave Mom a hug and kiss while Dad had to settle for a hearty handshake. I had a seat at the table and the three of us caught up on news from the past couple months. The twins soon lost interest in adult conversation. They toddled off in search of other amusements followed by Hunter.

The boys returned about ten minutes later carrying their favorite book.

“Unka Ky... book?” Connor asked hopefully.

“P’ease.... Cat in Hat?” Noah begged. I was impressed. My nephews’ vocabulary was expanding even if their pronunciation left something to be desired.

I accepted the proffered book and started to follow the boys towards the steps. Hunter immediately let out a squall. “Take Hunter,” Mom instructed. “He insists on being part of story time.”

“OK” I agreed as I reached down and picked up my brother.

“I’ll be up in five or ten minutes to put him in his crib,” Mom added as I followed the twins upstairs. The four of us settled on Connor’s bed. Connor was cuddled against me on the left, Noah on the right. Little Hunter sat on my lap as I read the three boys their bedtime story. They were fast asleep long before the parents returned home to the disaster the Cat in the Hat had produced in the story.

I stayed where I was surrounded by sleeping boys until Mom came to my rescue. Mom took Hunter back to her room and his crib. I moved Noah to his own bed and then tucked in each of the twins.

I felt great having this opportunity to reconnect with my family. I could see Kelly and me with our own kids in a few years, once we were out of school and settled in wherever I ended up after the draft. Hopefully my own offspring would be as adorable as my nephews and baby brother.

Andy caught up with me as I was exiting the twins' bedroom. He came to check up and make sure their uncle did a proper job of putting them to bed. Andy was satisfied with my work. Each twin got a kiss on the forehead before the two of us exited their room quietly.

Andy and I went down to the basement. I talked while he worked out, letting me catch up on his life over the last couple months. This Saturday night was prom night for our high school. Andy decided to blow it off. He didn't have a girlfriend or any prospects.

"Did you consider asking Heather Miller?" I asked.

"She's going steady with Taylor Bradford," Andy explained. "They've been together for almost two months."

"No one else catches your eye?" I asked.

"The supply of eighteen year old fathers of two far exceeds the demand," Andy replied.

"I guess that's true," I agreed.

"Anyway, I'll save about \$400 dollars in expenses for me and a date," Andy added. "Instead I will work the evening shift tomorrow and make about a \$100 dollars. That'll keep my car filled with gas and going for awhile."

Andy and I talked as he finished his workout routine and we switched positions while I did my workout. Andy let me know one member of our family was going to enjoy the prom this year. Nate Good, the junior class president, had asked Liz to be his date about a month ago. Liz was in seventh heaven to be invited to the junior prom while she was still in tenth grade.

I knew Nate from when I was in high school. He was active in student council even as a ninth grader. He was a decent guy and a good date for my sister. They weren't a couple but had gone out on a couple dates to get to know each other better before the big night Saturday night.

The two of us went out for our three mile run after we finished with the weights. Andy helped me move my things from my car to the basement after we finished our run. Andy and I grabbed some ice cream for a bedtime snack after we finished unloading my car.

I checked my e-mail before I went to bed that night. I didn't receive anything other than junk e-mails. I considered sending an e-mail to Kelly but changed my mind. She DID hang up on me twice today when I tried to clear things up with her. I decided it would be better if I let her cool off a little longer before I contacted her.

I was in the middle of a really nice erotic dream where Kelly and I were out in the woods making love when....

RING... RING.... RING.... My God damned cell phone woke me just as I was ready to climax.

“What?” I growled into the phone.

“What are you up to buddy?” the voice asked. I realized it was Ed Fritz as my brain gradually awoke.

“Sleeping,” I groused.

“What? No finals now?” Ed said. “What time are you getting home?”

“Last night, around 8:15,” I answered.

“Shit! You’re home already?” Ed said. “I’m sorry man. I thought Penn State didn’t finish finals until today.”

“The school does finish today,” I agreed. “My last final was over at five o’clock last night. I high tailed it out of there as soon as it was over.”

“I can’t blame you,” Ed said. “You want to get together?” I glanced at my clock. It was a few minutes after eleven in the morning.

“How about after lunch, say one o’clock?” I suggested.

“Done!” Ed replied. “I’ll drop by your place at one.”

I clicked the phone off and sat up in bed and tried to wake up. I had managed to squeeze in over ten hours of sleep on my first day of summer vacation, so I felt pretty good. My phone rang not more than thirty seconds after I ended my call with Ed.

“What Ed?” I asked.

“Ed?” the voice said. It definitely wasn’t my best friend. “Kyle, this is Coach Burton.”

“Coach!” I exclaimed. “What’s up?”

“Are you going to make the meeting this morning with me?” Coach asked.

“Meeting? Um... ummm...” I stammered. “I didn’t know I was to meet with you today.”

“I left a note in your locker yesterday morning,” coach Burton replied.

“Oh! Um... I cleaned out my locker Wednesday night,” I explained. “I didn’t get the note.”

“Oh, OK,” Coach asked. “Can you come over to my office sometime today?”

“Uh, Coach.... I’m home now... in Lancaster County,” I replied.

“Oh...” Coach said. He paused for about ten seconds. “I guess this is what I get for putting off talking with you.”

“What do you need?” I asked. “I guess I can drive back to campus... if you really need me to.”

“No... No, that won’t be necessary,” Coach said. “I guess we can do this over the phone.”

“Sure Coach, whatever you want,” I agreed. I was relieved that he didn’t insist I drive back to campus.

“You know about the youth football camps we run in June,” Coach said.

“Yeah, I participated in one,” I said.

“That’s right, you did,” Coach agreed. “I use team members as resident assistants for the football camps. I was wondering if you would be willing to help out at one of the camps.”

“Um... yeah, I’d be happy to help out,” I said. “When do you need me? I have to check with my bosses at my summer job to make sure I can get the time off.”

“I need you to come back to campus on Friday, June 17th in the morning and work until noon on Sunday, June 19th,” Coach explained.

“That’s probably the best weekend of the whole summer for me to get free from my job,” I said. “It’s a good thing it wasn’t a week later. I have a wedding to go to that weekend.”

“I know,” Coach agreed. “I will be there. I had to reschedule this football camp from that weekend so I could attend Hayes’ wedding too.”

“Cool!” I said. “I’ll make sure you get a good seat. I’m one of the ushers.”

“Of course you are,” Coach Burton said. “I’ll send you information about your duties. Your primary duty is to chaperone the kids to and from the dorm, to meals, to the auditorium and to the practice fields. You’re welcome to do one on one coaching with them too, if you like.”

“That sounds like fun,” I replied. “I’ll talk to my immediate boss, my brother Will, tonight. One of us will clear it with his boss and then I will let you know if I can help.”

“Thank you Kyle. I wonder if Chip Brinton is still on campus,” Coach mused.

“He has a final after lunch today,” I said. “I’ll warn you though; you may have trouble getting him off work to help out. He is my assistant at my scout camp’s pool. I don’t know if we can spare him and me both. My pool staff is pretty young and I recruited Chip to add some maturity to my staff.”

“Ask your brother and his boss when you talk to them,” Coach said. “If I can get only one guy, I want you over Brinton. Meanwhile I will see if I can catch Brinton before he bolts this place too.”

“I’ll be back in touch Coach,” I promised before I clicked the button to end the call.

I was pleased to get an invitation to help with the camp. It sounded like fun. I would enjoy talking with and helping some of the young receivers for a weekend. I grabbed a shower and then headed upstairs for some lunch.

Ed and I caught up with each other’s past couple months when he came over. He had gotten home last Sunday afternoon after a long drive up from Gainesville. He caught me up on our friends too. Jeremy and Kathy had returned home from Indiana on Tuesday. Brandon returned from Allentown on Wednesday.

Jake Kring, Hal and Tammy were due home this evening after dinner. Penny was coming home tomorrow around lunchtime. By Saturday night our whole high school crew of friends would be assembled. Ed and Jeremy were trying to set things up for the whole group to go out to the Green Iguana Saturday night.

Ed and I did a grocery run to pick up some munchies in the afternoon. We spent time in the back yard tossing the football back and forth, like we had done for years. It was like old times.

Ed and I worked our cell phones later in the afternoon, connecting with all our crew. We set everything up for our night out on Saturday. Ed headed back home around five pm, just as mom and the little kids arrived home.

Will and Abby arrived from Philadelphia a couple minutes later. Dinner was late since Mom went all out for the family homecoming. Mom made twice baked potatoes while Dad grilled steaks for everyone. Liz did a salad.

Dad cooked the steaks to a perfect medium rare. The potatoes were delicious. Will and Abby told us about their experiences back at school. Abby was happy her first year of medical school was over. Abby told us how intense medical school was. Will told us about his experiences working as a teaching assistant while he worked on his master's degree.

Mom picked up a strawberry pie at the store on the way home from work tonight. We topped our slices of pie off with whipped cream. What a way to end a meal.

Liz and Andy took off as soon as dinner was done. Andy was going into work for a few hours to help close up. Liz took off to meet her girlfriends. I hung around the table with Will, Abby, Dad and Mom. I decided now was a good time to talk with Will about helping at the Penn State football camp.

“Coach Burton called me today to ask if I can help with football camp,” I explained. “He wants me Friday morning through Sunday evening. He also is asking Chip Brinton to help. Do you think you can spare us from the pool at camp that long Will?”

“I think it can be worked out Kyle,” Will answered. “Which weekend is it?”

“June 17th, 18th and 19th,” I replied.

“Shit!” Will exclaimed. “We already gave four aquatic staffers off that weekend. Josh Hunsecker, Matt Sauders, Dave Mitchell and Cody Stevens all are going to some sports camp that weekend.”

I laughed. “Yeah, they’re going to the Penn State football camp.”

“Ahhh... I see,” Will replied. “It is the end of staff week so Friday and Saturday won’t be a problem. Sunday afternoon is another story entirely. I can’t have half the aquatics staff gone when we have to do swim tests for the first week campers. Can you be back by noon on Sunday?”

“I’ll check with Coach Burton, I don’t know if we can leave early,” I replied.

“You get back by noon Sunday and I’ll get John to approve your weekend off,” Will promised.

Chip and I probably could get loose Sunday morning after breakfast from what I remembered of football camp from three years ago. All I remembered Zack and Aaron doing on Sunday morning was checking us out of our room after breakfast and then hanging out at the practice field the rest of the morning.

After dinner Will, Abby and I hung out together in the family room, talking and playing with the little kids. I enjoyed spending time with my older and younger siblings and nephews. The twin loved their Unka Wih and Aun' Abby. Mom and Dad joined us after the dishes were done. We probably looked pretty silly, five grown-ups (OK, technically I'm still a teenager for another eight weeks, but who's counting?) on the floor goofing around with Connor, Noah and Hunter.

I hung out with them until Ed, Jeremy and Hal came over to work out. We traded stories as we trained that evening. Hal proudly announced he had been named the starting kicker for his team. Jeremy said Coach Tenuta, his defensive coordinator, had moved him inside to middle linebacker. Jeremy much preferred that to playing outside like last season.

Ed was upbeat. He felt he played well against his competition, Terrence Walker. Coach Meyer did not name either of them as the #1 QB yet. The competition would continue this summer.

The four of us headed out for our three mile run. We barely broke a sweat as we ran through the neighborhood. All four of us had come a long way since six years ago when I started running this route with Will. My brother nearly killed me that first night.

The twins had conned Will into reading them 'The Cat in the Hat' before bedtime so I didn't get to be the good uncle that night. I wished Will and Abby good night. They were staying at Abby's parents place until the twins' birthday party. This was their mini-vacation for the summer. After the party they planned to go back to their apartment in Philly for a couple weeks before coming back for Andy's high school graduation.

I headed for the basement, grabbed a shower and relaxed with my MP3 player and a good book. I was going to need to go shopping soon. The twins' birthday was next Tuesday and I didn't have their gifts yet. I also needed new reading material this summer. I was used to having the full resources of the Pattee Library at my disposal. I'd read all the interesting non-fiction books at the local library when I was growing up and was short on good, new books.

All my high school friends made it to the Green Iguana Club on Saturday night. Penny's boyfriend Harrison Chandler came over from York to join us. We enjoyed the club's excellent music, had some snacks and enjoyed each other's company. The spares, Ed, myself, Jake and Brandon, did enjoy a few dances when Jeremy, Hal and Harrison shared their girlfriends.

Even though I didn't home until one am, I checked my e-mails. I was hoping to see something from Kelly. I didn't. I stayed up and spent fifteen minutes composing this e-

mail to my girlfriend. I had learned the hard way with my ex-girlfriend Julie to e-mail often, regardless of how things were in our relationship.

Date: May 14th

To: Kelly O'Keefe <okeefe.kelly@psu.edu>

From: Kyle Martin <fastwr87@redroses.net>

I'm sorry I left without talking things through with you on Thursday Kelly. I should have been more patient. We can talk about it on the 27th when you come in.

Noah and Connor are asking about you. They thought you and I should always be together when I'm home. I gave them hugs and kisses for you.

Are well for your family? I hope to hear from you soon.

Love

Kyle

I managed to get up in time to attend church with my family. Reverend Hollinger was delighted to see me back home. We talked football for a couple minutes after the service.

After lunch on Sunday I settled in for an afternoon of reading the paper, watching old movies and relaxation. Noah, Connor and Hunter played on the floor in front of me.

I was almost done with the paper when Connor and Hunter had a fight. The first sign of trouble was Connor's yell, "Baby no!" followed by Hunter's squeal. I looked down to find Hunter trying to reach for one of the wooden blocks Connor was stacking up. Connor took the four blocks and set them up on the coffee table. Hunter stared up there and cried. I picked my little brother up and held him on my lap for awhile. I figured Hunter would forget about the blocks.

Ten minutes later I put Hunter down on the floor again. He crawled over to the coffee table immediately and stared up at it. After about thirty seconds he grabbed the leg at the corner of the table and pulled himself up so he was on his knees. Unsteadily and very deliberately my little brother pulled himself up until he was standing on two feet leaning against the table.

Hunter rested his right arm on the table top to hold himself up and deliberately reached for the coveted blocks. He managed to grab one and pulled it to his body. He clutched the block to his body and turned, his right hand still steadyng him.

Connor spotted what was going on and shrieked, "No! MINE!" Connor scrambled to retrieve his toy as Hunter let go of the table and unsteadily stepped towards the couch and the safety of his big brother. He managed three steps before he grabbed my pant leg. Connor reached him by then.

Connor and Hunter struggled for the block a few seconds before both boys fell down in a heap. Both boys cried out, more from surprise than hurt. I scooped up Hunter and Connor, trying to sooth them.

The crying brought Mom to the room in seconds. "What's going on?" she asked.

"Hunter wanted to play with one of Connor's blocks," I explained. "Connor didn't like it. The boys fell down when Connor caught Hunter and tried to take it back."

"Poor boy," Mom cooed to Hunter as she took him from me. "Did your nephew get too rough with you?"

I soothed Connor while Mom quieted Hunter. Noah, feeling left out, walked over to me and held his arms up to be held. "Unka Ky?" he begged quietly. I picked him up and set him beside his brother on my lap. He leaned back against me while I stroked his hair.

When the boys all quieted down I asked, "How long has Hunter been walking?"

"Hunter doesn't walk," Mom answered. "He is learning to pull himself up on things but he can't walk yet."

I laughed and explained what I had witnessed a few minutes ago. Mom nuzzled Hunter's nose and said, "Aren't you full of surprises my smart little boy." Mom turned her attention to Noah and Connor, giving them a gentle lecture on sharing.

Mom hung out with me for half an hour hoping that Hunter would repeat his walking. The three boys played quietly without further incident. Hunter pulled himself up on the table repeatedly while Mom was there but never tried walking again. Right now I guess my little brother needed motivation to walk – like being chased by his bigger nephew.

Sunday had been a good day until I checked my e-mail after dinner. I received a reply from Kelly.

Date: May 15th

To: Kyle Martin <fastwr87@redroses.net>

From: Kelly O'Keefe <okeefe.kelly@psu.edu>

I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU ARE SUCH AN ASSHOLE! YOU DROVE OFF THURSDAY AFTERNOON AND LEFT ME THERE!!!!

I'M SO PISSED OFF THAT I HAVE ZERO INTEREST IN TALKING WITH YOU RIGHT NOW. DON'T WRITE UNTIL TELL YOU I WILL LISTEN!!!!

Kelly

I slumped down as I read through her e-mail. The hostility and contempt she felt for reached off the page and strangled the breath right out of me. I sat back and stared at the wall for minutes. What was happening to us? Was the end coming?

When I looked down again I saw that Kelly sent me a second e-mail less than two minutes after the first. It was much more civil.

Date: May 15th

To: Kyle Martin <fastwr87@redroses.net>

From: Kelly O'Keefe <okeefe.kelly@psu.edu>

I'm sorry for calling you an asshole and for hanging up on you Thursday afternoon. Give me a little time to cool down and then we will talk. I'll let you know when.

Love you, but not right this minute.

Kelly

I felt much better after reading the second e-mail. Kelly and I would work things out once she cooled down. I realized that taking off Thursday afternoon wasn't the most brilliant decision I had ever made. What difference would it have made if I had stuck around longer that night?

I had checked out of my room already but I was sure Anders and Damian would have let me crash there anyway. That or I could have slept on Zack's couch that night. I let my anger at Kelly's hanging up on me override my better judgment. When would I learn to control my temper?

At least the path out of this mess was clear now – give Kelly some space to work out her anger and then talk. I was confident by the time Kelly came in for the long weekend at the end of the month we would have patched up our differences. Hey, make up sex was good. We'd have a blast together that weekend.

I settled into my routine at home pretty quickly. Sleep in half the morning. Grab some lunch. I volunteered to cook dinner for the family while Mom was at work, so I would do prep work for dinner. I'd hang out with Ed, Jeremy and Hal for awhile in the afternoon. We watched movies, tossed a Frisbee or football around, or played video games. Vacation is good!

I gave Coach Caffrey a call on Monday afternoon and cleared things with him so I could join the high school players for the Tuesday and Thursday afternoon informal drills. We talked for about fifteen minutes about my spring at Penn State and Coach's plans for the Wolverines for the coming season. By the time we were done talking I knew exactly what I would emphasize with the receivers when I coached them.

I was excited Tuesday afternoon when I drove Ed and myself over to the high school practice fields a few minutes before school dismissal. Working with the kids teaching football was going to be fun. Jeremy, Hal and Kenny Weaver were already at the athletic fields when Ed and I arrived. Jeremy and Kenny were working with the defense at the practices. Hal came along to work with the kickers and punters for the team.

Kids came out from the middle and high school locker rooms for the athletic fields a few minutes later. Matt Sauder, Cody Stevens, Dave Mitchell, Josh Strickler and Ryan Lapp all gathered around me when they came out.

They were the last guys I knew well on the football team. All the guys I played with in high school were graduating. I barely knew the kids younger than the tenth graders. These kids looked so young to me.

I was talking with Matt, Cody, Dave, Josh and Ryan when I spotted a familiar figure leaving the middle school locker room outside door. I did a double take because I swore it was Greg Harrison, my deceased teammate. When I looked again I realized that it was Greg's little brother Gary. Gary had grown six or eight inches since last summer. He bore an amazing likeness to his older brother now.

My brother Andy and Tex Johanson, the departing team captains, called the crowd together and made assignments to get the afternoon's practice going. Ed was assigned to coach the quarterbacks for the afternoon. Andy worked with the wide receivers. He had me start with the tight ends and running backs.

All the kids knew me as "Coach" Martin. I slipped back into my old nickname comfortably. It fit me here.

I worked with four tight ends, two of which would be varsity next season and two that would be JV. Gary Harrison was finishing eighth grade, so he would probably be on JV next year.

My time working out of the slot at Penn State allowed me to teach these guys tricks to help catching passes over the middle in heavy traffic. I showed them how to use their

bodies to screen out the defender as he caught the ball. I talked about mental toughness – how to be prepared to catch the ball a split second before some big linebacker or lineman hits you. All the guys did well that afternoon. I was particularly impressed with Gary. He showed enough promise that he may match his brother's talent a year from now when he plays on varsity.

Andy switched me over part way through the practice to work with the kids practicing punt and kick returns. Andy had trained the kids well. He was one of the best high school return men in Pennsylvania. I gave the kids my advice. They listened. After all, I was ranked as one of the best collegiate return men in the nation.

The hour and half of practice flew by. I enjoyed myself teaching the younger kids. I thought our high school team should be strong again next season. These kids seemed dedicated to improving themselves and had learned quite a bit from the coaches, departing seniors and from Ed, Jeremy, Hal, Kenny and me.

We had a birthday dinner for Noah and Connor Tuesday night. "G'amma Wagner joined us and the boys for dinner. Mom bought an ice cream cake for dessert for the twins. They loved it.

Mrs. Wagner gave us news of her daughter Crystal, the twins' mother. Larry Burkholder had asked her marry him last weekend at the prom. She accepted his proposal. The wedding was planned for late fall, after Larry finished basic training. He had signed up for the army. Crystal was finally getting her wish – to get out from under her father's autocratic rule.

My family asked Mrs. Wagner to convey our best wishes to Crystal. Even though she had cut herself off from the twins completely, none of us bore her ill will. What happened two years ago had been difficult but it had also been a true blessing to our family. I couldn't imagine our lives without Noah and Connor.

I received a brief e-mail from Kelly Tuesday night telling me she had cooled down and was ready to listen to what I had to say. I spent a half hour carefully writing out an explanation of why I thought we needed to cut back on our drinking.

I was shocked Wednesday evening when I got the response from Kelly. I received a long diatribe from my girlfriend excoriating me for being too controlling. The best way to summarize the rambling e-mail was that Kelly was perfectly happy with our partying and drinking. She did not feel any need to moderate our partying.

The conclusion of the e-mail sickened me. "I don't need a frickin' temperance lecture from my boyfriend. I'm so frustrated and tired of every conversation we have revolving around how much I drink. Don't expect me to drive the whole way across the state for a four day talk about sobriety. Think again!"

Kelly wasn't sure about coming for our long weekend in ten days? Giving Kelly time to cool off wasn't working. I needed advice. Somehow I had to get through to Kelly. My first thought was to get advice from Mom and Dad. I rejected that quickly. Given their antipathy towards drinking, this wasn't the right subject to talk about with them.

At school I would have sought out Anders or Zack for advice. Anders was in California right now and Zack was in Green Bay at their mini-camp. Neither friend was in a position to help me. My next choice was my brother Will. Will and Abby had headed back to their apartment last night after the twins' party. I gave my brother a ring.

"Hey Will, it's Kyle," I said after he answered the phone.

"What's up little brother?" Will asked pleasantly.

"I'm looking for girlfriend advice," I replied.

"Really? Mom and Dan couldn't help?" Will said.

"This problem isn't one I can discuss with them," I explained. "It's about drinking."

"OK, I'll see if I can help," Will said. "What's up?"

"Kelly and I have been having an ongoing argument the last two weeks about drinking," I explained.

"I'm not surprised," Will said. "I've heard about some of your exploits this last year."

"I guess your Penn State spy keeps you up to date on me," I said.

"Yeah, Zack is a good friend," Will answered. "Somebody has to keep your nose clean up there in the boonies. I guess Kelly is upset with you about drinking too much."

"Actually, you have that backwards," I replied. "I realize that Kelly and I have been drinking too much at parties. I am trying to convince her that we should cut back. She disagrees."

I needed about ten minutes to tell Will the whole story. Will interrupted a couple times to clarify some points.

"Wow!" Will exclaimed when I finished. "You really shouldn't let an argument go on for ten days Kyle. That's never good for a relationship."

"I understand that now Will," I replied.

“...and coming home from campus in the middle of the argument,” Will continued.
“That’s really bad too. How do you and Kelly usually resolve your arguments?”

“We’ve never had an argument like this,” I explained. “That’s why I called you. I’m stumped about how to fix things with Kelly. What do I do?”

“You’re on the right track cutting back on your drinking,” Will said. “You’ve got too much to lose to risk it for a few drinks.”

“I understand that,” I said. “How do I fix things between me and Kelly? I love her and can’t lose her.”

“Apologize,” was Will’s one word answer.

“Apologize?” I asked. “You just told me I was right about cutting back on drinking. Why should I apologize?”

“Apologize,” Will said decisively. “Right or wrong doesn’t matter at the moment. This argument has gone on too long between the two of you. Be the bigger person and say you are sorry.”

“How is that going to help me convince Kelly that we need to cut back on our drinking?” I countered.

“It won’t,” Will replied. “You can’t control what Kelly does. You can only control yourself. Kelly seems to have some hang-ups about control. You haven’t told me enough so I can understand what is motivating her. I suspect you don’t understand it either.”

“That’s certainly true,” I agreed. “I don’t understand it at all. I love Kelly and don’t want her to get hurt. I need to make her understand that what she is... what we are doing is going to hurt us.”

“No, you don’t,” Will replied. “I’ve known about your drinking too much for a year and a half. Did I tell you to stop?”

“No.”

“You wouldn’t have listened to me if I did tell you to stop,” Will explained. “You can’t control Kelly and make her understand any better than I could with you. You need to love her and support her as much as you can. Hopefully Kelly will mature enough to see that getting drunk at parties is stupid.”

“That’s hard,” I replied. “I did that one weekend this spring. Kelly got totally drunk on Saturday night. I limited myself to three beers. She passed out in the middle of making love back at her room. It wasn’t pretty.”

“You need to take care of yourself,” Will explained. “You would be pretty stupid to throw away your football scholarship and everything that comes with it so you could go out on Saturday nights, get totally wasted, pass out and then feel like shit on Sundays. It doesn’t seem like a good trade.”

“It wouldn’t be,” I agreed.

“Give Kelly space to make her own decisions,” Will said. “You stick to your resolve. Hopefully Kelly comes to understand what you’ve figured out.”

“I hope that works,” I said. “I worry about what all this drinking does to her. I want what’s best for her.”

“I understand,” Will agreed. “What is best for Kelly is for you to let her make her own decisions. Give her the space she needs.”

“Yeah, I guess,” I said, dubious about whether Will’s advice would work. “Thanks for talking with me.”

“No problem little bro,” Will answered. “I hope everything works out between you and Kelly. The two of you make a great couple.”

“Thanks, I hope so too,” I said before I hit the end button on my cell phone. I sat on my bed for a few minutes trying to collect my thoughts and decide exactly what I would say to Kelly.

Before I could get myself organized Ed and Andy came downstairs to work out. I joined them. Kelly and I had been arguing for ten days. Another hour wouldn’t hurt. Jeremy and Hal joined us about five minutes after we started working.

By the time the five of us finished with weights and did our three mile run, it was after nine o’clock. I decided it was too late to call Kelly that evening. I would give myself the rest of the evening and lunchtime tomorrow to get my thoughts organized so I could convince Kelly to come in for a long weekend together. I hated us arguing and missed being close to her.

I woke up around eleven on Thursday morning. I lay in bed for awhile composing what I wanted to say to Kelly. This argument had gone on long enough. Will was right. I needed to be mature and bring this to an end. I spent about half an hour planning out what I wanted to say to settle things between the two of us.

Kelly picked up the phone on the second ring.

“Kyle?” Kelly asked. I’d called her cell phone number so she could see my name before she answered the call.

“Kelly, is now a good time to talk?” I asked politely.

“Sure,” Kelly replied. “I was reading the paper after breakfast. Anne and I have the house to ourselves this week. I don’t start working at the paper until next Tuesday.”

“Cool,” I said. I took a deep breath and launched into the spiel I had planned. “Kelly, I wanted to apologize for being such a pain in the ass the past ten days. I’m sorry.”

“Uh huh,” Kelly commented.

“I never was trying to control you or give you orders,” I continued. “I just want us to be together, safe and happy. I hope you will accept my sincere apology.”

“I accept Kyle,” Kelly replied. “I’m sorry for being so stubborn. I never should have hung up on you when you called me after your last final. It was childish of me. We missed the chance to say good bye.”

“That’s all past now,” I said. “Are you still planning to come over here for a long weekend and the Phillies game? I hope you are. I really have missed you.”

“I missed you too Kyle,” Kelly responded. “I’ll come over to your place as long as we aren’t going to have another argument about drinking.”

“I promise I will not even bring the subject up that weekend,” I promised. “You do realize that we won’t be getting any opportunities to drink while you visit, don’t you? Your parents are adamant about us not having sex when I visit you. My parents are the same way, except about drinking. They won’t tolerate any drinking while you visit.”

“I know that Kyle,” Kelly agreed. “... at least not at your house. Are your friends planning any parties?”

“Not that I heard about,” I replied. “Last Saturday night all of us went out to the Green Iguana Club. We didn’t do any drinking, just dancing. It was a fun evening.”

“I remember from January,” Kelly said. “I had fun at that club too. Do you think your friends would want to go back so soon?”

“I’ll talk to the gang, but I bet they will,” I replied. “The other idea I had was to go to Hershey Park like we did last summer.”

“Either sounds like fun,” Kelly agreed. I feel her mood warming to me as we talked casually. Kelly told me about her Spanish final. She thought she aced it. She told me about happenings in her family. She described the plans for her brother Billy’s college

graduation party and for her brother Mike's high school graduation. Billy had landed a job in Columbus and was moving there in three weeks. Mike was working at scout camp this summer and then starting at Penn State in August. He was lucky he got a spot at main campus. Many freshmen had to start at a branch campus before they transferred to University Park.

I told Kelly that the twins were disappointed that she didn't come home from school with me. They expected to see her when I came home. Kelly told me to promise the boys that she would see them in ten days. I asked if she had gotten her grades back yet. She hadn't. Both of us expected them to come any day.

The two of us talked for half an hour. The tension and strain disappeared as we talked casually the way we always did when we were together. I felt really good by the time we exchanged "I love you's" and hung up.

I headed upstairs just in time to find that mailman outside. I went outside to the curb, grabbed the mail and brought it back to the kitchen. I found the letter I was looking for as I sorted the mail into piles for each member of the family. My grades came from Penn State!

I opened the letter quickly and scanned it. I had an A+ in History 21 and in History 130. I had a straight A in Geography 20. Indoor Climbing, Kinesiology 10, were A's as expected. I was pleased to find Art 10 was an A-. That's pretty good for a would-be teacher with little practice at art. The last grade was disappointing but not surprising. I had a B- for Sociology 1. I was correct last week when I thought I had blown the final.

My grade point average was 3.82 for this semester. My overall GPA was 3.59 for the past two years. I was pleased, I made the Dean's List again and this was my best semester so far.

I was also pleased that Kelly and I were talking again. Will had given me good advice. Without his help I probably would have continued to insist I was right, which I was about us drinking too much, and would have stubbornly insisted she apologize. Who knows what would have happened with our relationship.

Kelly and I still had a big issue to work out but there wasn't any need to hurry. Kelly and I wouldn't have any booze when she visited at the end of May. We couldn't get roaring drunk at Zack and Leigh Ann's wedding either. We would not be exposed to booze at the end of July when she came in to visit before football camp. Further resolution of this point could wait until the fall.

The most important thing was Kelly was coming in to see me in eight days! I couldn't wait for her arrival.

(To be continued)

Chapter 40

The intervening eight days between Kelly and I making up and her visit to Paradise flew by. The two of us IMed, talked on our cell phones or exchanged e-mails daily. Our fight didn't seem to have harmed our underlying relationship. Kelly's visit was all I could think about as I made supper for my family that Friday night.

Kelly called me when she left work around 4:00 pm. She was grabbing dinner at a rest stop on the turnpike and expected to arrive around 8:15 to 8:30 pm. I was excited that she was on her way. So were the twins when they heard at dinner.

Andy, Ed, Jeremy, Hal and I did our workout early that evening so I would be free when Kelly showed up. Mom took Hunter and very disappointed Noah and Connor for their bathes at eight o'clock. The twins whined when they were told it was time for bed and Kelly hadn't arrived yet.

The twins picked out a book other than "The Cat in the Hat," for me to read to them when they were ordered to bed. Connor sprawled on the bed with his head on my leg. Hunter was on my lap and Noah sat beside me, leaning against my side as I began the story. Hunter was asleep and the twins were fading fast when my cell phone rang.

"Hey Kelly, what's up?" I asked when I saw her name on my phone.

"Keh-EE?" Connor asked as he roused himself.

"I just passed the downtown Lancaster exit on the Route 30 bypass," Kelly explained.

"KEH-EE!" Noah chirped after his brother said her name. "KEH-EE!" both twins repeated.

"How close am I?" Kelly continued.

"You'll be here in fifteen or twenty minutes," I said.

"Shhh!" I said to the twins. "You'll wake up Hunter." I added into the phone, "I'll see you soon honey. I love you."

"I love you too," Kelly agreed. She ended the call.

The twins carrying on woke Hunter again. The twins bounded out of bed and danced around. "See Keh-EE!" "See Keh-EE!"

"It's your bed time," I explained. "You need to go to sleep. I don't think your dad is going to like you staying up late."

“Daddy! Daddy, see Keh-EEE p’ease?” the twin tornados cried as they raced out of their bedroom in search of Andy.

Hunter, now fully awake, turned around and tried to wrap his arms around my neck so I would carry him.

“Come on little buddy,” I said quietly as I hoisted him up. “Let’s go find our nephews.”

We found them in the kitchen begging Andy to be allowed to stay up and see my girlfriend. Andy asked, “How long?” as the twins begged.

“She’s passing Lancaster now,” I replied.

“OK guys, you can stay up to see Kelly,” Andy agreed. “You have to go to bed as soon as she gives you good night kisses. Do you promise?” Both twins agreed. They were too wound up at the prospect of seeing Kelly to go back upstairs so I could finish their story.

Mom took Hunter upstairs. The little guy didn’t remember my girlfriend and was ready to zonk out any minute. The twins were smart. They went back to the family room and picked up a different book, in hopes Kelly would read it to them. You probably guessed – they found a fresh story teller so “The Cat in the Hat” came out, only the fourth time that week.

Noah, Connor and I waited impatiently at the front door for Kelly to arrive. All of us were anxious and hoping to get the first hug from my girlfriend. I’m older and cagier than my nephews. I jogged outside across the lawn and met Kelly at the curb when she pulled up. My nephews, in bare feet and pajamas, could only wait inside to welcome my girlfriend.

I gave Kelly an impatient hug and exclaimed, “God, I’ve missed you.” I gave Kelly a fervid kiss. Her tongue met mine, letting no doubt that she desired me as much as I desired her.

“I’m glad I’m here Kyle,” Kelly replied. “I’ve missed you too.”

After a too long kiss, much longer than was proper for public display, I helped Kelly bring her bags inside. We walked in towards the house. “I have to warn you that the twins are dying to see you,” I explained. “They had this silly idea that you should have come home with me two weeks ago when school was over. They couldn’t understand why we wouldn’t be together.”

“I don’t think that is such a silly idea,” Kelly replied. “I think your nephews are pretty smart. I wish we hadn’t fought at the end of the term.”

“They’re going to hit you up to read them a bedtime story as soon as you get in the door,” I said.

“That will be fine,” Kelly said. “I’d enjoy putting the boys to bed.”

Noah and Connor cheered “Keh-EE” and hugged her around her legs as soon as we got in the front door. Kelly reached down and picked up one twin.

“What’s your name?” she asked.

“No-ah” my nephew announced.

“You’ve gotten so big since March Noah,” Kelly said. He wrapped his arms around her neck and gave her a peck on the cheek. She set Noah down and picked up his brother.

“What’s your name, you little cutie?” Kelly asked.

“Conn’r” the boy replied.

“You’re both so smart,” Kelly said before she gave him the same hug and kiss as his brother. She set Connor down again.

Noah brought out his story book and asked, “P’ease... book?” politely.

“Sure, I’ll read you a story,” Kelly said as she accepted the Dr. Suess book. “Let’s get upstairs. I’m sure it’s way past your bedtime.”

I left Kelly’s bags downstairs by the front door and followed her as she followed the twins upstairs to their bedroom. The twins settled on Noah’s bed. Kelly and I took turns reading story to the boys. They were excited to see Kelly so it took almost the entire book to put the two boys asleep. I transferred Connor to his own bed.

Kelly and I went back downstairs so she could greet Liz, Andy and my parents. Mom and Dad joined us for a bowl of ice cream so they could catch up on Kelly’s life since her visit in March.

Kelly had done well this semester, though not quite as well as me. She had A’s in History 21 and Poly Sci 3. She had B’s in her other three courses. Her GPA of 3.40 was just short of Dean’s List for the semester. Still, it was a good academic performance.

We had a nice talk with my parents. Mom warned us that we couldn’t lock the basement bedroom door in the morning. She needed to get down to the laundry room in the basement to do laundry before she expected us to get up. The twins would be able to come visit us in the morning so we needed to be circumspect. Mom didn’t want them to get a premature education in the ways of the world.

Kelly and I headed downstairs to our bedroom after we finished our snack. We got comfortable (i.e. undressed to our undies). I popped a DVD in the DVD player and we sat back to watch a movie.

Kelly had picked out a chick flick, which was fine with me. I'm a romantic at heart. Not that the choice of movie mattered all that much. Making out was much more romantic than the movie. We had lost track of the plot by the time we pleasured each other orally. The movie was nearly over when we watched in our post-coital reverie.

I turned off the TV when the movie was done. Kelly and I had significant catching up to do that evening. Thanks to our fight and the end of the semester, we hadn't made love in a month. Our second time making love was less frenzied and more sensual. Kelly put on a nightie and I put on boxers before we fell asleep. We didn't want the twins to get an eyeful if they wandered down to the basement in the morning.

I woke up Saturday to the superlative feeling of someone giving my hard cock a tongue bath. I cracked an eye open and saw my lover hunched over my hardness by the soft yellow light of early morning. I let out a whimper of appreciation.

"Shhh!" Kelly cautioned. "What time do the twins get up on Saturdays?"

"Ummm.... early sometimes," I admitted. I groaned when Kelly hopped out of bed.

"I'll lock the door for a few minutes," she explained as she scampered up the stairs. "Last night wasn't enough to make up for the past month," Kelly added as she slipped back in bed with me.

Kelly was lusty. She clambered over top of me, pulled her panties aside and sank straight down onto my root. I let Kelly ride me for six or seven minutes before I moved beyond fondling her breasts. Kelly climaxed soon after I switched to teasing her clitoris. I let my lover ride me to a second climax before I let myself go.

I spewed more semen into my lover's already sperm soaked womb. Thank God for birth control. Kelly and I would be working on our second child by now if it weren't for that. I thanked Kelly lavishly for her wake up call.

Since she had done all the work in bed, I volunteered to go unlock the basement door before we went back to sleep. I drained the lizard and then rejoined my lover in bed.

I woke up hours later to the sound of one of the little kids crying at the top of the steps. I opened my eyes and looked towards the steps. Two pairs of eyes met my gaze.

"Hi Unka Ky," one twin said. I realized it was Connor as I focused on him.

"Hi," Noah added.

“Good morning boys,” I replied. I realized the crying was from Hunter, stuck on the wrong side of the baby gate at the top of the steps. He hated to be separated from the twins. I heard Mom in the next room at the washing machine.

Kelly rolled over and pulled me to her. She gave me a kiss on the cheek. “That was a wonderful night lover.”

“We have an audience,” I explained as I pulled away.

“Good morning Connor. Good morning Noah,” Kelly said cheerily as she pulled the sheet up to cover herself better.

“Hi Keh-EE” “Hi” the two boys replied.

“Would you boys like to join Kelly and me for breakfast?” I asked. Both twins nodded yes vigorously. “I’ll make French Toast for you guys. Kelly and I have to shower and get dressed. We’ll see you upstairs, OK?”

“OK Unka Ky,” Noah agreed. “Bye” Connor added as the boys headed upstairs.

I let Kelly shower first. The two of us were upstairs twenty minutes later. Noah and Connor came running to the kitchen, followed by Hunter toddling unsteadily behind them, going as fast as his little legs could manage.

“Wow! Your brother is walking now,” Kelly commented. She picked up Noah and gave him a hug and a kiss.

“Hunter learned that a couple weeks ago, right after I came home,” I explained. Kelly picked up Connor. “It was an act of desperation the first time. Hunter stole a block and needed to get away from Connor quickly.”

“Were you being nasty to Hunter?” Kelly asked.

Connor shook his head and replied, “No.” Kelly gave Connor a hug and kiss before putting him down.

Hunter didn’t remember Kelly from last winter. He glued himself to my leg and watched this strange lady who had invaded his home. Kelly stooped down to his level and asked, “Do you want a hug too?” He hid behind my leg when she came on him.

“It’s OK little bro,” I said. “This is Kelly, my girlfriend. You liked her last winter. Why don’t you say hello?”

Hunter hesitantly stepped towards Kelly. “You’ve gotten so big since I saw you the last time,” Kelly said. She held her arms out to my little brother. Noah and Connor’s trust of

my girlfriend helped him overcome his reticence. He took two unsteady steps forward and let Kelly wrap her arms around him and give him a hug and a kiss.

Hunter warmed to Kelly pretty quickly. Kelly kept the three boys entertained while I fried some bacon and then made French toast for the group. Noah and Connor each got one slice French toast chopped in small pieces. Hunter's half a slice was diced into tiny pieces that would require little chewing. My little brother had two teeth so far. On Mom's orders Hunter didn't get a slice of bacon the way Noah and Connor did.

The boys enjoyed their late morning brunch with us. Kelly and I cleaned them up and sent them off to play when we finished our breakfast. The two of us changed into swim wear and put shorts and T-shirts back on. Ed and Paige Anderson would arrive at noon to catch a ride with us to Hershey Park. I would drive the four of us over to Jeremy's house where we'd meet him, Kathy, Hal and Tammy. I'd follow Jeremy to Hershey for the day.

Penny Edwards had spent Friday night at her boyfriend Harrison's house over in York. They would meet us in Hershey in the afternoon. Brandon McCafferty wanted to come for the day but couldn't. He worked at his uncle's construction company in the summer. The company worked every day with good weather from sun up to sun down, including Saturdays. Brandon's uncle was letting him leave early, around five o'clock, so he could join us for the evening.

Penny and Harrison met us outside the front gate of the park. We headed inside to the park's Boardwalk, a water park inside the park. We did the Roller Soaker, the Waverider, the Coastal Plunge, the Tidal Force and the newest attraction, the Shore. It was a huge tidal pool with waves from zero to six feet high blasting across the crowds.

The Roller Soaker was fun. We rode a car into the air while the spectators down below shot us with water cannons. In return we bombed them with gallons of water from our seats. I was recognized by Penn State fans on the second time up.

"Hey, it's Kyle Martin," one of the kids in a Penn State T-shirt yelled. I looked down and gave my fan a wave. He nailed me with the water cannon. My friends and I did our best to soak him and his associates until we ran out of water. I met up with my tormentors/fans when we got off the ride. It was all in good fun. I talked with them for a few minutes. They asked if I could give them autographs but I couldn't. No one had paper, pens or anything else dry.

Later in the afternoon my gang of friends ran into Brendan Hayden, Greg Nowicki and their girlfriends. I introduced my teammates to my high school friends. Brendan and Jeremy hit it off right away. Soon they were deep in conversation about the intricacies of playing linebacker at BCS schools.

I invited Brendan, Greg and their girlfriends to join us for dinner. They passed. They had other plans for the evening. We grabbed dinner at Freeman's Texas BBQ. Most of us had the pit beef subs or the ribs. Jeremy couldn't resist ordering a whole turkey leg.

Dinner came with delicious grilled sweet corn and iced tea. Brandon caught up with us as we were finishing dinner. He was exhausted from a day of hard work but was ready for an evening of fun.

We headed over to the Amphitheatre after dinner. Bowser was doing a rock and roll oldies show with tribute bands playing music from 50's and 60's. The music was ancient but we enjoyed it anyway. All of us grew up hearing our parents listen to music from this era and on up to the 80's.

We started hitting as many of the roller coasters as we could squeeze in before the park closed at ten pm. We managed to ride the Stormrunner, the Sidewinder, the Great Bear, and Fahrenheit. We saved the good old Comet for the final ride of the night. It's hard to find wooden roller coasters anymore. The Comet is a true classic. Our grandparents probably rode it. It was still a blast after over half a century.

We grabbed some Turkey Hill ice cream on the way out of the park. We hung out at our cars for half an hour, talking and enjoying our evening snacks. Our group split up after that. Harrison headed back across the river to York. Penny caught a ride home with Brandon. The rest of us headed south and east for Lancaster, Paradise and home.

Kelly and I got home around 11:30 that evening. A strange car was parked in front of my house when I got home. I parked down the street a little further than usual at the end of our lot. Kelly and I found the car's owner.

My sister Liz and Nate Good, her date that night, were locked together in a tight clinch. They were exchanging a totally volcanic good night kiss. I expected the sounds of Kelly and me walking up the walk would alert them to our presence. It didn't.

I cleared my throat loudly when Kelly and I were only a few feet away. I didn't wish to be a voyeur. Nate's eyes popped open and he jumped back like I'd hit him with an electric prod.

"Umm... ummm... ummm...." Nate whined, fear making his eyes the size of saucers.

"Relax stud," Liz said soothingly. She stepped up against Nate again. "They are going to be doing the same thing we just did at the park when they get downstairs." Liz wrapped her arms around her date again, snuggling him against her body.

"Sorry to disturb you guys," I said. "Kelly and I didn't want to stare or anything, but we need to get in the front door."

"Umm.... Ummmm... I wasn't trying to take advantage of Liz... or anything," Nate finally managed to stammer.

“You were, but it’s fine,” I said reassuringly. “Second base, third base, home run – I’m fine with whatever Liz wants from you. Relax Nate.”

“I told you before,” Liz added after giving him a kiss on the cheek. “My family is cool with sex. You and I would have been using my bedroom instead a blanket at the park if the little kids weren’t home.”

But your parents …” Nate responded.

“…don’t mind,” Liz said, interrupting his protest.

“She’s right,” Kelly added. “It takes some getting used to, but the Martins are cool with teens having sex.” She chuckled. “Now my father on the other hand, would have been out here with his shotgun if he caught me kissing a boy on the front porch when I was sixteen. By the way, I’m Kelly, Kyle’s college girlfriend.”

“Nice to meet you Kelly,” Nate said. He shook hands with Kelly when Liz let his hand loose.

“If you two will give us space to get in the door,” I said. “We’ll get out of your way. Liz still has twenty minutes until curfew. You two have plenty of time to make out some more.”

Nate blushed a deep shade of red. “Umm… I can’t stay that long. I have to be home by midnight too.”

“You two have fun for as long as you can,” I responded. “We’ll get out of your way.” Kelly and I squeezed past the two horny teens and went inside.

We found Mom and Dad in the family room cuddled together watching TV. Andy had helped close at the restaurant, was beat and was asleep already. Kelly and I talked with Mom and Dad for a few minutes, telling them about our trip to Hersheypark.

We bumped into Liz in the kitchen on our way downstairs to my bedroom.

“Sorry about interrupting you outside,” I said. “You were blocking the doorway and I didn’t really have any choice.”

“It’s no problem big brother,” Liz replied. “You freaked Nate out but he’ll get over it.”

“Are the two of you a couple?” I asked. “You seemed pretty heavily into each other outside.”

“Not yet,” Liz replied. “We did the prom and two dates since that. I like him a lot. He seems to like me. I think he’s almost ready to ask me to go steady with him. At least he ought to be after tonight. It was a very good night for him.”

“Am I to gather that Nate got lucky this evening?” I asked.

Liz smirked and gave us a wink. “He got lucky twice after I gave him a blow job. He’s not bad in bed and very trainable. Not every boy will go down on you when you ask.”

“Don’t I know it,” Kelly agreed. “Your brother is the first boy that was willing to do that for me.”

“My first time was horrible,” Liz replied. “My big brother here made sure my first boyfriend learned how to please me after that time. I guess I’ve become pretty demanding of my boyfriends.”

“Nothing wrong with that girl,” Kelly replied. “IF I have anymore boyfriends, I will be expecting the same thing.” She saw the funny look on my face. “Not that I expect anyone to come after you.”

“Come on sweetie,” I countered. “Let’s go downstairs and I will show you that I am absolutely indispensable.”

“You two have fun tonight,” Liz replied. Kelly and I started down the steps. “Make sure my brother earns his keep Kelly.”

“Don’t worry, I will,” Kelly answered.

I locked the door behind us and headed down the steps to our little love nest. I demonstrated to Kelly for nearly an hour why no further boyfriends would be needed. 69, doggie style, missionary style – I made sure both of us were thoroughly satisfied.

The two of us were so sweaty and covered with bodily fluids that we shared a shower at 1:15 in the morning so we were fit for bed. We got carried away running our hands over each other’s soapy bodies. We made love one more time in the shower. We went to bed a little damp, totally satisfied, extremely clean and very exhausted. Thank God the family was skipping church on Sunday. Dad scheduled our departure for the Phillies ballpark for 10:30 am in the morning. We could catch up on our sleep.

Andy and Liz were gone Sunday morning when Kelly and I came upstairs for breakfast. They had taken Noah, Connor and Hunter over to our grandparents’ house for the day. We grabbed some cereal and juice just before my family loaded up in the mini-van for the drive down to Citizen Bank Park.

Traffic wasn’t bad that morning for the drive to Philadelphia. We were early enough that the traffic around the stadium wasn’t too bad either. Chase Utley sent us two VIP parking passes, so we drove right in and parked beside the stadium. Will and Abby met

us by the First Base Gate. The eight of us presented our tickets and trooped inside the stadium.

Chase Utley had gotten excellent tickets for us. We were in section 118, four rows behind the Phillies dugout. The players were out on the field warming up when we arrived. I gave a note Chase had mailed to me to the nearest usher. In the note Chase asked the usher to inform him when we arrived.

A couple minutes later while we were settling into our seats a bat boy jogged onto the field and talked with Chase. Chase turned straight towards us and gave us a big smile and a wave, which we returned. Chase talked to the bat boy again and then returned to warm-ups.

I found out what the second conversation was about a few minutes later. The usher returned with a note from Chase. He said warm-ups would be done in about ten minutes. Chase invited me and my family to come down to the rail at the far end of the dugout. Chase wanted to introduce us to some of the team.

The ballpark was filling with fans, nearly everyone dressed in red. Unfortunately not all of the red was Phillies apparel. The Phillies were playing the Red Sox that day and the Red Sox brought their usual travelling contingent of fans to our ballpark.

This game was a big one, if any game in May can be a big one. The Phillies were defending World Series champs. The Red Sox led the American League in wins. The Phillies led the NL East with a slim lead. The Mets were one and a half games back and the Marlins were two games back.

The Phillies took the first game of the series on Friday night behind Joe Blanton. The Red Sox came back Saturday, beating young J.A. Happ. Today, two of the best pitchers on the planet were facing each other – Cole Hamels for our team and Josh Beckett for the boys from Boston.

My family and I headed down to the rail in Section 114 when the players finished warming up. Chase apparently spotted us and headed straight for that section of railing at the end of the dugout, half a dozen of his teammates following him.

Chase warmly greeted Kelly, Dad and me by name. I introduced Mom, Andy, Liz, Will and Abby to Chase and the other Phillies. Chase introduced Ryan Howard, Jimmy Rollins, Shane Victorino, Jason Werth and Carlos Ruiz to us.

In the middle of all the introductions another Philly player jogged over and joined the group. I was shocked to see he was Cole Hamels, the starting pitcher. I never expected him to interrupt game preparations to glad hand with fans.

Cole seemed like a genuinely nice guy from talking with him, like all the rest of the Phillies we met. Cole talked with us for a couple minutes before he excused himself. One by one the Phillies headed off to the club house for their final preparations.

Chase was the last of the Phillies with us. I asked, “Did your nephew Devin make it the game?”

“No, much to his disappointment,” Chase answered. “He begged his dad and my sister Taylor to give him a ride down so he could see the Red Sox. The Ironpigs have a game this afternoon too so his dad has to work. My sister is laid up. She broke a bone in her foot a couple weeks ago. I assume Devin caught a ride to the ballpark in Allentown and is watching the Ironpigs play.”

“That’s cool,” I replied. “Tell him I said hi.”

“I’ll do that,” Chase agreed. He started to turn away and then turned back. “Are you involved in Penn State’s football camps? Sis said Devin signed up for one next month.”

“Yes, I am,” I replied. “It depends which one he signed up for. I may see him there. Coach Burton asked me to help out the one from June 24-26th.”

“Yeah, that’s the weekend he’s going,” Chase answered. “Maybe he’ll see you there. Are you helping with the coaching?”

“I’m one of four team members acting as babysitters,” I explained. “We put the kids up on a couple floors of one of the dorms near the football practice fields. Chip Brinton and I are in charge of one of the floors.”

“That’s cool,” Chase responded. “You take good care of my nephew.”

“I will,” I replied. “You have a good game today.”

“I’ll do my best,” Chase responded as he started away. He stopped by Dad and asked, “We still on for dinner Dan?”

“If you want to eat with this scruffy crew,” Dad answered.

“It’s on,” Chase answered. “My wife is looking forward to meeting you. I have Kyle’s cell number. I’ll give you a buzz when the game is over. We can coordinate schedules and get together.”

My family and I scattered around the stadium to find food for lunch. We met back at our seats and settled in for the show. It turned out to be quite a show.

Josh Beckett and Cole Hamels provided us with a classic pitcher’s duel. Both pitchers had no hitters going into the fourth inning. Jimmy Rollins managed to smack a single

into the gap to get on base. Beckett clamped down again. The Phillies hitters left Jimmy stranded on base.

The Red Sox managed to score first, in the sixth inning. J. D. Drew scorched an uncharacteristically misplaced fastball over the wall for a solo home run. Drew was greeted by rousing boos from the Phillies fans as he ran around the bases. They hadn't forgiven Drew's snub of their team fourteen seasons earlier when he was drafted by the Phillies but refused to play for them. Cole didn't lose his cool. He struck out Kevin Youkilis and Jason Bay to get out of the sixth inning.

Jimmy Rollins sharply hit a ground out to start the seventh inning. Shane Victorino worked Beckett to a full count and then drew a walk. Red Sox manager Terry Francona got things started in the bull pen immediately. Meanwhile Beckett had to face Chase Utley, one of the hottest hitters in the majors over the last month.

The Flyin' Hawaiian, Shane Victorino, took a big lead off first. Beckett tried to pick him off twice before settling down to deal with Chase. Chase took one ball and smacked the next pitch deep. It curved foul for a strike. Shane continued to distract Beckett threatening to steal second base.

Shane took off with the next pitch. He handily beat the throw by Varitek to steal second base. Chase clobbered the next pitch Beckett offered him. The Red Sox right fielder watched helplessly as the ball flew over his head into the stands opposite me. Chase and Shane trotted around to home to bring the score to 2-1 Phillies' favor.

Manager Terry Francona pulled Beckett after that. The Red Sox relievers minimized the damage in the inning, not allowing anyone else on base. Charlie Manuel brought in Ryan Madson in the eighth inning and Brad Lidge in the ninth. They nailed down the win for the Phillies.

It had been a fun game to watch from fantastic seats. It featured excellent pitching, good fielding and timely hitting. Best of all it was a Phillies victory. The gilding on the day was the scoreboard report that the Braves beat the Mets to give Philly a more comfortable lead in their division.

My family, Kelly and I hung out inside the park as the crowd thinned and departed. My phone rang fifteen minutes later. Chase suggested that we hang out awhile longer in the stadium. When things had cleared out he could get us down on the field and then give us a tour of the locker room before dinner. We agreed.

We met Chase about twenty minutes later at the proper door. He introduced us to his wife Jena, his college sweetheart. She was extremely pretty. Chase was a lucky guy to have her.

Chase led us inside and then down onto the field. Andy and I ran the bases. Andy checked out the pitcher's mound. All eight of us followed Chase through the dugout into the Phillies locker room.

It was a beautiful facility. It was nearly as large as ours back in State College. Of course with only twenty-five players on the roster, each player had more space than I did. I shared our locker room with 108 teammates.

When he finished the tour, Chase asked, "What are you interested in for dinner? Something fancy? Casual? It's my treat, whatever you would like."

"We're not dressed for fancy," Dad replied. "What would you suggest that is casual? I think that would be good for us."

"Casual would be excellent," I added.

"How about Chickies and Petes's?" Chase said. "It's a sports bar and grill nearby. They have some good seafood and a nice atmosphere."

"A sports bar and grill sounds perfect," Dad responded. "Our family doesn't need anything fancy."

"It's a few blocks away," Chase replied. "I'm probably parked in the same lot as you. Follow me over."

We followed Chase and Jena out of the stadium to a nearly empty parking lot. The game was over an hour earlier, giving all the fans plenty of time to depart. Kelly, Andy, Liz, Mom and me hopped in the mini-van with Dad. Will and Abby followed us as we headed the several blocks to the restaurant.

Chickie's and Pete's was crowded when we arrived. The hostess welcomed us and then sent us to the waiting area. She didn't recognize the Phillies second baseman. She said it would be a few minutes until they could clear and assemble a table for ten. Several other guests recognized Chase immediately.

They caused a bit of a commotion in the waiting area as they crowded around the day's hero to congratulate him on his game winning home run. The commotion attracted the attention of Pete Ciarrochi, the front man and face of the Ciarrochi family, who owned the bar and grill.

"Mr. Utley, it is so good to have you drop in on our restaurant," he gushed.

"Please call me Chase," Chase responded.

"And you must call me Pete!" Pete replied. "Would you mind posing for a photograph with me? I like to get photos with all the celebrities that stop by."

“Sure,” Chase agreed. “You’ll want to include my guest in the photo too.” Chase gave me a wink.

Pete stared at me for a few seconds, obviously not placing me. “This is Kyle Martin, the top wide receiver for the Penn State Nittany Lions,” Chase explained. Pete stared at me for a few more seconds before recognition crept onto his face.

“Yes, the Rose Bowl,” Pete said finally. “You ARE an outstanding wide receiver. You and your teammates certainly took care of Oregon last New Year’s Day.”

One of the waitresses took the photo when Chase, Pete and I posed. Pete personally seated us and promised to look in on us periodically during our meal. The waitress distributed menus to our group.

We were browsing through the menus when two gentlemen approached Chase. The younger of the two was sharply dressed in an expensive suit, blue button down shirt and tie. The second guy was dressed in a smart looking leather jacket.

The first guy walked up to Chase and said, “That’s was a hell of a game you had today Chase.”

My friend gave them a tight smile. His body language shouted ‘Be careful! Be very careful!’

Chase nodded to the two men and said, “Mike, John, thank you. How was your show today?”

“It was a great show,” the first guy answered. “The Phillies won. You hit the game winning home run. It’s always a good show when those things happen.”

The second guy asked, “You up for an interview Chase? You earned it after the way you played this afternoon.”

“No thanks guys,” Chase responded. “I’m having a quiet dinner with friends, maybe some other time.”

“You going to introduce us?” the second guy asked.

“You look familiar,” the first guy said as he stared straight at me. “I should know you, shouldn’t I?”

“Maybe,” I admitted. I get the distinct vibe from Chase that I should be extremely cautious around these two.

“This is John Clark,” Chase said, waving his hand towards the first guy. “...and this is Mike Missanelli,” as he gestured towards the second guy. “John and Mike do the Phillies Post-Game show for Channel 17 from here. John, Mike, this is the Martin family, guests and friends of mine.”

Missanelli? I remembered the name from the sports section of the Inquirer. He had a sports radio talk show too. His show generated a lot of controversy and heat. The vibe I got from Chase was on the mark. I needed to be VERY careful with these guys.

“Martin?” John Clark said. He paused a few seconds. “Kyle Martin, split end for the Nittany Lions.”

“That’s me,” I admitted.

“You had a hell of a season last year Kyle,” John said. “How do you think your team will do in the fall?”

“I think we’ll have a good season,” I replied. “I believe we will have a dominating defense. We lost a few good guys this spring but the younger guys, the ones my age, they will do a good job taking over. Tyler Madden is going to dominate in the backfield. He is a top notch safety.”

“What about offense?” Mike Missanelli asked, “You lost most of the offense to graduation this spring. How do you think your end of the team will hold up over the season?”

“We have a lot of work to do on offense,” I replied. “I believe my teammates will be up to the task of replacing the guys who graduated.”

John asked, “So who’s it going to be behind center next fall Kyle? Nicholson or Brinton?”

“I don’t know,” I answered carefully. “They both are very good quarterbacks.”

“Can Nicholson recover from his injuries in time to play in September?” John asked.

“Jay promised me he would be ready in August when camp starts,” I replied. “No one is more determined to succeed or will work harder than him.”

“So you’re saying Brinton doesn’t have a chance to win the starter’s job?” John asked.

“Not at all,” I answered. “Chip has been working out and practicing routes with the receivers all winter and spring. He’s got a lot of talent. Chip has a chance to be our starter.”

“If you could pick one, which quarterback would you prefer?” Mike asked, pressing in closer to me.

“I can’t pick one,” I countered. “Jay is one of my closest friends on the team. We’re going to be roommates this fall.”

“So you think your friend Nicholson is the better man?” John asked.

“Chip is has been my friend for three years,” I explained. “He and I are working together this summer as life guards at a camp up in Lancaster County. We’re going to work out together every day. I really have no preference between the two quarterbacks. I will go out and catch the ball for whoever Coach Burton puts on the field.”

“Thank you Kyle,” Mike said. “That was very interesting.” He turned towards Chase. “You should come on my show sometime. The fans would enjoy it.”

“You’ll have to arrange that through the Phillies PR department,” Chase countered.

“Thank you for talking with us Kyle,” John added before they departed. “Hell of a game today Chase. Enjoy your meal folks.”

Chase gave the two men time to get to the other side of the restaurant before he said anything. “That was deftly done Kyle.”

“I remembered the name Missanelli from the papers,” I explained. “He has a radio show that is... uh, controversial?”

“That’s a polite way to put it,” Chase said. “Missanelli would have loved it if you trashed one of the quarterbacks. He would have had a field day on his program tomorrow morning. You should be fine with your comments. You didn’t give him any fodder for his mill.” Chase leaned in closer, winked and said conspiratorially, “So, who do you prefer at quarterback?”

“I REALLY have no preference,” I answered. “Both guys are close friends. I can work with either of them.” I returned Chase’s wink. “I do have a prediction. Even though Chip has slightly more playing time than Jay, I think Jay will win the battle to start. Jay’s extra year and a half in the program will be the difference. Jay knows the playbook stone cold. Chip has learned all the plays but still needs to think about them when he executes them. At our level a player doesn’t have time to think through the play. He has to react and go.”

We let the topic of the Nittany Lions drop after that. Everyone at the table was much more interested in hearing stories about the Phillies and the premier second baseman in baseball.

The waitress came by and took our orders. I found a fascinating item on the menu and had to try it – a lobster cheese steak. Kelly decided to try the hard shell crabs at Abby's prompting. Chase ordered a boatload of Chickie's wings, mozzarella sticks and fried calamari for us to snack on while the cooks prepared our entrees.

The appetizers promised that we would have an excellent meal. The wings were juicy and well spiced. The breading on the calamari was nice and light. They came with a tasty dipping sauce. The mozzarella sticks were "to die for".

A steady stream of fans stopped by our table as we ate to congratulate Chase on his performance that afternoon. A couple people recognized me too.

I was impressed with the patience that Chase showed. He was invariably friendly to his fans. He obliged them with autographs whenever requested. I was impressed with the way this superstar handled himself. He took baseball seriously but not all the fame and trappings. He was a very down to earth, friendly guy. If my fame grew beyond State College I would do well to emulate him.

Our dinners arrived about twenty minutes later. We talked as we ate our food. Chase engaged with everyone. He learned about Will and Abby's schooling. He talked with Andy about the University of Delaware. We had a very pleasant dinner with excellent food. My lobster cheese steak was tasty. It was a combination I never would have thought of. Chickie's Crab Fries were excellent, living up to their reputation.

We lingered over dinner, enjoying the good food and company. Good things must eventually end. After Chase paid the check Dad commented, "Thanks for your hospitality to my family Chase. This was a wonderful afternoon and evening."

"It was my pleasure Dan," Chase responded. "Your son was very generous with his time and help last fall arranging for my nephew and me to attend a Penn State game. This is the best way I know to say thank you to Kyle."

"That was no sweat," I said. "It was easy to get a star like you into one of our games. My teammates and coaches enjoyed your visit." I gave him a wink. "I got two free weeks of laundry service in the deal too. Let me know if you and Devin want to visit again. I'm sure I could set it up."

"That's very generous," Chase answered. "I may take you up on that in the fall."

Kelly and the rest of my family thanked Chase and Jena as we left the restaurant and headed to our cars. All of us waved good bye as Chase and his wife hopped in their car and took off for home. We hung out together in the parking lot for a few minutes talking with Will and Abby, coordinating their next visit home. They were coming back to Paradise in a week and a half for Andy's graduation and staying until Will, Abby and I headed to camp a few days later.

Kelly hung out in the basement Sunday night while Andy, Ed, Jeremy, Hal and I did our evening workout. Ed, Jeremy and Hal were envious of us when we told them about our trip to the Phillies game and our dinner with Chase Utley.

“I know Kyle trains every day for football,” Kelly observed as we finished our work with the weights. “I had no idea you guys did this strenuous a workout.”

I was feeling playful. “We’re going running now. Do you want to come along sweetie?”

“Running?” Kelly asked, half laughing and half sputtering. “How far are you going?”

“Only three miles,” I answered. “Easy little run.”

“Yeah, you should join us Kelly.” “Piece of cake.” “It’ll be fun.” Ed, Andy and Jeremy added.

“I don’t think so,” Kelly replied. “I’ll get all hot and sweaty. I think I’ll let the running to the athletes. I’ll stick around here and save my energy for later tonight. I hope you don’t wear yourself out with the run Kyle. I expect a proper good bye before I leave in the morning.”

“Don’t you worry sweetie,” I countered. “I’ll give you a good bye you’ll never forget!”

“Maybe I shouldn’t let you in bed tonight,” Kelly teased. “You’re going out and getting all sweaty.”

“Showering can be fun,” I replied. “Especially together.” I gave Kelly me a playful swat on the behind.

“Jesus!” Jeremy exclaimed. “Why don’t you two get a room!”

“We have a room!” I replied. “You’re in it.”

“C’mon loverboy,” Ed said, grabbing me by the shoulder. “Do your run then you can come back and take care of your woman.”

“Don’t start without me,” I called as Ed pushed me up the steps.

“Warm up maybe, but not start without you,” Kelly called out as we left. “Run fast...”

As we left the house Ed commented, “You really love this girl don’t you?”

“Totally and completely,” I replied.

“I don’t know how you do that,” Ed said. “I have too much fun playing around.”

“You’ll see one day,” I said.

“Kyle’s got it right,” Jeremy added.

“Said by the guy who’s been virtually married for the last six years,” Ed countered.

“And loving it!” Jeremy said.

The five of us took off for our run. Half an hour later I said good bye to my friends and headed downstairs to my lover. Kelly helped me clean the sweat off in the shower. She gave me a shoulder and neck rub to help me relax. I returned the favor.

Things escalated in the shower when I clasped my arms around her while she had her back to me and began fondling her breasts. Kelly let me play with her while I nibbled her ears and kissed her neck from the back.

Kelly turned around and kneeled down after a few minutes of my attention. She engulfed my hard knob in her mouth and proceeded to give it a tongue bath. Kelly stopped after a minute and turned around to present her backside to me.

“Do me in the back Kyle,” Kelly cooed. I soaped up her backside, rinsed it and then wormed a finger inside my lover to loosen her up. I carefully inserted a second and then a third finger. Kelly grew more excited as I stimulated her.

“I’m ready loverboy,” Kelly purred. “Gimme that big cock of yours.” Kelly braced herself against the shower wall while I got in position. I held Kelly’s ass cheeks apart and gently pressed the knob of my cock against her sphincter until it yielded.

“Mmmmm... yeah,” Kelly purred as I thrust my shaft deep into her insides. I thrust slowly at first as Kelly got used my anal invasion. I picked up speed gradually, rutting and thrusting away. Our bodies banged together rhythmically as we screwed.

We humped together for several minutes, Kelly thrusting her ass back at me as my slapped into her. Kelly leaned against the wall with one hand while she used the other to diddle her clitoris. My lover managed to stifle a scream as she orgasmed. I tried to continue thrusting but her spasming sphincter clenching around my cock was too much for me.

I growled and thrust hard, driving my cock in to the hilt and smashing Kelly against the shower wall. I gave her a series of pelvic thrusts as my balls blasted spurt after spurt of cum into her rectum. I staggered away, pulling free of Kelly when I was spent. Kelly turned around and sagged back against the wall.

“God! The things you do to me Kyle,” Kelly groaned. “If my priest...” she laughed and added, “...or my parents ever knew the things we do. We are so bad together.”

“And you love it,” I added.

“Yes, I do!” Kelly answered.

Anal sex in a shower is convenient. The two of us washed each other clean again after we recovered our wits. We helped each other dry off and then dressed in sweat pants and T-shirts so we would be decent.

The two of us grabbed some ice cream from the refrigerator and joined Mom, Dad, Andy and Liz in the family room. We watched a movie until eleven o’clock. Kelly thanked my family for their hospitality this weekend. My family wished Kelly a safe trip home tomorrow. Liz and Andy headed to bed. They had school tomorrow. Kelly and I went back downstairs.

Kelly and I stripped down and climbed in bed. Our second lovemaking session for the night was slower and gentler than our urgent coupling in the shower. We made out some; I brought Kelly to climax with cunnilingus before we joined ourselves together. Kelly came twice before I squirted my semen into her belly.

My lover wasn’t satisfied yet. She wanted one more time since we wouldn’t be together again until Zack’s wedding in a month. I let her ride me until she was finally contented, two more orgasms later. The two of us fell asleep tangled together, exhausted and content.

Kelly and I woke up around ten o’clock on Monday morning. The two of us couldn’t resist making love one more time before she departed for home. I gave my lover a good hard pounding, just the way she wanted. The memory would need to last a month. We showered separately, to avoid further distractions. Kelly wanted to be on the road by 11:30 so she would be home before afternoon traffic made the roads in Pittsburgh miserable.

I made scrambled eggs and sausage for the two of us while she packed her bags. I helped Kelly carry her bags out to her car when we were done eating.

“I’m going to miss you,” I said as Kelly climbed in her car. “I’ll see you Friday evening, June 24th at the rehearsal dinner.”

“No. Didn’t you hear Abby and me talking yesterday?” Kelly replied. “She invited me to spend Thursday night at her cabin. I’ll see you then.”

“You’re visiting camp?” I asked. “I missed that.”

“Maybe you can spend the night with me,” Kelly said. “I’m sure Will and Abby wouldn’t mind.”

“They might not but the camp director will,” I replied. “Guys get fired for sleeping with a girl at camp. Fun will have to wait until Friday night. You’re going to reserve a hotel room at the Lantern Lodge, right?”

“Yes, I already made the reservations for Friday and Saturday nights,” Kelly answered.

“Excellent,” I said.

“There is no way you can get free earlier?” Kelly asked. “I would be willing to get rent a room for Thursday night if you can get out of camp.”

“There is no way honey,” I explained. “Will and I have classes to teach on Friday and then we have to process and sign some three hundred merit badge approvals and partials. It’s going to be a minor miracle for us to get the Zack’s rehearsal dinner at 6:30 Friday night.”

“Oh well, a girl can hope,” Kelly said. “I guess I’ll see you in camp Thursday night.”

“Thursday night – I promise lots of hugs and kisses,” I said. I leaned in the car window and gave Kelly a heavy duty kiss. “I love you honey.”

“I love you too,” Kelly answered. I pulled out of her car window and waved as Kelly pulled away and headed down the street.

Damn, summers are hard. I have two more summers apart from my lover before we could be together permanently.

I got back to my summer routine – make suppers for my family, coach the high school kids Tuesday and Thursday afternoons and hang out with Ed. Jeremy and Hal started their summer jobs that Monday. Ed and I still had a couple weeks to goof off before scout camp started.

Coaching the high school kids was rewarding. I could see them progress from last year, even from two weeks earlier when I started working with them. Matt Sauder was outstanding at quarterback.

I had encouraged Logan Mitchell, the starting quarterback at the beginning of last season, to work hard so he would have a shot at starting this fall. Logan had improved a lot since last year. Unfortunately with his limited physical gifts, the best he would ever be was a decent high school quarterback.

Matt Sauder had made a lot of mistakes last season as a sophomore and still led the team deep into the playoffs. He cut down the mistakes and had improved his techniques. If Matt kept his head screwed on right and didn't get hurt, he was going to be heavily recruited by big time college programs. In some ways I thought Matt was ahead of Ed Fritz when Ed was a sophomore.

Davey Mitchell was progressing at wide receiver. He was going to benefit from Penn State's football camp and my tutelage this summer. The four tight ends I worked with did well too. Surprisingly the best of the group was Gary Harrison, just finishing eighth grade. Gary was going to give Coach Caffrey a tough decision later this summer. Could he handle varsity yet? Gary very well could be the third guy in our high school to make varsity as a freshman this fall.

Tuesday was the seniors' final day of school. Andy and Tex planned to continue coaching the football drills until the rest of the kids' school year was done the following week.

Andy goofed off and relaxed with friends Wednesday and Thursday. The seniors had graduation practice Friday morning. Thankfully the thunderstorms we had Thursday night and Friday morning cleared out in time for the school to have graduation outside in Harrison Stadium.

My parents decided the little kids should come along to see their daddy's or big brother's graduation. Mom took care of Hunter, I took Connor and Liz looked after Noah. Dad's job was to take a million pictures of the proceedings.

We had to wait through 107 graduates before the school district superintendant intoned, "Andrew Michael Martin." Andy strode across the stage, accepted his diploma from the superintendant, shook hands with the chairman of the school board and walked off stage. Our whole family, including Connor and Noah, cheered for Andy as he received his diploma.

Noah, Connor and Hunter behaved pretty well for young kids during the long ceremony. Mom gave each boy a piece of candy later in the ceremony to keep them quiet. We had to fight our way though a big crowd at the end of the ceremony to find my brother.

He was hanging out with his best friend Eric Connell, Eric's girlfriend Sammy Hoover, Troy Smith, Troy's girlfriend Kaitlyn and Heather Miller. They were reminiscing about their time together in Venturers. The six planned go to Pinchot State Park for a few days next week for Seniors Week instead of going to the beach.

My family and I congratulated Andy and his friends on their graduation. I had a chance to talk more with Andy's friends. I knew Eric was attending MIT in the fall for computer programming. I found out he and Sammy were staying together. She was attending Boston College. Troy was headed south for the University of Maryland. Kaitlyn was going across the state to the University of Pittsburgh.

I was pleasantly surprised when Heather told me she was accepted into the School of Architecture at Carnegie Mellon. I told Heather how I had seriously considered becoming an architect before finally choosing teaching and coaching football instead. I wished Heather luck with her studies.

The twins and their little uncle were a hit with Andy's friends. Troy, Kaitlyn and Heather played with the little kids. Eric and Sammy watched. They were on a first name basis with the twins. "Ehr-wick" and "Sammy" were well known to the boys. They visited Andy and the twins nearly every day.

I sat beside Andy on the way home from graduation. "Congratulations little brother," I said. "I'm proud you made it through."

"It wasn't a big deal," Andy replied modestly.

"Your camping trip sounds like fun," I commented. "Three couples on a three day camping trip. No parents, no jobs, no responsibilities. I guess you guys will have some fun."

"It's two couples and two spares Kyle," Andy corrected. "I am bringing my own tent and so is Heather."

"No sleeping together?" I asked.

"No, we're just friends," Andy replied.

"I'll believe that when I see it," I said. "You've had a thing for Heather Miller since you were twelve years old."

"That's past," Andy said. "We're just good friends now."

"Betcha' ten dollars you are more than friends by the end of the camping trip," I challenged.

"I'll take that bet," Andy said smiling. "That's easy money. Nothing is going to happen between Heather and me."

I didn't say more. I knew the feelings that Andy and Heather were denying burned just as hot as when they dated three years ago. The embers from that fire still burned, even if the pair thought they were gone. I knew from past experience that given an opportunity, they would reunite. Heather didn't have a boyfriend now. Three days camping with Andy was plenty of opportunity. The ten dollars was going to be easy money – my easy money!

Mom and Dad did a graduation party for Andy on Sunday afternoon and evening. Andy's friends and our relatives came to celebrate with my brother. I was allowed to invite my friends too. Hal, Tammy, Jeremy, Kathy, Ed and Penny all came to enjoy the food. We also relieved Mom, Dad and Andy of responsibility for the little kids.

Mom and Abby played hostesses. Dad and Will manned the grill. My friends and I had fun looking after my adorable little nephews and brother. The twins ran around the back yard, meeting and getting hugs and kisses from our friends and relatives. Little Hunter toddled along after them as fast as his little legs would carry him.

Will, Eric and I found some time to talk about how the aquatic department would operate over the summer. Eric was co-assistant aquatics director at the boat yard. I was assistant director in charge of the pool. Will talked about how we would run check in, polar bear swims, night swims, and mile swims. We agreed that between Will, me, Eric, Dustin and probably Chip Brinton, we would have a good leadership team in aquatics. The five of us would have to supervise ten junior staff members and four CITs each week.

Dad grilled hot dogs and hamburgers half the afternoon, until the crowd was stuffed with food. Mom had lots of side dishes and salads and a ton of desserts. The party went on until around five o'clock. My friends and I were discharged from our babysitting duties when we put the boys down for their afternoon nap around three o'clock.

It was a good party, though not as big as the bash for Will, me, Penny and her sister Niki two years ago. It probably wouldn't be as big as the one for Liz, me, and hopefully Kelly two years from now.

Andy took off with his friends for his camping trip Monday around lunch time. The twins didn't think anything about their dad being missing at dinner that night. They were used to him frequently being at work at dinner time. They didn't miss him at bedtime either. I put them to sleep that evening reading "The Cat in the Hat."

The whole family wondered how the boys would take things when they realized their dad was still gone on Tuesday. He hadn't left them overnight since they were born. Hopefully the boys would be OK. If not, it was going to be a long second half of the summer for Mom, Dad and Liz. Andy left for college on July 29th and wouldn't be able to get home until Labor Day weekend, September 5th.

The school year finished at 11:50 am on Tuesday. Even though Andy, Tex Johanson and the other seniors were gone, the football players asked for one final practice before summer. Most of the seniors were away on vacation like Andy. Tex Johanson had different summer planned. He flew down to Austin, Texas on Sunday to register for summer term. He wanted to get started learning the Longhorn playbook as soon as possible.

Ed, Jeremy, Hal, Kenny, Jake and I agreed to run it. The six of us suggested and the players agreed to make our final practice a scrimmage instead of simple passing drills. The offensive and defensive linemen were invited. We would be playing with everyone live – no players, quarterbacks included, were protected from contact.

Ed and Jeremy coached one team. Kenny Weaver and I coached the other team. Hal and Jake Kring worked the game as impartial referees. Coach Caffrey let us use old practice jerseys for the scrimmage. My team dressed in white jerseys. Ed's team was in red jerseys.

On Monday Ed, Kenny, Jeremy and I got together and picked up teams from the pool of available players. We went over the ground rules. Varsity players could play the first half. JV could play first half and third quarter. The fourth quarter would be strictly for seventh and eighth grade players. We didn't want 250 pound juniors playing against 105 pound seventh graders. Somebody could get hurt that way.

By a lucky coin flip Monday, I had Matt Sauder on my team. Ed picked up Cody Stevens and Dave Mitchell. I surprised Ed when we got the tight end position. I picked Gary Harrison first, over last year's varsity tight end, Wilson Woodrow. All of us thought we had done a nice job of balancing the two teams.

Eighty-two kids showed up for the scrimmage. I played Matt Sauder the entire first half of the scrimmage. Ed and I both called plays from the Wolverines' playbook but our teams reflected our college team's style anyway. Ed had quarterback draws and sweeps, and wide receivers all over the place – just like his Gators.

I called a more conventional, though wide open game. I used three wide receivers just like the Nittany Lions (and Coach Caffrey during the high school season). I ran the ball with the tailback and fullback more than Ed's team.

It was a wild, high scoring game as Jeremy tried to find ways to stop my offense and Kenny tried to slow down Ed's guys. I only had two tight ends, Gary Harrison and Tom Wenger, an undersized seventh grader. Gary played two and a half quarters for me. Tom played the rest of the way.

Gary ended up playing a decisive part in the game. My team was leading 21-20 as the second quarter was winding down. Matt Sauder hit Gary across the middle in traffic for a ten yard catch. The varsity strong side linebacker didn't wrap Gary up when he went for the tackle. Gary broke free and raced down the field scoring a touchdown for us.

My "draft pick" strategy paid off in the second half. Mike Bensinger, a confident, lanky ninth grader took over at QB for Matt. Gary Harrison was an eighth grader, so he was eligible to continue playing. I had Mike keep passing Gary the ball over the middle, play after play. Gary outweighed all of Jeremy's linebackers by ten or twenty pounds. Mike

and Gary took our team down the field twice for scores in the third quarter to give us a 38-20 lead.

Ed's QB, Tyler Snavely, an eighth grader, couldn't keep up with the fast placed plays Ed tried to run to counter my team's scoring. I put in seventh grader Kevin Burkholder at quarterback in the fourth quarter. I kept things real simple for Kevin, asking him just to hand off the ball and occasionally hit a receiver five yards deep.

Tyler Snavely managed to score one touchdown when Ed simplified his play calling. Still my team won 38-27. Everyone had fun and no one got hurt during the scrimmage. I thought the guys picked up some valuable experience, especially the younger kids playing at varsity speed.

Coach Caffrey and Coach Wyndham had observed the scrimmage from the stands. They came down to meet Ed, Jeremy, and the other volunteer coaches for the scrimmage as the gaggle of kids headed home.

"What did you think coach?" I asked as they approached us.

"You guys sure called a lot of passes," Coach Caffrey observed.

"What did you expect from a quarterback and a wide receiver?" Coach Wyndham asked. Coach Wyndham coached our team's defense.

"And you're saying you don't like to pass Coach Caffrey?" I asked.

"Yes, I guess I do enjoy that," Coach Caffrey admitted.

"I thought you were crazy yesterday when you picked Harrison as your tight end," Ed said. "I thought you were being sentimental."

"I knew what I was doing," I replied. "I coached Gary for two weeks. He's a talent."

"Yeah," Jeremy agreed. "I couldn't find any linebacker who could cover that guy. I certainly didn't expect that."

"Gary held his own playing against the varsity," Ed commented. "He dominated when he played against JV kids."

"Have you thought about where you are going to play Gary next fall Coach?" I asked.

"Today was an eye opener," Coach Caffrey replied. "I had expected him to play another year on JV. Do you think he is ready for varsity Kyle?"

“Maybe,” I said. “If Gary stays on JV in the fall he is going to dominate like he did in the third quarter. He’s good sized, has sweet hands and doesn’t mind catching in traffic. I think you should take a good look at him at football camp.”

“He needs work on blocking,” Coach Caffrey observed.

“He does,” I agreed. “I only had two weeks to work with him. I’ll work with him on blocking at scout camp this summer. He’ll be better in August.”

“You’re going to teach someone how to block?” Jeremy cackled. “That’s rich.”

“I’ve gotten much better this winter,” I explained. “I have been working with my roommate to improve my technique.”

“I’ll take your recommendation for Harrison under advisement,” Coach Caffrey said. “Thank you for your help with the team this month. I believe you gentlemen have given our team a big assist.”

“My pleasure coach,” “No problem Coach,” “Count on me again next year,” were among the chorus of responses to our former coach’s thanks and praise. The coaches headed back to the school building. We six college players and ersatz coaches gathered up our things.

“Do you really think you can block worth shit Kyle?” Jeremy challenged.

“I’ve been working hard over the winter,” I said.

“Show me what you got,” Jeremy said.

“What?” I asked, confused at what my friend was proposing.

Jeremy dropped down into a three point stance. “Drop and show me what you got.”

“Are you serious?” I asked. Jeremy nodded yes. I dropped down into a three point stance in front of my buddy. Jeremy outweighs me by fifty pounds and probably bench presses twice the weight I do. I was going to get creamed. I decided that I would go down fighting regardless of outcome.

“Give us a count Ed,” Jeremy directed.

“On three,” Ed said. “Hut.... Hut.... Hut!”

I fired off, staying as low as I could. I managed to hit Jeremy in the thighs. I drove forward as Jeremy grabbed and tried to yank me aside. I got leverage, lifted and pushed Jeremy backwards. To my surprise and Jeremy’s shock, Jeremy went over backwards, landing on his ass. I stood up as our friends laughed at Jeremy.

“How the hell did you...” Jeremy growled as he picked himself off the ground

“You remember Damian Thompson, my roommate, don’t you?” I said. “The running back from Strong Vincent when we played them for the state championship? He has been working with me.”

“Thompson?” Jeremy asked.

“You remember Damian,” I said. “He’s the guy that kept you off my ass two seasons ago when you were trying stop my punt and kick returns.”

“Thompson,” Jeremy said nodding. “I remember him now. I guess he’s done a good job.”

I wanted to help my friend save face a little. “You went easy on me, didn’t you?” I asked.

“You’re right,” Jeremy agreed. “I didn’t want to hurt you.”

We let things drop at that. I knew part of the reason I beat Jeremy was surprise. He really didn’t expect me, a skinny wide receiver, to put much effort into blocking him, a big old linebacker. If we had tried it again, he definitely would have beaten me. The six of us headed off to our cars and home.

The twins were upset by Tuesday night that their daddy wasn’t around. Liz and I did our best to keep them occupied that evening. Mom let them have a special bed time treat and I read them “The Cat in the Hat” a second night in a row.

The twins were pretty upset when they got home from day care on Wednesday afternoon and daddy wasn’t home. They moped around like little lost puppies without their mother. They clung to me, Liz or Mom, whoever was most convenient while we got supper ready.

Andy was expected home after dinner. A phone call from Andy after dinner didn’t help. He and his friends decided to take an afternoon hike and get in a little more swimming before they came home. He wasn’t sure he would be home before his boys went to bed.

Hunter was in a playful, chipper mood when I took the boys upstairs for their bedtime story that evening. The twins were down in the dumps. I read them their favorite book for the third night in a row but they were barely interested.

I was half way through the story when we heard someone large coming up the steps. I knew the footsteps were too heavy to be Mom’s or Liz’s. The person was coming up the steps too quick to be Dad. The twins both knew too.

“Where are my boys?” a voice outside their door mock-growled. “Where are they?”

The twins’ faces lit up and they leapt out of bed. “Daddy!” “Daddy!” they shouted as they skipped across the room to meet Andy. He stepped into the room and knelt down to hug his sons. He was engulfed by ecstatic boys delighted to finally see their father.

The tumult startled poor drowsy Hunter. I had to soothe him while Andy and the twins exchanged hugs and kisses. I held Hunter while the twins cuddled against their dad while he read them the bedtime story from the beginning. All three boys were safely asleep and tucked in bed ten minutes later.

“Did you have a good trip?” I asked as we headed downstairs again.

“It was great,” Andy replied. “Sleep in, hang out with my friends, not have any responsibilities – it was great. I got to feel like a kid again.”

“I’m glad,” I said. “You deserve that.”

Andy pulled a ten dollar bill out of his wallet when we got to the bottom of the steps. “I owe you this.” I gave my brother a confused look. “You know, the bet. Me and Heather...”

“OH! That bet,” I said as I took the ten. “That’s good for you. I guess it’s been a long time.”

“A VERY long time,” Andy agreed.

“Why don’t you and Heather stop pretending not to like each other and JUST START DATING?” I asked. “You drive each other crazy. Why don’t you just accept it and become a couple?”

“I had two chances already with Heather and blew them,” Andy answered. “The best I can do is to be friends with her, nothing more. Anyway, even if I did convince Heather to be my girlfriend again, I leave for Delaware in six weeks. She leaves for Pittsburgh in eight.”

“Hopefully you’ll find a cute coed at college,” I suggested.

“Hopefully,” Andy agreed. “One that likes kids.”

I spent Thursday and Friday that week collecting and packing my things for scout camp and for school. I had the same plan as last year for the last couple days before football

camp. Spend as much time with Kelly as possible and as little time packing for school. To that end, I had nearly everything packed for school before I left for camp.

I received the confirmation letter from the housing department at Penn State on Friday morning. It said that I would be sharing Apartment #12 in the Nittany Apartments with Trevor Conwell, Jason Nicholson and Damian Thompson in the fall. The best news of all was the small notation on the card – “Townhouse”. We had scored a premium apartment where each of us had our own bedroom. Excellent!

Kelly and I wrote each other nearly every day since she left after her visit. Things were going well. Our relationship hadn’t suffered from our fight about drinking. Eventually in the fall the two of us would need to sit down and have a rational talk about it. I wasn’t in any hurry for the talk. Things could continue the way they had for now with us.

My friends and I decided to have one more night out together before Ed and I headed to camp for the rest of our vacation. Jonathan Goff, the well known impressionist and comedian, was doing a show at Long’s Park outside Lancaster on Friday night. We brought blankets or lawn chairs since the show was being held in the amphitheater.

Goff had appeared on many talk shows, late night shows and comedy specials over the years. He wasn’t a top flight comedian, but he was nationally recognized. He did a fantastic ninety minute show. His impressions were pitch perfect. We nearly died laughing at his jokes. The show went by so quick.

We stopped Friendly’s Restaurant for ice cream over on Lincoln Highway East on the way home. We hung out together at the restaurant for nearly an hour, talking about our summer plans. We agreed to do one more group outing at the end of July, the Thursday before we had to head to football camp. I hoped Kelly would be able to make it early enough to join us that evening.

We said our good-byes outside the restaurant and headed for our homes. The past month had been a great vacation but I was ready for camp – even though I had to get up early every morning, had to work fourteen hours a day, seven days a week and had no privacy at all. It’s time for scout camp – and I love it!

(To be continued)