

Lost and Found

Part 5

By Douglas Fox

Chapter 41

Saturday, June 11th

I woke to the sound of my cell phone ringing. Groggily I answered, “Yeah?”

“GET YOUR ASS OUT OF BED LITTLE BROTHER!” my brother Will commanded.
“We got work to do at camp today.”

“I said I would be there by one o’clock,” I replied. “I’ll be there. I just want to enjoy one more morning of sleeping in.”

“One o’clock sharp!” Will said.

“I’ll be there,” I agreed before I clicked my phone off. Will could just leave me a message on my voice mail if he called to bother me again. I slept another hour before showering, getting dressed in my uniform and heading out.

Noah, Connor and Hunter got hugs and kisses before I left. I said good bye to Mom, Dad and Liz before I left. Andy was at work. I had said good bye to him last night. I hopped in my car and headed for camp. I grabbed some lunch on the north side of Lancaster. I pulled into the parking lot at camp around 12:45, earlier than I promised my brother (and boss).

I checked in at the office with Rob Young. Rob was returning as program director again this year. We talked for a couple minutes then Rob sent me in to see Mr. Holloway, the camp director.

“Kyle, it’s good to have you back at camp,” Mr. Holloway said as he stepped from behind his desk and shook my hand.

“It’s good to be here sir,” I replied.

“Don’t stand on formality Kyle,” Mr. hallway replied. “You’re senior staff now. Call me John.”

“OK, I will... John,” I agreed.

“Your brother and sister-in-law arrived about half an hour ago. Get your things in a tent, see Abby with your medical and then get over to the pool. Your brother is anxious to get things set up over there.”

“I know,” I agreed. “He woke me out of a sound sleep to make sure I would be here on time.”

“That sounds like your brother,” John said. “You better get to the health lodge, see Abby and then get over to the pool.”

“On the way,” I said as I headed out the door.

Abby gave my medical form a pro forma look-over and sent me on the pool. Will was working on cleaning the pool office. He sent me to clean the staff showers while we waited for senior staff to show up for their swim tests.

When I finished with the showers I said, “All done Will,” as I set down the mop and bucket.

“Excellent,” he replied. “Hop in the pool and take your swim test.”

“Swim test?” I teased. “Why in the hell does the assistant aquatics director need to do a swim test?” I knew the BSA policy but I couldn’t resist tweaking my brother.

“Every person in a scout camp takes a swim test,” Will answered patiently. “You know that.”

I headed down to the deep end of the pool as I talked, Will following me. “Who gave you your swim test?”

“Course director at National Camp School,” Will said.

I stood at the side waiting for Will to tell me to go. I jumped in when he gave me a nod. When I came to the surface I yelled, “What happens if I don’t pass this test?”

I took off down the pool. Will yelled back, “You’re pretty handy with that bucket and mop. I could put you in charge of cleaning up this place.”

I flew through the first three lengths using freestyle and then rolled over on my back. I used my best form on the elementary backstroke as I glided back to the deep end of the pool. Will pulled me out seconds after I started floating on my back.

“Red, white and blue,” Will said. The two of us walked back to the office. Will made out a buddy tag for me, colored it in and handed it to me. I placed the tag on the buddy board in the staff section.

A steady stream of senior staff came to the pool for their swim tests over the next hour. It was reunion time for our staff. Almost everyone had worked at our camp previous years. Paul Carpenter, the shooting sports director, was the only new hire among the senior staff. Ed Fritz, Eric Connell and Dustin Carter were being promoted to senior staff this year. Nancy Clark was head cook again. Mike Lafferty was running campcraft for his second year. Sean Clark had the nature department again. Sue Smith was in here for her tenth year as handicraft director. Dan Beiler would supervise the CITs. Eric got permission for Sammy Hoover to arrive a day early so she could ride to camp with him. Sammy was Sue's assistant director this season.

Will briefed Dustin, Eric and me about pool operation after the swim tests were over. Any of the four of us would need to be able to regulate the chlorination system, filters and pumps during the summer.

Will opened up the pool from four to five pm for a staff swim. Nancy cooked a nice dinner for us. After dinner John and Rob reviewed the training plans and daily schedule for the staff. I volunteered to give the Effective Teaching lecture on Monday evening. Others volunteered to lead various training sessions during the week.

During the day on Monday and Tuesday the staff would finish erecting tents and setting up campsites in the troop's camps. The OA (Order of the Arrow) had done good work the previous weekend but hadn't finished all the set up at camp. Wednesday, Thursday and Friday would be spent setting up our merit badge areas and reviewing the teaching sessions for each merit badge.

Will and I would have the whole staff at the pool on Wednesday working on Swimming and Lifesaving skills. Thursday Dustin and Eric would check out the entire aquatics staff with the rowboats and canoes. Will wanted every staff member to be able to teach anything in our program area.

Eric, Ed and I set up the computers in the staff lounge that evening. I wanted to be able to keep in touch with my sweetie. I sent an e-mail off to Kelly before Ed and I headed back to our tent to work out.

"Do you mind if I join you guys?" Dustin asked.

"Sure man," Ed said. "You're always welcome."

"Absolutely," I agreed. "It's good to stay in shape even if you don't have to worry about playing football anymore."

"Actually," Dustin responded. "I may still be playing football."

"Oh? Last summer you told me you didn't plan to play football in college," I said.
"What happened?"

“After I confirmed my acceptance at Shippensburg the football coach called me and asked me to try out for the team,” Dustin explained. “I’ll be a walk-on and I’m not guaranteed a spot on the team. Still, it’s football and I love it.”

“Good for you Dustin,” I said.

“Who knows?” Dustin replied. “Maybe I’ve learned enough trying to cover you in the past three summers so that I can play decently against other Division II players.”

“Let’s see if we can get you ready for college football,” Ed said.

The three of us lifted and then took off out the camp road for the entrance. Dustin did a good job keeping up with us on the three and a half mile run. It was impressive that he kept up with us given the training regimen Ed and I had been on for the past six years.

Will, Eric, Dustin and I cleaned the pool Sunday after breakfast. Ed, Dustin and I used our free time later in the morning to toss the football around and to relax. The remainder of the staff came in after lunch. Will, Eric, Dustin and I ran all twenty-seven junior staffers and 18 CITs through swim tests.

Chip Brinton was one of the first to arrive at the pool. We exchanged high fives when we met. “What do you think of our camp?”

“Nice,” Chip agreed. “It’s different but it looks well kept. I love this new pool.”

“New?” I asked incredulously. “They built the pool when the camp opened. That was in 1969.”

“Exactly,” Chip replied. “Camp Horseshoe’s pool is almost eighty years old. Everything is about tradition at my camp.”

“Cool it with the ‘my camp’ around here,” I said. “We take pride in our camp. I don’t want the other guys getting bent out of shape while you praise your camp. You work here this summer.”

“Point taken,” Chip replied. “I like my camp here,” as he gestured an arm towards the office and dining hall. “What’s next boss?”

“Go see Eric down at the end of the pool for your swim test,” I directed. “After that you can go move into the staff area.”

“Do you have room in your tent?” Chip asked. “I wouldn’t mind rooming with you again like we did a couple years ago.”

“Sorry man,” I replied. “Ed Fritz and I always tent together. We have since we started scouts. You’ll have to look around for another tent mate.”

“OK, that’s cool,” Chip said. “I’ll catch up to you later.”

He headed down the side of the pool and checked in with Eric for his swim test. A steady stream of staffers showed up. A lot of the guys had worked here previous years. It made the afternoon a reunion of sorts, since most of us hadn’t seen each other since last summer.

About a quarter of the guys looked a little lost and bewildered as they went through the check-in process, they were new to staff. The youngest, greenest of the new guys were the CITs – counselors in training.

Matt Sauder, Cody Stevens and Dave Mitchell came in the middle of the crowd of staffers arriving for their swim tests. My younger friends were in a boisterous mood. Cody summed their feelings up best when he said, “We get to spend the whole summer in scout camp and they pay us! If there is a better job, I don’t know what it is.”

Matt, Cody and Dave were done with their swim tests and were standing with me while I made out their buddy tags when Josh Hunsecker arrived at the pool. I knew Dave and Josh tented together last summer but I was surprised at the obvious delight on each boy’s face when they greeted each other with bear hugs. The three kids from my school hung out and waited until Josh finished his swim test before the four of them headed back to the staff site to change.

Patrick Finnegan’s appearance surprised me when he showed up. I remembered Patrick from two summer ago when he worked at the aquatics area for a few weeks with his older brother Justin. Patrick was a scrawny kid, maybe 5’-7” back then. He was around 6’-1” now and hairy! I don’t know many seventeen year olds who can grow a decent beard but Patrick could.

Patrick’s older brother Justin used to be the assistant aquatics director at the pool for my brother Will. Justin stopped working at camp two summers ago when his parents were killed in a car accident. Justin, who was twenty at the time, had to take care of fifteen year old Patrick and twelve year old Niki.

I caught up on Patrick’s life when he finished his test. Justin graduated from Millersville University last month and got a job with WLAN, the local radio station. He was working as an assistant to the program director for the station. Patrick had one more year of high school. Niki was doing well. She would start high school in the fall.

The three siblings had adjusted to life after their parent’s death. Justin encouraged Patrick to come work at camp this summer in spite of Patrick’s misgivings. Patrick felt he should stick around home to help with Niki while Justin was at work. Both Niki and

Justin disagreed and convinced him to go and have a normal summer for a teenager. Niki could get help from a neighbor lady if anything went wrong.

More of my staff arrived. Pete Good, a sixteen year old I knew from last season who worked with Trent at the pool last summer came next. I knew Alex Maddox from last season. He was a fifteen year old guy who worked as a CIT last summer. He had worked with me one week down at the boat docks. The last guy on my staff to arrive was Adam Zimmerman. I didn't know Adam well. He was a CIT in the second half of the season. He didn't work in the aquatics area before I headed back to State College for football camp. Eric, Dustin and Will all assured me that I would like Adam's work this summer.

Two familiar faces from my scout troop showed up as we were finishing the swim tests. I had wondered when they would arrive. Gary Harrison and Chris Nauman got a ride with Chris's dad, Mr. Nauman. They got caught up in traffic around Lancaster. I wasn't really surprised they were late when I heard Mr. Nauman gave them a ride. He was notorious in our scout troop for being late for nearly everything.

"You guys getting settled into camp?" I asked as I gave each of the boys from my troop a high five.

"I guess," Chris said.

"It's weird being here without Mr. Clark and the rest of the troop," Gary added.

"You'll get used to it," I replied. "After all, our troop or crew has eleven people on staff this summer."

"That many?" Gary asked.

"Me, Will, Abby, Ed, Eric, Samantha, Matt, Cody, Dave..." I said counting them off on my fingers. "...and you two. You will have fun."

"I know," Gary agreed. "Cody and Dave told me about what it was like when they were CITs last summer. I'm especially looking forward to working with you some more on football. Do you plan to do passing drills after lunch the way you did last year?"

"Absolutely," I replied. "One of the quarterbacks from Penn State is working here this summer so he can work out with me."

"Really?" Gary asked. "That's pretty cool. You taught me so much the last three weeks of school. I can't wait for football camp so the coaches can see what I have learned."

"I'm sure they will be pleased. You guys go see Eric for your swim test," I directed.
"I'll talk with you some more later."

“See you Kyle,” “See you later,” The two boys replied as they headed for Eric at the opposite end of the pool.

Will, Eric, Dustin and I closed down the pool after Gary and Chris finished their tests. We headed back to the staff area and hung out until dinner time. Most of the staff spent the afternoon moving into their quarters. Chip ended up bunking with Patrick Finnegan near the tent Ed and I shared.

After dinner Sunday night Mr. Holloway, er... John had every member of the staff introduce themselves and briefly talk about their experience in scouting. He went over the staff code of conduct, reminding us that alcohol, tobacco and illicit drugs were grounds for dismissal. Having sex in camp was also grounds for firing.

That was more significant than it had been when I started working there five summers earlier. The staff was all male then. Now three other female Venturers worked in camp beside Eric’s girlfriend Sammy Hoover. One worked in the kitchen, a second worked with Sammy in handicraft and the third worked in the camp office.

After John dismissed the staff everyone headed back to the staff area. Will, Ed and I invited Chip to workout with us. Gary Harrison joined Matt, Cody, Josh and Dave in working out with Matt’s weight set. All nine of us did the three and a half mile run out to the camp entrance and back after that.

Gary lagged behind on the run. I dropped back and talked with him about the importance of workouts if he wanted to stand out in football in high school or college. He understood. Gary remembered how his brother Greg had been fanatical about lifting weights and running.

All of Monday and most of Tuesday were spent setting up tents, dining flies and picnic tables in campsites. Will opened the pool for an hour each afternoon before dinner so everyone could relax and cool down.

Monday evening I did my effective teaching lecture to the staff. I emphasized the demonstrating and enabling the learners to try the skill as opposed to pure lecture. The scouts were in camp voluntarily. Camp needed to be VERY different from the lectures the campers were used to at school.

The staff broke up by program area around two o’clock on Tuesday afternoon, after the last campsite was set up. Will and I took our staff over to the pool and started reviewing and testing all aquatics staff members on the Swimming Merit Badge skills. Will went over emergency procedures too before the staff swim.

“You feeling OK Abby? I asked at breakfast Wednesday. I noticed this was the second morning in a row she barely ate.

“It’s just a little upset stomach,” Abby explained. “I’m going to the doctor for a checkup in the afternoon.”

“I hope everything goes well,” I said.

Will and I drilled our staff at the pool that day on the remainder of Swimming Merit Badge and then moved on to Lifesaving Merit Badge skills. I didn’t think about Abby again until lunch time. She missed lunch with the staff.

Will and I finished drilling our staff on Lifesaving Merit Badge after lunch. We did a neck or back injury drill at the end of the afternoon. Will had me be the victim. The guys did not do very well on the first try. They didn’t come close to drowning me but a normal swimmer would have been in trouble. Will made the guys repeat the drill. This time they got me immobilized and out of the water successfully without risking neck injury to me.

Will had me run the staff swim that afternoon. Rob Young came over and hung out at the pool during the swim. He provided the adult supervision component necessary for me to run a safe swim.

I was surprised when Will and Abby missed dinner. John Holloway told me they were having a private dinner at their cabin. Will showed up in the dining hall after dinner just before John started his evening lecture on emergency procedures, hard cover and youth protection.

I finally got to talk to Will after the evening training was over. I let Ed and Chip do their weights first. It gave me a chance to talk with my brother.

“How did Abby’s checkup go this afternoon?” I asked. “Is everything OK?”

Will stared at me for a few seconds, took a deep breath and let it out. “What the hell,” he said. “You’re going to know soon enough.” He broke into a big grin. “You’re going to be an uncle again.”

“Abby and you are going to have a baby?” I gushed. “That’s such good news.” I gave Will a slap on the back. “How far along is Abby?”

“Five and half weeks,” Will replied. “She is due February 7th.”

“Congratulations ‘dad’,” I replied. “This is wonderful news.”

“Yeah, congrats Will,” Ed added. “This is excellent news.”

“Truly excellent,” Chip agreed.

Will looked into my eyes. “You seem a little surprised Kyle.”

“I didn’t think you and Abby would be starting a family quite this soon,” I replied. “I kind of expected that you would want to wait until after Abby finished med school and her internship.”

“That was the original plan,” Will agreed. He gave us a sheepish smile. “Abby and I weren’t trying to have a baby just yet. Let’s say we haven’t been as vigilant as we could have been with our birth control. We’re twenty-four, married and have a place of our own. Starting our family now isn’t the end of the world.”

“No, it isn’t,” I said. “I think it’s a wonderful thing.” Ed and Chip agreed. Matt, Cody, Dave and Josh offered their congratulations when they heard just before we did our evening run. I passed the news on to Kelly later that evening before I went to bed.

Thursday the whole aquatics staff went down to the boat yard. Eric and Dustin had everyone go through their rowing and canoeing skills to make sure they were ready to fill in at the boat yard if needed during the summer. Will and I mostly observed, letting Dustin and Eric take the lead that day.

Chip had done pretty well with the swimming and lifesaving skills Tuesday and Wednesday. He was OK at canoeing. His troop did a lot of canoeing during the year. Chip wasn’t good at rowing. He explained that Horseshoe, the camp where he learned, used the Octoraro Creek for boating. It was 20 yards wide at the boat yard. The deep pool where scout canoed and rowed might have been a hundred yards long before the creek got too shallow.

Chip’s innate athleticism showed during the day. Frankly, he sucked at rowing in the morning. By the end of the day he did OK. Will did not plan to send him down to the boat yard, except in an emergency. He would be with me at the pool for the whole summer.

Chip and I packed up our things Thursday night after our run. The two of us needed to leave camp immediately after breakfast on Friday to drive up to State College for the weekend football camp. Matt, Cody, Dave and Josh were getting a ride with Josh’s dad Friday afternoon. Cody’s dad was going to bring the four boys back to camp late Sunday afternoon.

The drive up to State College was routine on Friday morning. I pulled into the parking lot in front of the Lasch Building around 11:30 am. Our appointment with Coach Burton wasn’t until 1:00 pm, but both of us hoped to snag lunch by getting our eLion cards loaded up with credits early. We headed inside to see Marie at the reception desk.

“Hey Marie, how’s it going?” I asked with a big smile. “Is Coach Burton in?”

“Hey Marie,” Chip added.

“Sorry boys, no luck,” Marie replied. “You just missed him. He left for lunch a few minutes ago. Is there anything I can help you with?”

“We were hoping we could our meal credits a little early,” I explained. “We didn’t get lunch on the way up here.”

“Sorry guys, no can do,” Marie replied. “That’s already set up – dinner tonight through lunch on Sunday.”

I turned to Chip and asked, “Baby’s?”

“Baby’s,” Chip agreed with a nod. “Burgers, shakes and fries.”

“Tell Coach we’ll be back by one o’clock,” I said.

“I’ll do that boys,” Marie replied. “Enjoy your lunch. I’ll see you later.”

Chip and I walked downtown to Allen Street. Baby’s wasn’t busy. We enjoyed the burgers, fries and shakes at the retro 50’s restaurant. We were back in plenty of time for our meeting with Coach Burton.

Chip and I found out who the other resident assistants were for the weekend while we waited for Coach. They were Josh Bruno and Shawn Byrd. The four of us talked until Coach called us into his office.

Our primary duties for the weekend were to look after the kids when they weren’t at practice or meetings. We would check them into the dorms, get them to meals, do bed checks at night and get them to meetings and practices. We were welcome to help coach the kids if we wanted, but it wasn’t required.

Coach sent us on to the housing office in East Halls when he was done. We met with Mr. Johnson, from Housing and Food Services. He charged up our eLion cards for the weekend. He took us over to McKean Hall, the dorm we would be staying in for the weekend. The third and fourth floors were reserved for the football camp.

Chip and I took the third floor while Josh and Shawn took responsibility for the fourth. Mr. Johnson gave us the paperwork with the room assignments and keys for all the rooms on our floor. We didn’t use the regular RA’s room since it didn’t have beds for two. We took the next room down the hall near the elevators.

Chip and I went upstairs to Josh and Shawn's room after we moved our stuff into our room. The four of us talked for a few minutes, trying to decide how to kill a couple hours until it was time for dinner.

"I wonder what Jay is up to?" I asked. I knew Jay was taking summer classes.

"Anybody got his number?" Shawn asked.

"I do," I answered. I dialed his cell phone right away.

"Hey Jay, it's Kyle," I said when Jay picked up. "I was wondering what you were up to."

"Just chilling," Jay answered. "I finished rehab half an hour ago. You got free time at the pool?"

"No, I'm here with Chip, Josh and Shawn," I explained. "We're on campus this weekend helping with the high school football camp. We were wondering if you wanted to hang out for awhile."

"Sure, that's cool," Jay agreed. "Come on over to my apartment. I'm sure I have more space here. They put you up in the dorms right?"

"Yep, that's right," I replied. "Where are you at?"

"#12, Nittany Apartments," Jay said.

"You're in the apartment we have this fall?" I asked. "Cool! I'd love to come over and see my digs for next semester."

"Come on over guys," Jay said. "I'd love to have some company this afternoon."

The four of us headed down the hill to the apartments. My future residence was in the first row of apartments closest to the Lasch Building. That was going to be convenient. Jay let us in after the first knock. Jay greeted his ex-roommate, Shawn, future roommate, me, and rival for the starting job, Chip, warmly.

Jay took us on a quick tour of the apartment. It was a mirror image of the apartment that Zack, Jake, Evan and JT shared this past year. It came with basic furnishings. Jay, Trevor, Damian and I would need to do some decorating and bring a decent TV, sound system and DVD player for our apartment.

Jay took us upstairs. "I hope you don't mind that I took one of the upstairs bedrooms Kyle," Jay said.

"I don't care at all," I agreed. "I don't care where my room is if I get one of my own. It will make things great for Kelly and me next fall."

“Yep, that it will,” Jay agreed. The five of us headed back downstairs. I noticed Jay still had a slight limp.

“How’s your leg doing?” I asked.

“Not too bad,” Jay answered. “I’m about 90% on my range of motion with my ankle. The trainers are finally allowing me to lift. I have a ways to go but I will be there by the end of July.”

“You keep working at it roomie,” Shawn added. “We’re counting on you.”

“I’ll be ready, count on it,” Jay replied. He pointed at Chip. “You can bet I won’t be conceding the starting job to you.”

“I never expected you would,” Chip answered quickly. “...but you better be at your best. I’ll take the job otherwise.”

“We’ll see,” Jay countered.

Both of my friends let the competition for starting quarterback drop after that. We had seats in the living room and talked. I found out why Jay wasn’t helping with the football camp. He already worked one last weekend. Coach Burton wanted to get as many players involved as he could.

We talked for awhile about how last week’s camp went. “Does anyone want a beer or something?” Jay asked during a pause in the conversation.

“Maybe sodas,” I suggested. “We have to work with a bunch of high school kids and our coaches this evening.”

“We should probably pass,” Shawn agreed. Jay brought sodas out from the kitchen for the four of us. He did have a beer. We relaxed and discussed the football team’s future.

All of us were confident about our team’s defense in the fall. We lost one guy on the defensive line, albeit an all-American. Our line would be solid. We lost Karol Zizka from our linebackers. Josh was up to the task of taking over the middle of our defense. Shawn and Tyler would make sure the defensive backs played up to last year’s standard.

Offense was going to be the challenge for us in the fall. We lost eight of eleven starters on offense. All of us had read pre-season predictions that identified that problem. We talked about our prospects. None of us expected our team to score the way it did last year. We did feel our offense would take a little time to jell but it would come together in time.

We started off with home games against Boston College and Cincinnati. We expected to win both. We flew out to LA for our third game to play the USC Trojans. We were going to face a lot of pressure that game. We had a bye week after that and then played our Big Ten schedule of games.

The one saving grace for us was that Jay, Chip and the rest of the second string played a lot of minutes last season. Hopefully they would be ready to join Ben Walker, Mahmoud Greene and me as starters in the fall.

Jay, Josh and Shawn asked me how things were going with Kelly. They knew about the fight we had at the end of the semester but didn't know what happened after we headed for home. I assured my friends that Kelly and I had reconciled. I told them about the enjoyable weekend Kelly and I had together at the end of May. They were envious of my getting into a Phillies game and having dinner with Chase Utley.

Jay decided to join the four of us when we headed to the dining hall for an early dinner. I think Jay enjoyed having some friendly company. The campus seemed deserted to my eyes. I was used to the 40,000 students at University Park. Probably 10% of the students were here over the summer.

Josh, Shawn, Chip and I headed for the IM (Intermural) Building for check-in for the camp. We hung out in one end of the gym while athletic department staffers processed the arriving high schoolers. They came over to us one or two at a time as they finished registering, dragging their overnight bags with them. My teammates and I welcomed them, getting their names and making them feel comfortable.

We had collected half a dozen when the first two guys from home joined the group. Matt Sauder greeted me with a hearty, "Hey coach, how's it goin'?" followed by a high five.

"Coach, you got everything set up for us?" Cody Stevens added as he joined the group. "Hey Chip, how's things?" he added when he saw Chip in our group.

"I'm good guys," I replied. "Did you guys lose Davey?"

"Nah, the R-Z line was short," Cody answered. Cody gestured towards the line at the registration table and added, "He's still over there registering."

I introduced my friends to Josh and Shawn. Dave Mitchell joined our growing crowd a couple minutes later. He greeted me with a strong hand shake and, "Hey Coach! I guess you guys take us to our rooms?"

"This is the place," I agreed. I was still introducing Dave to the others when Josh Hunsecker and his dad joined the crowd.

"Hi Warren," I said as I shook Josh's dad's hand. "It's good to see you again."

“It’s good to see you too Kyle,” Mr. Hunsecker replied.

“Hey Coach!” Josh added.

Mr. Hunsecker gave Josh a hug and said, “You behave yourself this weekend Joshua. Mr. Stevens will get you boys back to camp on Sunday.”

“I know dad,” Josh protested as he squirmed out of the hug. “I’ll be good.” Mr. Hunsecker headed out after that reassurance.

“OK, what’s the deal with the nickname Kyle?” Josh Bruno asked. “Given your personality, I understand why the guys from your high school call you coach. Why in the hell does Christian’s little brother call you coach too?”

“I know part of the story,” Chip said before I could reply. “I’m curious why everyone on the pool staff at camp calls you Coach.”

I explained how I got the nickname back in eleventh grade when I blew out my knee and had spent two thirds of the football season helping our coaching staff instead of playing. The nickname took on a life of its own after that season. I told them about working with the younger kids at our informal spring passing drills and the after lunch passing drills at scout camp.

“Coach,” Shawn said when I finished the story. “It does fit you Kyle.”

“Coach, we got fifteen kids now,” Josh Bruno said. “Let’s move the first batch into their rooms.”

“OK Josh,” I agreed with a slight shudder. I was OK with the kids from my high school calling me ‘Coach.’ I didn’t feel it was an appropriate nickname here at Penn State. I hadn’t earned the honor here. I hoped Josh and Shawn would forget about the nickname.

Josh and I took the first fifteen kids down Shortridge Road to McKean Hall and took them upstairs to their floors. About half the kids got off with me on the third floor. The remainder rode the elevator up to the fourth floor. I handed out keys to the seven guys on my floor.

Dave Mitchell was assigned to room with Josh Hunsecker down the hall a couple doors from me. I found out later Dave and Josh had requested to room together when they signed up for the camp. Matt and Cody shared a room across the hall from me. I helped the other three guys find their rooms.

I warned all the guys to settle in, study the notebooks they received and that we would meet at the elevator at 7:15 to go to their first session with Coach Burton and the rest of the coaching staff.

Chip stepped off the elevator about five minutes later with another group of campers. He, Josh, Shawn and I would trade off manning our floor for arriving campers and shuttling campers from the IM Building and McKean Hall. Now that Chip was here it was my turn to go get the next group of campers from the IM Building.

Chip shepherded his charges towards our room. I was ready to step onto the elevator as the last guy stepped off. I stopped when I saw who it was.

“Devin!” I exclaimed. “How are you doing? Welcome to Penn State.”

“Hi Kyle, it’s good to see you again,” Devin Kerr replied.

“Your Uncle Chase said you would be here,” I said. “Your uncle was nice enough to get us tickets to the...”

“Shhh!” Devin answered. “I’m just another football player this weekend. I want to be noticed for my football skills not for my uncle.”

“Fair enough Devin. You’re just a guy I met last fall when you visited campus,” I agreed. “By the way, we play top notch football here. The only thing that gets you noticed here is being the best football player. Big Ten competition is brutal.”

“Thanks Kyle, I appreciate that,” Devin said.

“I’ll warn the other RA’s too,” I said. As I stepped onto the elevator I added, “See you at 7:15 tonight here at the elevator.”

I headed down the street to the IM Building. Shawn took off for the dorm with a group of campers as soon as I got there. The four registration lines were backed up. Most of the hundred campers were here and waiting to be processed. Twenty campers joined me by the time Josh Bruno returned from the dorm.

Josh, Shawn, Chip and I took turns leading groups of campers down to the dorm, getting them settled and heading back to the gym for the next batch of campers. Most of the campers knew who I was before I introduced myself. The kids gave me a lot of compliments. A few guys seemed awed by me. I tried to be humble. The last thing I wanted was hero worship.

My last run to the IM Building was at 6:30. I picked up the last five kids and walked them down to McKean Hall. Everyone was safely settled in their rooms by seven o’clock. I headed back to my room and found Chip hanging out with three of the campers.

He introduced me to Todd, Brent and Bill. They were all students at Unionville who knew Chip. Todd was going to be a sophomore in the fall and hoped to make the varsity team at quarterback. Brent and Bill were both defensive backs. Brent would be a senior

in the fall, Bill a junior. We talked for a bit until it was time to take the group over to the Lasch Building.

Chip and I did a quick head count at 7:15 to make sure all the campers were there and then took the group over to the Lasch Building. I enjoyed watching the faces of the kids when they walked in our big reception area and then took them past the wall commemorating the team captains of the past decades. Passing names like Glenn Walker, Daryll Clark, Derrick Williams, Dan Conner, Kerry Collins, Bobby Engram, Curt Warner, Jack Ham, Franco Harris and Lydell Mitchell was intended to impress.

The names on the wall did their job. The group got quiet and the boys stared at the names as they passed. A couple of the boys ran their fingers across the names as they passed them.

Our group arrived at the auditorium ahead of Josh and Shawn's group. The boys scattered and found seats around auditorium. I had planned to sit in the back and watch the lecture until it was over. Before I got a chance to sit down I found an unexpected but familiar face.

"Coach Caffrey, what the hell are you doing here?" I asked as I walked up to my high school coach.

"Hi Kyle, I guess you didn't expect to see me this weekend." he answered. "I'm here because my old friend and your coach asked to help out."

"Friend?" I replied. "I thought Pitt and Penn State were big rivals back when you played there."

"We were huge rivals back in the eighties," Coach Caffrey agreed. "Bob also ..."

"... generously gave you an interception," a voice behind added. I turned. It was Coach Burton.

"One of only two in my college career," Coach Caffrey said.

"I threw three interceptions in my career," coach Burton said. "That one was the ugliest for me. We were playing here..."

"Day after Thanksgiving," Coach Caffrey added. "It was cold and snowing. You guys were up 27-3. Coach Fazio decided he didn't have anything to lose so he sent me in to play in the fourth quarter."

"I think the score was 30-7," Coach Burton countered. "I was shocked when Joe let me throw a pass... and of course I throw the ball straight at you." Coach Burton chuckled. "Joe didn't call any more pass plays that game!"

“And my team still lost,” Coach Caffrey said as he winked. “I appreciate you inviting me to help out this weekend. I know I’m going to enjoy this.”

“I’m blown away coaches,” I interjected. “I had no idea.”

“Why not Kyle?” Coach Burton asked. “After seeing how much football Hayes knew when he started college here and considering how much you knew two years ago – why wouldn’t I get to know one of the best high school coaches in the state?”

“I guess that makes sense,” I agreed. Josh Bruno and Shawn Byrd came in with the other fifty football campers.

“Oops, that’s my cue,” Coach Burton said. “I’ll see you guys later.” He strode to the front of the room as the other half of the group filed in. The campers quickly found seats and got quiet, waiting for my coach to start.

Coach Burton started off with logistical aspects of the weekend – housing, the RA’s job, meals, medical emergencies, and recreational opportunities on campus for the participants. I was standing in the back beside Coach Caffrey as the talk started. I felt a tap on my shoulder as I listened.

“Bob told me you and your teammates are allowed to help with coaching,” Coach Caffrey whispered to me.

“Yeah, that’s what he said,” I agreed.

“I am assigned to coach the youngest, most inexperienced group of quarterbacks and receivers this weekend. I wonder if you would be willing to help me out. I sure can use a hand.”

“I’d be happy to Coach,” I replied quietly. “After all the help you have given me over the years, I’d be honored to help you.”

Coach Burton spent about ten minutes going over the logistical details and the schedule for the weekend. He had the assistant coaches hand out the “tests” to the campers. This drew the predictable groans from recipients. I knew from the grin on my coach’s face that he enjoyed teasing the kids. It wasn’t really a test. It was a questionnaire to help the coaching staff identify everyone’s knowledge and abilities so they could be placed in appropriate skill groups for the weekend.

Coach C and the other defensive assistant took the defensive players down the hall to another conference room for their evening’s lecture. I stayed for Coach Burton and Coach Schroeder’s offensive lecture. It was very basic but it was a good refresher for me.

Coach Burton dismissed the players around 8:30 pm. Matt, Cody, Josh and Dave made a bee-line for Chip and me in the back of the auditorium.

“Where’s a good place to get a snack around here?” Cody inquired.

“We had an early supper on the drive up here,” Dave added. “I’m starved.”

“There’s a convenience store in Pollock Commons where you can get sandwiches, chips and so on,” I replied. “Downtown we have a Burger King, a McDonalds, a deli for sandwiches, ice cream places, pizzas places...”

“PIZZA!” Dave exclaimed. “That’s exactly what we need!” Josh, Dave and Cody all expressed their hearty agreement.

“I want to mention one more place,” I said. “Sometime while you are here you have to go down to the Nittany Diner for the grilled stickies.”

“Grilled stickies?” Matt asked. “What the hell are they?”

“You’ve had sticky buns back home,” I explained. The guys all nodded agreement. “The Diner takes the sticky buns and grills them in lots of butter. They are amazing served hot, dripping with melted butter.”

“They sound good Coach,” Cody said. “... but I think pizza would be better tonight.”

“Maybe we can get them tomorrow night,” Matt added. “We have free time after dinner don’t we?”

I confirmed that they did. The five of us started for the door when we met up with Chip and his former teammate Bill, trailed by Brent and Todd. We invited them to join us for pizza. They agreed. We added yet another person to our growing group outside the Lasch Building when we ran into Devin Kerr. I invited him to join us. I knew he didn’t have anyone from his high school to hang with.

Chip and I took our charges down to Hi-Way Pizza. On the way down Dave and Josh found out that Devin played wide receiver too. The restaurant seated us immediately. Over the summer the downtown isn’t crowded, even on Friday night.

We enjoyed ourselves talking and chowing down on pizza as the kids from Unionville, Paradise and Allentown got to know each other. Football, girls, movies and music dominated the conversation.

I was recognized by some Penn Staters as is usual when I went out in public in State College. I talked with them when they stopped at our table and signed a few autographs. The kids were overly impressed with the attention I drew, except for Devin. He knew what a real super star had to put up with.

Dave and Josh talked with Devin the whole time about each other's experiences playing receiver. Eventually they asked Devin how he came to know me. Devin froze, not sure what to say.

I gave him a wink and jumped into the conversation. "I know Devin's uncle. I met Devin when they came up for a game last season. We had dinner together after the game."

"That's cool!" Dave said. "I bet your uncle was pretty excited to meet a star player here."

"I was more excited than my uncle," Devin said. Devin returned my wink with a shy, relieved smile.

The guys at the table accepted my explanation for Devin knowing me. The conversation moved on to other topics. Devin would get the chance to be accepted in our group for his football skills and personality, not for being Chase Utley's nephew.

The kids did a little window shopping downtown after we finished our pizza. Matt bought a "Property of Penn State Football" T-shirt at the Penn State Bookstore. We teased him about it a little. Matt explained he wanted the coaches to know he was a huge Penn State fan and wanted to play here for college. I didn't comment on that desire. Our group headed back to the dorms around 9:30 that evening.

More than half the kids were back on the third floor when Chip and I arrived with our young friends. All the kids returned and were accounted for before ten o'clock, as required. Chip and I started bed checks at 10:25. By 10:35 lights were out, everyone was in their rooms and things were quiet – well, relatively quiet. They are teenaged boys after all.

Chip and I were up at 7:00 am on Saturday. We ran into some of the campers in the bathroom after our showers. We went door to door waking the rest of the campers. All the campers were heading for the dining hall by eight o'clock.

On the way down in the elevator I overheard Devin Kerr casually remark, "I was surprised that Kyle took the time to wake us up this morning. I didn't expect him to bother with that."

"That?" Dave Mitchell laughed and answered, "That is classic Kyle. He was my patrol leader when I started Boy Scouts four years ago. 'Out of bed guys! Get up! Let's move it!' I heard that every campout."

"Yeah," Cody agreed. "Kyle takes good care of the kids he's responsible for."

I was standing behind Devin, Cody and Dave so I didn't let on that I heard what he said. It did make me feel good that the younger guys appreciated my efforts.

The group grabbed breakfast at the dining hall and then headed back to the dorm to change into practice clothes. Chip and I had been instructed to dress in khakis and Penn State Football polos for the day so we would blend in with the coaching staff.

Chip and I went down opposite hallways of our floor rousting everyone from their rooms at a quarter to nine. "Let's go! Head for the practice field!" we shouted as we hurried the campers along. Tom, a soon-to-be senior resisted.

"We got fifteen minutes until practice," he complained. "What's the hurry?"

"We're on Coach Burton time today," I countered. "Five minutes early to practice is considered late. Move it!"

"What happens if we're late?" Tom asked.

"Members of the football team run laps if we're not there five minutes early," I replied. "I can see Coach Burton having you run if you're not there on time."

Tom stopped arguing and headed for the practice field with the other fifty-some guys from our floor. Josh Bruno and Shawn Byrd had passed a similar message on to the boys on their floor. All hundred campers were assembled on the three practice fields beside Holuba Hall seven minutes before nine o'clock.

The coaching staff came out of the Lasch Building promptly at five minutes before nine. The group did stretching and warm-up exercises to start off the day. Coach Burton divided the group by offense and defense. He further subdivided them into three skill levels.

Coach Goodwin, our running backs coach, Coach Caffrey and I took the youngest, least experienced group of offensive players. Everyone we were working with would start ninth or tenth grade in the fall and had no experience playing varsity high school football. Coach Caffrey worked with the three young quarterbacks in our group. Coach Goodwin took the six running backs and left me to work with the two tight ends and four wide receivers in our group.

The three of us coached the boys on the absolute basics of throwing, catching and running pass routes. The guys were enthusiastic, if unpolished at their positions. We had them run simple pass routes without opposition in the morning. I showed the guys how to run precise routes and how to catch the ball. I enjoyed working with the kids. I could see them improving as the morning went on.

Coach Caffrey, Coach Goodwin and I conferred about the afternoon drills for a few minutes when the kids headed for lunch. Chip, Coach Peterson, our quarterbacks coach, Josh Bruno and Shawn Byrd joined us as we headed to the dining hall. Chip, Josh, Shawn and I let the coaches go through the cafeteria line ahead of us.

“Hey join us guys,” a voice called to us as we looked around for an open table at the end of the cafeteria line. We turned to see it was Coach Burton. “You’re coaches this weekend,” Coach Burton added as he waved us over. “Come join us.”

We looked at each other and shrugged our shoulders. All of us had the same thought – if the Coach wants our company during lunch he gets it. We joined the other coaches at their table.

I sat down beside Coach Caffrey. My friends sat down beside me. It was instructive to see my coaches in a relaxed social setting instead of the usual team meeting or practice setting. They bantered back and forth and teased each other. They reminded me of... well, me and my friends when we’re together at meals. This was a totally different side of my coaches than I had seen before.

I’m used to see them in “business mode” – no-nonsense, take charge, tell the players what to do. Coach Burton displayed a quirky sense of humor I had never seen before. As a first and second year player I got very little face time with my head coach. I probably spent no more than fifteen or twenty minutes total with Coach Burton in the eight to ten face to face meetings I had with him in the last two years.

Coach Schroeder’s cell phone buzzed him in the middle of lunch. He checked it and chuckled as he read the message.

“All of you will appreciate this message,” Coach Schroeder said. “It’s from Zack Hayes. He and his agent just came to terms with the Packers. The message says: ‘Wahoo!! I’m rich now! \$15M signing, \$65M for 7 yrs. How about that? Z’ Damn! We’re in the wrong line of business.”

“\$65 million,” Coach Burton said shaking his head. After a sigh he added, “I don’t think anyone here at this table got a nibble from the NFL after college did they?” All the coaches nodded in agreement. “Those who can’t teach, right?”

All the coaches agreed with Coach Burton’s observation. Coach Burton turned to Coach Caffrey and asked, “What do you think of your protégé’s good fortune Walt?”

“No one worked harder or deserves it more than Zack,” Coach Caffrey said. This also met with general agreement by the coaching staff at our table.

I nudged Chip and whispered, “I’m staking a claim to Zack for next year’s Thon. I plan to up my asking price substantially too. He can afford to be very generous next winter.”

The coaches continued discussing Zack's good fortune and how the other Penn State draftees were faring. Cuch, Karol, Evan, JT, Shawn and Vlad had all signed contracts with their teams in the past month. The only unsigned Penn Stater was Jake Washington. Word on ESPN was that Jake and the Chargers were still far apart in dollars and length of contract. The commentators speculated that it may not get done before NFL camp started in the end of July.

Coach Burton didn't hustle everyone out after lunch. The temperature had been increasing all morning. It was expected to top out in the mid-90's after lunch. Scott Burgess, our head trainer warned everyone to make sure they were thoroughly hydrated before they took the field in the afternoon. The coaches shooed all the kids down to get ice water or Gatorade instead of the soda or fruit drink they would have preferred.

The coaches started the kids out easy with stretching and some other warm-up exercises. The groups went back to work on separate fields after half an hour. This time the group Coaches Goodwin, Caffrey and I were working with scrimmaged against Coach Schneider's defensive players. They were soon-to-be ninth and tenth graders like our guys.

We sent out two or three wide receivers, a tight end and one or two running backs on each play to work against our opponent's d-backs and linebackers. The guys on the field would run a few plays and then come back off. The coaches and I would critique their performance and suggest adjustments to help them when it was their turn on the field again.

The 95 degree temperature that day almost beat the 96 degree record high for State College. The coaches called numerous short water breaks to rest and hydrate the campers. The boys worked hard in spite of the heat.

I occasionally got glimpses of Matt, Cody, Dave, Josh and Devin as the advanced team played on the north/south field at the end of the two east/west fields our team and the middle skills team were playing. Matt looked sharp quarterbacking his squad. I saw him complete a spectacular deep pass where Devin had to out-jump the cornerback. Cody, Dave and Josh made some good plays too.

The younger guys I was helping coach improved during the afternoon but couldn't compete with the older, more experienced boys in the adjoining field. One boy in particular stood out that day – Kenneth Garver. Kenny would start ninth grade at Jefferson High School outside Pittsburgh in the fall. He was 5'-3", maybe a 100 pounds fully clothed. Baby smooth cheeks hinted that puberty was nowhere in sight.

Kenny had good foot speed for someone his age and size. He couldn't out jump anyone for the ball but he did run nice clean, crisp routes which got him open more than you would expect for someone with his slight stature. It was obvious the kid loved football. He listened closely to every suggestion I gave him and used the suggestion on the field on the next play. He would be a good player if he ever grew to a decent size.

Coach Goodwin and Coach Caffrey called our squad together to review of lessons learned that afternoon as our practice ended. The kids had a few questions after the coaches finished talking. The last question unexpectedly was directed at me.

Kenny Garver gushed, "I think you're the best receiver in the world. How do you do it? Is it all talent or can I learn it too?"

"Talent? A small part of my success is talent," I replied. "I can run fast. I am able to out-jump almost anyone. Both of those skills help. I've also had more than my share of luck to get where I am today. Mostly what got me here was hard work. I started playing football when I was your age Kenny." Kenny smiled. I gestured towards Coach Caffrey. "Coach recruited me to play football when I was finishing eighth grade. Do you know what I did as soon as I decided to play?"

"What?" Kenny asked.

"I started lifting weights to get my body in shape to play football," I explained. "I ran three miles every day. I worked with my quarterback all summer to get prepared to play. I've been doing that for six years. Hard work makes the luck I have. Preparation lets me use my talents to their fullest."

"Do you really think somebody my size can be successful at football?" Kenny asked.

"If you work hard for it," I said. "You showed some talent today."

Kenny thanked me before he headed off the field with the other campers. Coach Caffrey tapped me on the shoulder after the boys left.

"That was an excellent answer Kyle," Coach said. "Hopefully the young man takes it to heart."

Chip, Josh, Shawn and I headed for the Lasch Building locker room to shower before dinner. The coaches headed for the coaches facilities in the building. The four of us hung out at the player's lounge with Jay, Max Rosen, and Jeff Knox for half an hour. Max was taking summer classes to make sure his academic standing allowed him to be eligible to play football this season.

Jeff Knox was a freshman player who decided to start classes at the university in summer term instead of waiting until fall like most of the incoming freshmen. Jeff expected to play safety.

Chip, Josh, Shawn and I headed down the street to the dining hall for dinner. Coach Burton motioned for the four of us to join the other coaches at their dinner table. We sat down on the end beside Coach Caffrey. I enjoyed listening to the banter between our coaches as they ate.

Near the end of dinner I felt a tap on the shoulder. "Hey Coach," Matt Sauder asked. "Is it correct that we have free time tonight?"

Half a dozen coaches' heads turned to look at the questioner. "Umm... I meant Coach... err... Kyle," Matt sputtered. The others at the table chuckled at Matt and my discomfort.

"Yeah," I agreed. "You are free this evening."

"Cool!" Matt replied. "Some of us heard we're allowed to use the university pool. A swim would feel good after a hot afternoon of practice."

"I think that's OK," I agreed.

Coach Burton added, "You are allowed to use any of the university facilities this weekend Mathew."

"Thanks Coach," Matt said automatically. "...and thanks Coa... uh, Kyle."

I blushed from Matt's use of my nickname. I didn't feel that it was appropriate here at Penn State.

"The boys at my high school have been calling Kyle 'Coach' for a few years," Coach Caffrey explained. "He was invaluable to me with our informal off-season workouts and film study sessions."

"I'm sure he has been," Coach Burton agreed. "I see it already the way he has helped the younger players on our team prepare. You certainly earned the honorific this weekend with the way you helped the campers. 'Coach' Martin fits you to a tee."

Chip, Josh and Shawn teased me a bit. Whether I liked it or not, it looked as if my nickname was going to make the move from home to college.

Matt, Cody, Dave, Josh and Devin were extremely efficient passing the word about the university pool. Nearly fifty guys showed up to head to the pool with us after dinner. I led them down the street to the outdoor pool by the Natatorium.

Bill Evans, one of the lifeguards I worked with in the winter, was working the gate when we arrived. His eyes bugged out.

"Kyle!" Bill exclaimed. "I'm glad you're here tonight. Mike and I are the only ones on duty. We can't take all these people with two guards. If you can work too, I can let in the first two dozen people."

The group of campers behind us overhead the exchange and let out a collective groan.

"I hadn't planned to work tonight," I replied. "...but I guess I can. Do we have to limit it to two dozen? These guys are here for football camp and have spent the afternoon in the hot sun."

"One of us has to man the gate," Bill replied. "That only leaves two guards for the pool. You know the rules for guard to swimmer ratios."

The crowd behind let out another collective groan. I suddenly had a brainstorm. "Is John Coleman around?" I asked.

"He's at home tonight," Bill said. "But he said to call if we had any problems. We expected a quiet night tonight."

I smiled. "I might know where to find more lifeguards. I'll go inside and give John a call."

The receptionist at the front desk passed the phone to me when I got inside. I dialed John's number. He answered on the second ring.

"Hi John," I said when he answered. "It's Kyle Martin. I'm over at the Nat."

"Kyle?" John asked. "I thought you went home for the summer?"

"I did," I agreed. "...except for this weekend. I'm up here working with Coach Burton's football camp. I have about fifty campers with me at the pool and they are looking to get wet and cool down after a long afternoon of practice in the hot sun."

"...and I don't have enough guards on duty," John said finishing my thought. "You're welcome for work tonight if you want. I won't have any trouble getting pay for your time."

"We need more guards than just me," I answered. "By chance, I happen to have half of my pool staff from my scout camp here this weekend for the football camp. Would I be allowed to get a couple of them to help guard so everyone can get maximum time in the water?"

"Are all of them certified?" John asked.

"All of them are," I replied. "Well... except for Chip Brinton. He completed BSA Lifeguard recertification but last week but won't be official until he turns his paperwork into his council."

"Brinton, the quarterback?" John asked.

"Yes, Chip is one of our quarterbacks," I confirmed. "He's working at our camp this summer so the two of us can practice together every day."

I heard John chuckle on the other end of the phone. "I guess the reports in the Daily Collegian are correct. They say he is determined to grab the starter's spot from Nicholson and Korbel."

"Chip is being given a shot at starting," I agreed. "He's determined to give it his best shot."

"I guess that makes sense," John said. "How many lifeguards did you bring with you?"

"Six, counting myself," I said.

"How many football campers?" John asked.

"About fifty," I answered.

"We can accommodate all of them if you work and add two guards to Bill and Mike."

"That shouldn't be a problem," I replied.

"Make sure you put in a time card for tonight," John said.

"I'll do that," I agreed. "You can direct deposit it into my eLion account for me to use this fall."

I thanked John for his help and headed back outside. Bill had admitted the first dozen kids in line into the pool. The remaining kids were waiting impatiently to see what would happen next. I called Chip, Matt, Dave, Josh and Cody together and explained the deal. They agreed to take turns filling the other guard spots.

Bill stayed on the gate. Mike and I took turns as lookout in the chair. The others manned the sides of the pool. The campers enjoyed themselves and cooled down from their afternoon of work.

John Coleman stopped by around eight o'clock. He looked over our arrangements and was pleased. John called Chip Brinton over and talked with him for about five minutes before leaving for home again.

Chip bounced over to me after John left. "Would you believe it?" he asked. "Mr. Coleman offered me an out-of-season job lifeguarding next winter. Is that cool or what?"

"It's definitely a good way to earn some extra cash off-season," I agreed.

"He promised he could arrange the schedule so it doesn't conflict with my football preparations," Chip said. "How has it worked out for you?"

"John is as good as his word," I said. "I never had any conflict between things I needed to do for football and my lifeguarding schedule."

"Excellent," Chip replied. "This will be a good job for me."

The outdoor pool closed down at 8:30pm. Chip, Matt, Dave, Cody, and Josh stayed to help Bill and Mike close down. Devin Kerr and Chip's friends from his high school stuck around until we finished. The ten of us headed downtown to the Nittany Diner for an evening snack.

I insisted, with Chip's concurrence, that everyone try a grilled sticky. The guys enjoyed the State College specialty.

Our group made it back to McKean Hall about fifteen minutes before the boys' curfew. Chip and I did a head count. All our campers were in the dorm in time. The two of us popped upstairs and talked with Shawn and Josh until it was time for the eleven o'clock bed check. We coordinated things for Sunday morning. Shawn and Josh would handle check-out for all campers since Chip and I had to leave immediately after breakfast to get to camp on time.

The hard day's work helped keep the campers quiet that evening. Half the guys were already asleep when we did bed check.

Chip and I had a good night's sleep. We got up, made sure all campers were awake and then packed our stuff. We took the group over to the dining hall for breakfast. I said good bye to Coach Caffrey, Coach Burton and the other Penn State coaches. Chip and I turned the keys and paperwork over to Shawn and Josh before we hopped in my car for our trip to camp.

Chip and I made it back to scout camp fifteen minutes ahead of our noon reporting time. We switched into our swim trunks and headed over to the dining hall for the staff meeting. My brother Will was pleased. We had close to three hundred scouts to process through their swim tests at the pool that afternoon with only half our normal staff.

Will arranged for extra CITs to help out, including three who already had their BSA Lifeguard certification. Will gave the safety talk as the troops arrived at the pool. I met them at the entrance and talked about the buddy system, showers and the pool rules.

Eric Connell started each camper off at the beginning of their test. Dustin Carter stayed at the end to judge the boys' backstroke and floating ability before passing them as swimmers. The remainder of the staff was spread around the perimeter of the pool making sure everyone did the 75 yards of strong stroke and 25 yards of elementary backstroke properly. As usual the handicraft staff was on hand to help with filling out buddy tags.

The last scout climbed out of the pool around 4:50 pm. It was an impressive performance for a make-shift crew. Will and I thanked all the extras who helped. We gave them a fifteen minute staff swim before we closed the pool for the day.

Cody's dad delivered the other half of my pool staff back to camp in time for dinner. The two of us talked for a bit while the boys unloaded their gear and carried it down to the staff area. Mr. Stevens said the four boys talked of nothing but football for the whole trip back from State College. He felt they learned a lot from their weekend on campus.

The job of Pool Director turned out to be easy for me. After five years on staff, I knew the aquatics operations inside out. Will reminded me that I needed to delegate responsibilities now. I put Patrick in charge of Swimming Merit Badge. Chip was responsible for Lifesaving Merit Badge. Each of them had three instructors and a CIT to teach the badge. Will and I concentrated on supervision and working with the youngest scouts who had trouble swimming. I also taught the BSA Snorkeling class.

One other advantage came from our extra assistant director this season. Will, Eric, Dustin and I had to get up early for the 6:30 am polar bear swims once every four days this season. John, the camp director; Rob, the program director; and Warren, our chaplain, took turns being the qualified adult (over 21) supervision on the days Eric, Dustin or I ran the polar bear swims. The younger aquatic staffers had to guard for polar swims every other day.

Ed, Chip, Matt, Cody, Dave, Gary, Josh and Dustin all joined me after lunch each day to practice passing routes and catches. Ed, Chip, Josh, Dustin and I worked together. Matt threw to Cody, Dave and Gary during our sessions. Chip and I made sure we got about half the reps together each afternoon. That was an important part of why Chip was working at our camp.

Operations at the pool ran pretty smoothly during the first week. My instructors were learning their jobs and doing a decent job teaching their merit badges. Kelly and I kept in touch every evening via e-mail or IM. Both of us were looking forward to her visit at the end of the week for Zack and Leigh Ann's wedding. She expected to arrive sometime Thursday afternoon.

The campers were leaving the pool Thursday morning at the end of third period when a wolf whistle caught my attention. I looked over at the far fence around the pool to see what was up. Half a dozen staffers were staring over the fence at a red headed beauty strolling towards the pool.

It was Kelly, dressed in her dark green Venturer uniform, heading for the pool. I jogged to the fence and called out, "Sweetie, you're early!"

Kelly jogged to me. "Honey, I've missed you so much!" she exclaimed as we hugged over the fence. We wrapped our arms around each other's necks as we kissed. I hadn't meant to French my girl in so public a spot in front of a dozen staffers and probably 30-40 scouts. When our lips met, those intentions disappeared. Electricity jolted us when our tongues met. Our tongues twisted and slipped together as the two of us communicated our lust for each other.

"Damn, Coach has good taste in girls!" someone remarked. Kelly and I separated after a couple more wolf whistles.

"Can I welcome you to camp too sweetie?" Patrick Finnegan offered.

"Cool it Pat," Chip warned. "Coach and Kelly are in a very serious relationship."

"God, I missed you honey," I said ignoring the interchange. "I didn't expect you so early. I thought you planned to come in the afternoon."

"I woke up early this morning," Kelly replied. "I was so excited to be coming over to see you that I couldn't get back to sleep so I came early."

"What's with the uniform?" I asked. "Did you have lunch yet? Maybe I could get you a spot in the dining hall."

"I'm in uniform because I thought I should blend in," Kelly explained. "I am staying for lunch. Abby arranged it already."

"Cool!" I exclaimed. "Give me a minute to change into my uniform and I'll escort you to the dining hall."

"Do you want any help changing sweetie?" Kelly asked. "I'd be glad to take care of you."

"Umm... tempting, but this is scout camp," I replied. "I don't think it would set a good example for my staff if you helped me get dressed."

"Spoilsport," Kelly mock-pouted. "I'm going to jump your bones when I do get a proper chance."

"Tomorrow night," I said. I went ahead and introduced Kelly to the rest of my staff. I held Kelly's hand as we walked together to the dining hall. We sat down with Will, Abby, Ed, Chip, Eric and Sammy.

I noticed that many of the older campers and most of the staff stared at and ogled my girlfriend. It was hard to blame them. Horny teen aged boys were fascinated with girls and girls were in short supply in camp. How could they not stare? I was sitting with the most gorgeous girl in the room.

Kelly left to go to Schaefferstown to help Leigh Ann and her mom with preparations for the wedding after lunch. She wouldn't be returning to camp until later in the evening. Kelly would sleep on Will and Abby's couch at their cabin for the night. The two of us would stay at the Lantern Lodge in Myerstown tomorrow and Saturday night.

I gave Kelly a hug and a kiss before she left. I headed out to the parade field for passing drills when she left. The afternoon moved fairly quickly, considering how anxious I was to spend time with Kelly when she returned. After dinner we ran camp wide games for the troops.

It was almost ten o'clock when my friends and I finished our workouts and evening run. I followed Will back to his cabin when we finished. Kelly greeted me with a hug and a deep kiss when I sat down on the couch with her. Will and Abby joined us as we watched Leno on TV. Will and Abby went to bed at eleven, when the show was over.

"Don't stay up too late," Will cautioned. "You're running polar bear swim tomorrow."

"I'll be fine," I replied. "We're going to watch the news and then go to bed, right honey?"

"We'll be quiet and won't get to bed too late Will," Kelly added.

Kelly and I snuggled together when we were alone. We listened to the news for a few minutes before we began kissing. Both of us intended to behave ourselves that evening but a month's separation prevented us from holding to that resolve. My shirt and Kelly's top came off after our making out raised our craving for each other.

I fondled and caressed her luscious full breasts as we continued to smooch. I was rock hard by the time Kelly straddled my lap and sat on my erection. Rocking on my hardness was driving her crazy too.

Kelly broke loose from my lips momentarily and pulled off my lap. She unzipped my pants and extracted my cock. Kelly sucked the pre cum off my cock quickly, pulled her skirt above her waist, pushed her panties aside and mounted my exposed erection.

The feel of the folds of her pussy sliding down over and encasing my hard cock was exquisite. Kelly paused momentarily when she was fully impaled on me for a deep kiss and then she started bouncing on top of my lap. Both of us needed to release our month old pent up frustrations.

What we were doing was soooo bad! We were fucking ten feet away from my brother and sister in law in the next room and in front of the big picture window in the cabin. If John Holloway happened to walk past the front of Will's cabin on the way to his own cabin we'd be busted. We tried to stifle our groans and pants with limited success.

Kelly and I were both too worked up and needy for this coupling to last long. I managed to last through three minutes of Kelly's bucking and rocking before I spewed a gallon of hot, creamy semen all over her insides.

I collapsed in a stupor. Kelly stayed on my lap, letting my tumescent cock plug her sloppy hole. She kissed me and cuddled while I recovered my senses. I began to play with my girl's clit when I recovered. I had a little relief thanks to my cum, but Kelly didn't. Kelly blew after about a minute of manipulation.

Kelly's vaginal contractions and her squirming brought my cock to hardness again. Neither of us was satisfied with this quickie.

“God, fuck me again!” Kelly begged. “I need you on top this time.”

Kelly climbed off my seven inch erection and lay back on the couch and spread herself open for me. I climbed into position and thrust my sloppy, cum covered erection into my lover's box. In and out, grind our pubic areas together, and then in and out again. I thrust and bucked as I used my six and a half years of experience to bring my partner to climax a second time.

I lasted long enough my second time to give Kelly two more orgasms before I blasted jets of cum into her belly. We collapsed together in a sweaty panting heap of bodies when I was spent. The two of us kissed and cuddled for about fifteen minutes, spent but not satisfied yet. The sound of Jimmy Fallon yakking told me that satisfaction would have to wait until the next evening.

I dressed and hurried back to the staff area after giving Kelly a good night kiss. It was a quarter after one when I finally climbed into my cot.

“What time is it?” Ed asked groggily when I made too much noise.

“Quarter after one,” I replied.

Ed shook his head. “You just got laid, didn't you?”

“Yeah,” I agreed. “It's one of the prerogatives of having a steady girlfriend.”

“Must be nice,” Ed grumped. “I haven't gotten any in three weeks and have no prospects for another month.”

“Good night Ed,” I said as I stripped down to my boxers and climbed in bed. I was asleep in minutes.

“KYLE... KYLE! WAKE UP!” someone exhorted as they shook me awake.

“Wha?” I groaned.

“You’ve got the keys to the pool.” I opened my eyes and saw it was Cody. “It’s almost time for polar bear swim and we can’t get in the pool to set up.”

“Sorry,” I replied. “I guess I overslept.” I pulled the keys off the end of my footlocker and handed them to Cody. “Don’t let anyone in the pool until I get there.”

Cody ran off to open up. I stripped out of my boxers and put on a swim suit. I jogged over to the pool and found around eighty scouts and leaders lined up outside waiting for my arrival and for the pool staff to open the gates.

I scanned the pool area. All the staff were in position. Our chaplain Warren Zug was seated on a chair outside the pool office.

“Go ahead and let everyone in Chip,” I called out as I reached the staff gate to get inside. Chip began checking in buddy pairs for their early morning swim. I glanced at the clock on the wall. It said 6:32 am.

“Late night visiting with your girlfriend?” Warren asked as I walked by him.

“Yeah, it was,” I agreed. “You know how it is.”

“Yeah, I do,” Warren agreed.

I liked Warren. This was his first year on staff with us. He was a twenty-four year old seminary student who decided spending a summer in a scout camp would be fun.

I settled in and watched as my staff performed. I was pleased with the way the group worked together. I had a young staff but they were enthusiastic and worked well together. All I needed to do was wander around and observe while my guys ran the swim.

I went over to hang with Chip after he got all the scouts checked into the pool.

“You look like hell,” Chip commented. “I bet you got a piece last night.”

“I did NOT ‘get a piece’ last night,” I answered.

“You look like I do after I bag a babe at one of our parties back on campus,” Chip said. “You still smell of pussy too. ‘Get a piece’, ‘get laid’, screw – call it what you want. I know you did it with Kelly.”

“I prefer to call it making love,” I countered. “Anyway, we shouldn’t be talking about that here in front of the younger kids. We’re supposed to be setting a good example for them.”

Just as I said that a threesome of eleven year old scouts came to the buddy board and asked to be split into two buddy pairs, adding one young kid from their troop who showed up late for the swim.

“Yeah, you’re right Coach,” Chip agreed.

The campers swam for about forty-five minutes, interrupted by three buddy checks during the swim. By Friday campers were good at finding their buddies, getting counted and then swimming again. My staff and I would need to train next week’s group of campers again on the rigors of safe swims in Boy Scouts. We cleared the pool at 7:15.

I did a quick six laps in the pool and then took a shower before I went back to my tent to wake Ed and to dress for breakfast. Kelly showed up in uniform for flag raising with Abby. We sat together with Ed, Will, Chip, Eric and Sammy like lunch the previous day.

Kelly and I received considerable ribbing from our tablemates. Our tryst seemed to be about the worst kept secret in camp. Fortunately John Holloway wasn’t among those in on the morning gossip.

Kelly packed up and headed up to Schaefferstown to help Leigh Ann for the day. I went over to the pool and got my staff ready for the day’s classes.

Will called me into the pool office a few minutes before the first class started. “You and Kelly certainly made a racket last night,” Will teased as he shut the door.

“Sorry,” I answered. “I hope it didn’t keep you and Abby up too long.”

Will gave me a wink and chuckled. “Little brother, let’s just say that listening to the two of you was quite stimulating.” He grinned wider. “Don’t you know pregnant women are sexually voracious? You weren’t the only guy in camp to get his rocks off last night.”

“I didn’t know that,” I answered. Will opened the door to the pool office again and we headed out to join our staff for the start of the morning’s classes.

I learned before lunch that I had one kink to work out with my staff next week. A lot of scouts needed make-up work to pass their merit badges. The after lunch football practice was cancelled so we could help the young scouts finish their Swimming and Lifesaving

Merit Badges. I needed to make sure the instructors didn't let scouts get too far behind that we needed to do make-up work with so many in the future.

Will and I made all the instructors turn in their paperwork and merit badge cards after each class so the two of us could process the partials and sign the completed merit badge cards as early as possible. Will and I wanted to lock up the pool at 5:00pm and head north for the wedding rehearsal and dinner as fast as possible.

Will and I used the free swim time during sixth period to finish all our paper work. Will turned the pool keys over to Eric at 5:00 pm so he and the ever willing Chaplain Warren could run a staff swim after we left and before dinner.

Will, Abby and I changed into casual clothes, checked out of camp and headed north for the Myerstown United Church of Christ, where the rehearsal and wedding were to be held. We made it about fifteen minutes before the rehearsal was to start.

We met up with Anders Voight and Shawn O'Conner, who were hanging out outside the front of the church. I introduced Will and Abby to my friends. Aaron and Tania Morano greeted us warmly when we stepped inside. I introduced Will and Abby to them too before I was engulfed by 130 pounds of red headed, enthusiastic girlfriend.

“Sweetie, I missed you today,” Kelly said between kisses.

“I missed you too,” I managed to croak between kisses. Kelly calmed down again after a few more kisses. Sam Hayes and his wife Trisha caught up to Will and Abby while Kelly and I kissed.

“It’s about time the rest of the wedding party showed up!” boomed across the room.

“Good to see you Zack,” I called in reply to my friend and mentor. “The happy day is almost here.”

Will, Abby, Kelly, me and rest of the crowd of friends we attracted walked down the aisle to meet the rest of the wedding party. I gave Leigh Ann a hug and a kiss of the cheek. Zack had to settle for a hearty handshake. Zack and Leigh Ann introduced us to the remainder of the wedding party.

Lisa Eberhardt, Leigh Ann’s high school best friend was the maid of honor. Kelly, Tania and Kristen Brooks, Leigh Ann’s college roommate completed the bridesmaids. Aaron was Zack’s best man. Sam Hayes, Will and Leigh Ann’s eighteen year old brother Mike were the groomsmen. Anders, Shawn, Evan Foster and I were the ushers.

I spotted a dear old friend as the introductions were completed. “Rev!” I said. “It’s good to see you!” as I walked over to greet Reverend Hollinger, my and Zack’s minister.

“Kyle! Kelly!” Rev replied. “It is so wonderful to see both of you.” The Rev gave me a wink and added, “I haven’t seen you in church for a few Sundays.”

I nudged Will in the ribs and replied, “I have a slave driver for a boss. He makes me work Sundays.”

“Hey Rev,” Will said as he turned to face our pastor. “Have you ever seen such a collection of football players as this?”

“It is wondrous,” Reverend Hollinger answered. Both of us knew he was a huge football fan.

“You haven’t seen anything yet Rev,” I added. “This place is going to be crawling with football coaches and players tomorrow. You will have more millionaires per pew than you ever imagined.”

“I suppose,” Rev agreed. “Zack has warned me about the guest list. I’ve assured him I won’t gush... too much.” Reverend Hollinger stepped back a step and scanned the crowd. “EVERYONE! I believe everyone is present. I’d like to begin the rehearsal now.”

The Rev started with Evan, Anders, Shawn and me, outlining our duties as ushers. He reviewed the starting positions of the bridesmaids and the groomsmen. Rev patiently walked us through everything so we would be prepared for tomorrow afternoon. The whole rehearsal took about half an hour.

Everyone hopped in cars and headed across town to the Country Faire Restaurant for the rehearsal dinner. I caught a ride with Kelly. They served good, home style Pennsylvania Dutch food. The food was excellent and so was the company.

After dinner Zack’s parents headed for their hotel room and Leigh Ann’s parents headed for home. Aaron organized the bachelor party for the younger guys in the wedding party. It took a little coaxing, but Zack managed to convince Mr. & Mrs. Bowman to allow their son Mike to go along for the festivities. Zack had to promise to take good care of him.

Lisa lined up a party for the bridesmaids. None would say what the plan was, but they loaded up in a car and in Kelly’s mini-van and drove east to Reading.

Aaron was taking all of us out to a strip club on the west shore of the Susquehanna opposite Harrisburg. Zack didn’t tell Mr. or Mrs. Bowman about that part of the night. Anyway it was time for them to let loose the apron strings. Mike had graduated from high school three weeks earlier. He was starting at Kutztown University in August.

Sam Hayes hopped in the front seat of Will’s car. Anders and I took the back seats. Zack, Evan, Shawn and Mike rode in Aaron’s big rental SUV. We drove west on 422 to Harrisburg and then worked our way through the city and across the river to the west

shore. After couple wrong turns and some backtracking we pulled up in front of a rather seedy looking place called “Club 15”. There were a dozen other cars in the parking lot. We headed inside. Mike and I both got carded by the doorman to prove we were eighteen before we could go inside. He didn’t bother checking the rest of our crew.

We came into a large dimly lit room with a huge stage down the middle. There were seats right at the edge of the stage along with tables behind the stage seats. We pushed three tables together to make room for the nine of us.

One nearly naked dancer was on stage gyrating and pulsing to the pounding beat of the loud music. The girl had the largest set of tits I had ever seen! I’ve seen more than my share of lovely breasts in the past six or seven years. I have a gorgeous, voluptuous girlfriend with lovely mammarys that are quite a handful. Still I stared in disbelief as I watched them bounce and jiggle as she danced.

“Pull your tongue in little brother,” Will said. “Haven’t you ever been to a nudie bar?”

“No,” I replied as I continued to stare at the girl.

“Zack, what are you guys doing in State College?” Will asked. “Don’t you get your young guys out to see things like this?”

“No, we don’t,” Zack answered. “Places like this are good places for guys on the team to get in trouble. We party on campus where we have less public interaction. Less publicity means fewer times when one of the football players show up in the papers for problems with the cops.”

“I guess that makes sense,” Will agreed.

“The Lions had more than enough ‘player arrested’ headlines when I started at the school,” Zack said.

“We learned to keep our partying private and low key,” Aaron added. “It has served us well over the last four or five years.”

“I guess,” Will agreed. “I’m not used to students being high profile in the news.”

Our waitress came in the middle of the exchange. “Would anyone like anything to eat?”

“No thanks, just drinks,” Aaron answered. “The bill for everyone comes to me. I’d like a Bud Light.”

“I’m sorry sir,” the waitress replied. “We don’t serve alcohol here. Would you like a soda instead?”

“Pepsi,” Aaron replied. The rest of us placed our orders too.

“I can’t believe it!” Aaron said crossly after the waitress left. “A strip club that doesn’t serve alcohol! I thought to ask if Kyle and Mike would be able to get inside but I never thought to ask if the place served booze.”

“It’s OK Aaron,” Zack said. “We’ll enjoy the sights here for awhile and then we can find a bar somewhere.”

I turned back to watching the beauty on stage while we waited for our drinks. I noticed Mike was staring even more intently than me at the girl. I nudged him in the ribs.

“You ever seen anything like this before?” I asked.

“NO!” Mike answered quickly. “Well... um... yes I have seen naked girls before. I’m not a virgin or anything.” He paused and turned to me. “The first girl I banged when I was fifteen barely had bumps on her chest. I’ve slept with a few since then. I thought my ex-girlfriend from my senior year was well endowed, but shit! This one on stage is twice as big as Mary was.”

“I know,” I agreed. “You’ve met my girlfriend Kelly. She has more than a handful in the breast department.”

Anders, Evan, Aaron and Zack teased us about our fascination with the girl dancing. Somehow that conversation morphed into a talk about first times and how many girls we had slept with.

Evan said he had been with fifteen girls since he lost his virginity in the back seat of his dad’s car on his seventeenth birthday. Shawn wasn’t sure but he thought he had been with close to twenty girls since his first time on his junior prom night. Anders described his encounter with an older cousin when he was twelve years old.

Those of us in the know teased that it must have been his cousin Angie. He denied that. The cousin was fifteen at the time and from his mother’s side of the family not his father’s. Anders did admit to many jerk-off sessions dreaming of Angelina Jolie when he was growing up but never had the courage to try anything with her. Sam, Will and Mike were surprised when they found out who his cousin “Angie” was.

Aaron admitted to sleeping with seven women in his life. His first time was conventional – he slept with his girlfriend of a couple months in the back of his mom’s car one Saturday evening when he was sixteen.

Sam didn’t want to participate in our tell-all. Zack spilled the beans for his brother. His first time was when he was sixteen with his first serious girlfriend. She rewarded her guy with a special treat late one Friday night under the bleachers of the football field to celebrate his first victory as the team’s starting quarterback.

Shawn lost his virginity to his high school coach's daughter in the girls locker room at school when he was fifteen. The two of them were an item for almost two years. Shawn said he nailed nine girls since his first.

Mike had the shortest history to tell. He coaxed a thirteen year old neighbor into sleeping with him just before he started tenth grade. He had sex twice with his eleventh grade girlfriend. He managed a fairly regular love life with Mary, his girlfriend from last October until after the prom this spring. Originally he and Mary both planned to attend Kutztown together but that changed when she dumped him the Monday after the prom.

I described my fumbling attempts to get laid when I was in ninth grade and my success at talking Penny into bed with me on Valentine's Day that year. I had guess at my total number of partners – twelve I think. I had too many drunken Saturdays on campus as an unattached freshman to be certain how many I was really with.

Zack was shocked when Will said he had slept with seven girls in his life. "How in the hell did you do that?" Zack demanded. "You and Abby have been utterly faithful since you started dating in tenth grade."

"I was a busy little fucker in ninth grade," Will said. "It actually started before high school on the trip to Canada..."

"Shit! I knew it!" Sam exclaimed. "Two girls turn up pregnant after the trip to Algonquin. I knew I should have gone along instead of going to quarterback camp that summer."

Will related the story of losing his virginity in the backwoods beside Lake LaVielle at age fourteen. He talked about all the girlfriends he had in the next year.

"Would you believe my snoopy little brother caught my fucking one Saturday night?" Will asked the group.

I laughed. "You only caught me watching once. I watched you screwing four times that year. I was one horny pre-teen!"

"Hell, you were one horny teenager too," Zack added. "You tried to drag nearly every girl who would look at you to bed when you were in ninth grade. Thank God Penny finally let you have what you wanted."

"How did you lose your cherry Zack?" Shawn asked.

Zack related his failing attempts to talk his first girlfriend Beth into bed with him in eighth and ninth grade. The whole group, except Will and me, were shocked to hear that he also lost his virginity in Canada on a scout trip. They were equally shocked to hear that it happened during a regular little orgy in a lake-side cabin.

“How about you Zack?” Anders asked. “All of us ‘fessed up to our past. How many girls have you bedded?”

“Forty-seven,” Zack replied confidently.

“Exactly?” Evan asked. “You’ve kept count?”

“I did,” Zack replied. “Seventeen while I was the hot shot quarterback in high school, three the summer between high school and college and the rest in Happy Valley, party central for colleges. Number forty-seven was my lovely bride-to-be. I will be a happy man if she is the last one I have for the rest of my life.”

“That’s a good thing buddy,” Aaron said. “That is what you are going to promise to her tomorrow afternoon.”

The big breasted dancer on stage stopped when the music stopped and marched off stage. A minute later two identical twins took the stage and began pole dancing. They were excellent. Conversation died as the nine of us concentrated on watching the matching girls perform.

I got hard watching the girls gyrate around the stage. I adjusted my package repeatedly to try to find some comfort as I watched. I noticed the other guys doing the same as they stared at the spectacle.

Another dancer replaced the twins after half an hour. We continued to ogle and stare at her performance. A few minutes later another dancer circulated around the room. She was a very sexy red head who reminded me vaguely of Kelly. Our group chipped in money and bought a lap dance for Zack.

He turned a bright red while she wiggled and shimmied over him. It was worth the money to watch his mix of enjoyment and embarrassment at the dance. Zack’s pants stuck almost straight up when the performance ended. The poor guy had a boner that wouldn’t quit!

“Kyle’s next!” Anders shouted as the dance ended.

“Nooo... no, no.... No!” I protested, to no avail. The other guys anted up and bought me a lap dance too.

Ooohhh... Oh, God! I could smell her perfume as she danced inches from me. Bare breasts wiggling in my face.... I smelled the girl’s arousal from this act. I KNOW she was juicy and wet.... My cock was hard... harder than I had ever felt it. It felt like a titanium bar trying to burst out of my khakis. I fought the urge to grab her and bury my head in her tits or her juicy twat.

My four minutes of torture seemed interminable. Finally she gave me a kiss on the cheek and backed away. Our group wasn't done teasing. We bought Aaron a lap dance too and then gave Mike a treat he would never... ever forget.

Poor Mike came in his pants in the middle of his lap dance. He shuddered, groaned and let go. I know the wet spot in his pants was much too large to be precum (like the spot in my pants). He turned beet red as Candy, the dancer, finished up. All of us chipped in more to give the girl a good tip. She certainly earned it.

We watched a succession of dancers on stage until around eleven o'clock. Aaron, our entertainment director, wanted to find a bar so the group could enjoy some drinks before the party ended.

Zack suggested a bar in Lebanon that he and Leigh Ann went to occasionally. We headed back across the river, through Harrisburg and on to Lebanon. We ended up at Joe's Corner Bar on the outskirts of the city.

The bar was dark when we headed inside. The bar tender carded everyone. Mike and I grabbed sodas. The rest of our group ordered shots and beers. Aaron handed his keys to Mike and announced, "You're my designated driver. Be kind to the rental company. No dents please."

"You take care of mine little brother or I'll kick your ass," Will said as he handed me the keys to his Honda.

The drinkers downed shots and beers repeatedly over the course of the next hour and a half. Mike and I talked as our friends quickly became quite drunk. I expected my horniness would pass after we left the strip club. I was still sported a metal bar in my pants the entire time we were at the bar.

Around 12:30 Will announced that it probably was time for us to leave. Anders bought a six pack to go just before we left. Mike and I helped our friends stagger out to the cars. We needed about fifteen minutes to get back on the nearly empty road to the Lantern Lodge where all of us were staying.

Anders pulled his six pack apart when he reached his room. He handed Mike two cans of beer. "You earned this man," Ander slurred. "Enjoy it in private." Anders gave me the remainder of the six pack. "You and Kelly know what to do with this Kyle. Thanks for being a good sport and driving us back here."

I took the beers and helped Anders into his room. I headed down the hall to my room. Kelly and the other girls weren't back from Reading yet. I put the beers in the refrigerator and took a shower to clean up.

I was still hard as steel and horny enough to fuck anything that presented itself with a hole for me. Thank God the first person in the room was Kelly. She came back while I

was showering. I rinsed off quickly, dried myself and came out into our room bare-ass naked, my seven inch steel rod leading.

“God woman, I need you now!” I declared firmly.

Kelly eyed me. “Good, you’re not too drunk!” she declared as she started stripping. “We went to a Chippendales’... well like a Chippendales’ club. I spent the night watching buff, hard bodied men dance around wearing thongs.”

She dropped the last of her clothes and hopped in bed beckoning me to follow. “I frigged myself the whole way back from Reading. Stuff me full with that big cock of yours right now lover.” Kelly lay back and pulled her knees to her shoulders and spread her feet wide to give me access.

I jumped on the bed between her legs and fingered her to get her wet. “Damn!” Kelly growled, “Stick it in. I’m ready!”

Without further pause I jammed my steely bar into her twat. My lover was totally wet and juicy. I slid home in one thrust. The two of us rutted and fucked frantically, trying to relieve our pent-up lust. Kelly was primed too. She came after thirty seconds of thrusts. I pride myself on being good in bed but I’m not that talented.

I managed to hold off my cum through a couple minutes of hard thrusts and grinds. Kelly’s second orgasm was too much for me. I shrieked and drove my cock in deep until our pubic bones crashed together. I held my cock head tight against her cervix and blasted burst after burst of semen into her belly.

Kelly and I needed almost five minutes to recover from that vigorous coupling. I offered Kelly one of the beers Anders bought for us and had one myself. Kelly had managed to snag most of a beer when the waiter at her club wasn’t looking. The two of us enjoyed our libations while we relaxed.

Our initial coupling helped reduce our hunger for each other, but not completely. We kissed and petted a little before we were ready for round two. Kelly asked me to do her doggie style the second time. She was able to play with her clittie while I drilled her. I kept one hand on her ass cheek for leverage and used my other hand to play with her jiggling, bouncing tits. Kelly brought herself to multiple orgasms while we fucked. Finally the grasping and clutching of her hot demanding pussy was more than I could tolerate. I rammed my hard cock home and spewed another load of cum into my lover’s belly.

We downed our last two beers while we recovered. The second sex session went a long way to quenching our desires but not entirely. Kelly and I went one more time, missionary style this time. I pumped and thrust for almost ten minutes while Kelly experienced orgasm after orgasm until they were nearly continuous. I dripped sweat on her and panted as I ran out of energy.

Kelly rolled us over and mounted herself on top of me so we could go to completion. She rode me, rocking and bucking up and down for almost ten more minutes before I finally spewed a weak string of cum into her belly. She collapsed on my exhausted body, pulled the sheets over us and kissed me before falling asleep. I followed her to sleep in seconds.

I woke up with Kelly still lying against and on top of my body. Her arms were wrapped around me and our legs were intertwined. My cock had wilted and fallen out of her during the night. I felt the wet sticky mess her juices mixed with my semen had made on us and on the sheets.

My bladder was full and demanded relief. Carefully as I could I disentangled myself from my slumbering lover. I deposited all the beer and soda from last night in the bowl, washed up and returned to our bed. The half light from around the edges of the curtain highlighted Kelly and her beauty.

I stared and thought about today. Zack was about to pledge his life to the perfect girl for him. ‘Till death do you part.’ I was fortunate enough to have found my perfect girl too. Kelly and I shared so many common interests. We laughed at the same jokes. Sexually the two of us were perfectly matched – untiring pussy hound and insatiable demanding cock lover.

Two years, maybe three – I KNEW Kelly and I would pledge ourselves to each other the same way Zack and Leigh Ann were doing today. This was the one woman I wanted for the rest of my life – the woman that would bear my children. I had an inspiration. Kelly and I were to meet our friends at 11:30 for lunch but had no commitments until then. We had time for some role playing.

I climbed back in bed behind her and spooned against her back. I wrapped an arm around her side and cupped one breast. I gently fondled and squeezed it while my lover and mate slept. My teasing brought her from deep to a light sleep. Kelly giggled and squirmed from the dreams I was inducing in her. Suddenly a hand grasped my hand and squeezed it tighter around her breast.

“Keep doing that,” my lover murmured.

“Mrs. Martin....” I whispered sweetly. “Mrs. Martin.... I love you.”

“Mmmm.... I love you too Mr. Martin,” Kelly purred.

“Are you too tired from last night to make love again?” I asked.

Kelly rolled over and gave me deep kiss. "I'm never too tired for that Mr. Martin." We kissed a couple more times.

"Let's get ready to make love sweetie," I suggested. Kelly rolled on her back and clambered around so I was facing the opposite direction. Kelly took my hardening cock into her mouth. I leaned down and licked her outer and then her inner labia. I was hard in seconds. I continued licking and teasing her womanhood while Kelly sucked on my balls and licked the shaft of my cock.

When Kelly's juices started to flow I wormed a finger into her vagina and then a second. I felt around deep until I found what I wanted. Kelly did have her birth control ring in. I worked on her G-spot for a few seconds and teased her clitoris with my tongue. I stopped before Kelly could climax.

"Mrs. Martin, when was your last period?" I asked.

"Ummm... It started on June 11th," Kelly replied. "Why?"

"That's what I thought," I answered. "Fourteen days ago." I turned around so I could look Kelly in the eyes. "I love you totally and want you to be the mother of my children. You should be ready today. Can we try to make our first child?" I gave Kelly a wink so she would understand that I was play-acting.

She smiled, winked back and answered, "I would like nothing more than for you to give me the gift of your child. Please take me and make this special. I want to remember this day for the rest of our lives together."

I knew my lover's cycles well enough to know that the little ring of hormones in her vagina was all that stood between us and parenthood. She really would be ovulating now without that little ring. Between the two times Thursday night, three times Friday night and now on Saturday morning we really would be conceiving a child. It would be fine with me if it actually happened, though of course it wouldn't.

Kelly lay back on our bed and spread herself open for me. I hoisted her ankles onto my shoulders and positioned my cock at her hole.

"Are you sure you want my baby?" I asked sweetly.

"More than anything in the world Mr. Martin," Kelly answered. I drove my seven inch cock slowly into my lover until the head bumped her cervix.

"Prepare yourself honey," I cautioned. I withdrew slowly and thrust back in. I did this repeatedly adding a pubic grind on her clitoris after every few strokes. I wanted this to last and I wanted it to be mind blowing experience for Kelly.

Kelly clutched my side and back to give herself leverage to push back as my cock drove home each time. In a year and a half the two of us had become finally tuned to each other's rhythms and needs. I took five minutes to bring my lover to her first orgasm.

"I'm going to give you a baby today," I murmured repeatedly as we continued. Kelly was just as turned on by the idea as I was. I picked up speed as I continued. I varied depth and speed. I gave my girl a grind periodically to keep her clit enflamed.

Kelly gasped and spasmed a second time. She panted, "God Kyle... Give it to meee.... Give it to me...." as she came hard. I continued thrusting into her quivering pussy.

"Oh God, I do want your child," Kelly moaned as our mating continued.

"You'll have it Mrs. Martin," I replied. "I want to give you this gift."

Ten minutes of action was wearing down my sexual endurance. I pumped then ground on her clit after each stroke now. I wanted her to cum when I did. A minute of working her clit and pumping her with my cock pushed her over the edge again. Kelly clutched my back, shrieked and came hard around my invading cock. I pounded in and out three times before I lost it too.

"Here it.... cummmmmssss.... I grunted before driving my cock in deep until it bounced against her spasming cervix. I pressed in hard, smashing my cockhead against her womb. I felt her cervix pulse and grasp at my cock head.

"Ohhh... God," I moaned. My cock spurted a huge pulse of sticky white, sperm laden cream into Kelly womb. "Here's our baby," I gasped. My cock pulsed repeatedly, flooding Kelly's vagina and womb with my sperm.

"I feel it Mr. Martin," Kelly gasped through clenched teeth. "I can feel your sperm squirting into me!"

I felt Kelly's vagina frantically pulsing, trying to suck up every drop of my fluids as it tried desperately to impregnate her. I drained myself with the last few weak spurts of sperm and collapsed momentarily on my lover.

I tried to roll us over so I wouldn't crush Kelly. "No Mr. Martin," she said. "Our chances of conceiving increase if you stay on top of me." I did as directed.

"Do you feel my sperm in your womb honey?" I asked after a minute.

"I do," Kelly agreed. "I can feel it down there."

"It's wiggling through your uterus into your fallopian tubes," I cooed. "It's going to find that big ripe egg, burrow inside it and join our beings. It will make us parents."

“I want that desperately Mr. Martin,” Kelly agreed. “I want to have your baby.”

We held the position to increase our chances of conception for almost ten minutes – Kelly’s bottom upturned so my sperm drained down to her cervix and womb, my cock inside her plugging her so none of my sperm could escape.

Finally I suggested, “I think I need to get off you before I hurt your back Kell.”

“OK,” Kelly agreed reluctantly. I withdrew my sloppy, semi hard cock and sat down beside my lover. She put her legs down and spread out on the bed again. “That was one hell of a fantasy Kyle.”

“Fantasy simply reveals wishes,” I said. “I do love you totally.”

“I can see it in two or three years Kyle,” Kelly agreed. “I wouldn’t have minded if today were real. I can see us together like Zack and Leigh Ann.”

“Two or three years,” I said. “We need to get cleaned up and go meet our friends for lunch.”

We took a half hour to shower, separately of course. We were too worn out to chance getting horny again and doing it in the shower too. We needed to be well rested if we were going to last through the party after the wedding.

We met Anders, Shawn, Evan, Aaron, Tania and Zack downstairs in the dining room. Thankfully for us the lodge still did breakfast food at 11:30. The group ordered an assortment of waffles, pancakes, omelets and home fries to get our day going. Anders’ date for the wedding joined us before we finished eating. She was busy last night so she drove down from State College this morning.

Kimberly, Anders’ date, was a grad student in the apartment next to his. They met a few weeks ago. Normally single first year grad students didn’t get into the White Course Apartments on the southwest side of campus across Atherton. Being a grad assistant to the head football coach had perks which included an apartment instead of sharing a dorm room in grad housing.

Tania and Kelly took off when we finished eating to drive down to Schaefferstown to help Leigh Ann get ready for the wedding. The rest of us hung out in the lobby for an hour, talking and reminiscing about our time together in college.

We headed back upstairs to clean up and dress for the wedding. Kelly returned while I was putting on my good suit. I hung out while she dressed in her bridesmaid dress, did her makeup and then fixed her hair. I zipped the tight dress up when she was ready.

I lost my breath when my lover turned around so I could see the whole package. Kelly was stunning. I teased her that she wasn't allowed to outshine the bride. Kelly drove the two of us over to the church around two o'clock.

The rest of the bridal party was arriving as we parked behind the church. Anders, Evan, Shawn and I took our positions by the sanctuary doors. Kelly, Abby and Tania waited for Leigh Ann's arrival. Aaron, Zack, Sam and Will waited in the hallway beside the sanctuary for things to begin.

We ushers we told to seat people in four sections – friends of the bride, friends of the groom, football players and football coaches. It was a useful division to assure that everyone sat with friends or acquaintances.

Coach and Mrs. Burton, Coach and Mrs. Schroeder and Coach and Mrs. Peterson were among the first to arrive. They came down together from State College. The sanctuary filled as more guests arrived. Being an usher kept the four of us hopping.

“Stanley!” I said in greeting. “It’s good to see you,” I added as I pumped Stan Humphries hand. I introduced him to Evan, Shawn and Anders and told them about how much he had helped me when I started playing football in high school.

Mike Wagner came in a few minutes later. He was escorting a cute looking young lady. He introduced her as his fiancée, Brittany.

“Mike is the guy who taught me how to play wide receiver when I started playing football in ninth grade,” I explained. “This is Anders Voight, my tutor in how to play college football.” Mike was living outside Washington D. C. and working for an investment company now.

Coach and Mrs. Caffrey showed up accompanied by Justin and Sherry Baer. I teased him about whether he wanted to be seated in the ‘friends of the groom’ section or the coaches section.

“Hell, I’m a coach now, I guess,” Justin answered. He glanced at Coach Caffrey and winked. “Who knows... maybe I’ll make some contacts and get a better job offer.”

“You get an offer from one of these fine gentlemen Justin, you take it,” Coach Caffrey answered. “Those opportunities don’t come along very often.”

I seated them beside the Penn State coaches. Over half our coaching staff showed – all the offensive coaches along with Coach Czarwinski and Coach Ferguson.

Alex Weaver, my crew leader from my first trip to Algonquin, showed up with his wife Kelsey. Rick Winters made it too. Jerry Frankhouser, our reliable kicker from six years ago made it to the wedding. Rick and Jerry both were team captains the year after Zack graduated from high school.

We had an assortment of NFL players show up too. Antwaan Booker came in from Denver for the wedding. Phil DiStefano arrived with his girlfriend. Glenn Tucker came too. I thanked Glenn profusely for his help last fall – advice and contacts for others who would help me improve as a receiver.

I was surprised when Daryll Clark strolled in a few minutes before the ceremony was to start. Anders reminded me that Daryll was a senior and the starting quarterback when Zack started college. Zack attributed much of his success in college to Daryll and Phil's help his first year.

I enjoyed meeting Daryll. He never quite seemed to be able to find time to visit campus while I was there. Of course he was busy in the NFL during the fall. He had visited a couple times but always between semesters when I was away.

Zack and the groomsmen filed into the front of the sanctuary promptly at 3:00 pm. Anders and I escorted Mr. and Mrs. Hayes and Mrs. Bowman to their seats in the front pews. Reverend Hollinger walked in from the same side door as the groomsmen after that. The bridal party was lining up at the door when a tardy guest hurried into the church.

I recognized him immediately. He was Coach Jim Bauder, the head coach of the Green Bay Packers. I escorted him to a seat with the other coaches while he apologized for being so late. His flight out of Detroit was delayed two hours. He barely had time to get his rental car and drive over here from Harrisburg International.

The music started and Lisa, Tania, Kelly and Kristen marched into the sanctuary and took their positions to the right of Reverend Hollinger. The music swelled as Mr. Bowman escorted Leigh Ann down the aisle. She looked stunning in her wedding gown. He led Leigh Ann to the front of sanctuary beside Zack.

Reverend Hollinger asked, "Who gives this woman in marriage?"

"Her mother and I do," Mr. Bowman replied. He took his seat beside Mrs. Bowman in the front pew.

Reverend Hollinger read from I Corinthians 13:1-13

"If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing."

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love

does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.”

The Rev continued talking about the meaning of marriage and how it formed the foundation for family, community and our country. His reflections were interesting. After that we came to the climax of the ceremony. Leigh Ann read the vows she composed followed by Zack.

Reverend Hollinger asked, “Do you, Zachary David Hayes, take you Leigh Ann Bowman, to be your wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better or for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish; from this day forward until death do us part?”

“I do,” Zack answered. His face lit up with a huge smile.

“Do you, Leigh Ann Bowman, take you Zachary David Hayes, to be your husband, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better or for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish; from this day forward until death do us part?”

“I do,” Leigh Ann answered.

“By the power vested in me by God Almighty I now pronounce you man and wife. Let no man put asunder what God has joined together,” The Rev pronounced triumphantly. “You may kiss the bride Zachary.”

Leigh Ann lifter her veil as Zack hugged her and gave her a passionate kiss. The guests rose, cheered and clapped for the happy couple. The music swelled again and Zack and Leigh Ann marched down the aisle and out of the sanctuary. The groomsmen and bridesmaids exited two by two. By chance Will escorted Kelly down the aisle to the exit.

Shawn, Evan, Anders and I stood ready at the rear to assist anyone needing help as the large crowd exited the sanctuary. We weren’t needed. The crowd milled around in the narthex while Leigh Ann, Zack and the rest of the party took wedding photos in the sanctuary. Zack and Leigh Ann insisted that we ushers be included in the photos.

The wedding guests were prepared outside the church to shower the newlyweds with rose petals fifteen minutes later. The whole wedding party fit into the big limousine. Kelly tossed me her keys and told me to drive her mini-van over to the lodge.

Anders, Kimberly, Evan and Shawn rode over to the lodge with me. We shed our jackets and ties when we reached the banquet room. The room filled as the guests arrived from the church.

Will and Abby joined Kelly and me at a table. Cuch Cuchiella and his girlfriend Gina Rossi joined us. Karol Zizka came stag. Cuch and I invited him to sit with us. Anders and his date Kimberly joined us too. The room was nearly full when Reverend Hollinger wandered by. He greeted Will, Abby, Kelly and me.

As we talked Aaron Morano called for quiet and asked everyone to have a seat. It was time for dinner. Rev looked around quickly for a place to sit.

“Join us Rev,” Will said.

“We would love to have you sit with us,” I agreed.

“Ummm... I guess I can,” Rev answered. “I’ll be back after I give the blessing.” Reverend Hollinger walked to the microphone in front. He asked God’s blessing on the happy couple and the guests here tonight. He rejoined us after that.

I introduced Anders, Kimberly, Karol, Cuch and Gina to Reverend Hollinger. Rev was delighted when he found out Cuch was drafted by his favorite pro team, the Eagles. His interest went up further upon learning that Karol was drafted by the Vikings.

Lantern Lodge provided an excellent meal for us. The wedding reception didn’t have a bar. Waitresses and waiter delivered drinks to the tables. Kelly and I were shut out of the booze thanks to the arrangements.

Our waiter delivered champagne to everyone at the table after dinner except Kelly and me. We received ginger ale instead. Aaron Morano gave a moving toast to the bride and groom.

I was glad when Zack and Leigh Ann cut the cake that they skipped the stupid tradition of smashing the first piece of cake in each other’s faces. The cake and ice cream that was served was excellent.

Zack and Leigh Ann took the dance floor for the traditional couples’ first dance. Leigh Ann danced with her dad and Zack danced with his mom. The bridal party took the floor next and then the rest of us joined them. Kelly and I spent quite a bit of the evening on the dance floor.

Kelly and I circulated around the room talking with our friends from the team and from home. I got a chance to talk with Bo Cherry that evening. My former captain and mentor was still playing in football in Canada.

He had hoped to play for his hometown Alouettes but ended up with the Hamilton Tiger-Cats instead. He was the number two receiver on the team last season. He had high hopes of doing better this season. His first regular season game was next Wednesday. No NFL team expressed interest in signing him this spring. Bo was satisfied to play out his career in the CFL.

Kelly and I took Reverend Hollinger around the room to introduce him to many of the players. My pastor, a passionate football fan, was in seventh heaven. He met Daryll Clark, Phil DiStefano, Glenn Tucker, Antwaan Booker, Jake Washington, and a host of other NFL and Penn State stars. Rev was in awe by the time we took him back to our table.

“It is an amazing world you live in Kyle,” Rev said as he sat down.

“Yes, yes it is Rev,” I said. “I’m very fortunate to have gotten this opportunity.”

Rev excused himself around nine o’clock, reminding us he had a church service to lead tomorrow morning. Kelly and I visited with our friends some more and danced as much as we could.

The party started to wind down around ten o’clock. Kelly made a valiant dive for the bouquet but didn’t catch. I was able to out leap all the single guys and snag Leigh Ann’s garter when Zack shot it into the crowd. Being a wide receiver does come in handy sometimes. The guys teased Kelly and me that we were destined to be married next. We protested that we probably wouldn’t be next but didn’t argue about getting married someday.

Zack and Leigh Ann left around eleven o’clock to the cheers of the assembled guests. They were spending the night in the honeymoon suite here. They were hosting a brunch at noon tomorrow for any guests still in the area and then leaving for the airport. Their honeymoon was ten days in Hawaii. Most of the guests took off after Zack and Leigh Ann left.

Kelly and I headed back to our room. We took showers separately and then joined each other in bed. Both of us were mellow after the long day. We kissed and cuddled for awhile while we watched the evening news.

My closeness to my naked lover eventually warmed my libido. Kelly and I made love once that evening. It was comfortable and loving, quite unlike our frantic couplings the previous evening. It felt perfect to us.

Room service gave me a wakeup call at ten o'clock on Sunday morning. It left time for a quickie with Kelly, a shower and then breakfast in the lodge's restaurant. Kelly and I met Will and Abby there. Kelly and I parted with hugs, kisses and repeated "I love yous," before I climbed in the back of Will's car for the ride back camp

Chapter 42

Camp continued running smoothly. Patrick and Chip oversaw their respective merit badge staffs. I worked out some of the kinks from the first week and helped my instructors improve their teaching techniques. By the end of the second week I was satisfied that we had a well drilled, top notch staff at the pool.

Kelly and I kept in touch by IMing late each evening. If we didn't connect with IM, I left her an e-mail. After the pool closed down each evening my friends and I did our work outs and ran three and a half miles.

After lunch each day we football players did our passing drills. Matt threw to the high school players. Ed and Chip threw to me and Josh Hunsecker while Dustin covered us. I worked with all the guys on their blocking. Matt protested he didn't need to do that until I reminded him about our high school's reverse plays. Matt turned out to be half decent when he tried.

Pack 312, the cub pack sponsored by my church showed up Saturday morning for their cub overnight on July 2nd. Justin Baer led the group of fifteen parents and sixteen wolf and bear scouts. Jon Miller came with his son Brian too.

Jon's son Brian and Justin's son Billy had grown since I last saw them. They turned nine this spring and would soon be first year Webelos Scouts in the fall. It blew Will's mind that the two boys would be in Boy Scouts eighteen months from now. Jon, Justin, Will and I got to talk during the boys' swimming session on Saturday afternoon. It was fun to have old friends in camp for the weekend.

The third week of scout camp was our lightest week. We had 210 scouts and leaders in camp. Classes were smaller and the scouts got more individual attention. It was a fun week. I celebrated my twentieth birthday on Saturday night while the cub scouts were in camp. It was low key. My family planned a bigger celebration the next week.

We paid for the light week in the fourth week. On Sunday afternoon my staff worked full out doing swim tests. We didn't finish with the last of the 403 leaders and scouts until 5:20 in the afternoon. My troop and Christian's troop were in camp for the week. Christian greeted Chip and me warmly when his troop came to the pool.

John Holloway loaned the aquatics staff two extra CITs for the week, which made it possible to give the campers some individual attention. The classes were crowded. Will and I assisted the slow learners each period so they could keep up with the rest of their group.

The after lunch football sessions grew beyond belief. Ryan Lapp, Josh Strickler, Tyler Anderson from our troop joined us. Christian brought along Blake Mummau and Ryan

Zug from his troop. We ran seven on seven scrimmages and still had a few players extra. Christian, Chip and I spent most of each session running Penn State routes on the side of the parade field to help us get ready for our football camp. It was three weeks away by the time the fourth week of camp ended.

By Friday afternoon Christian, Chip and I were totally in sync. Chip delivered the ball to us crisply – short, medium or deep. I thought our routes looked clean. Coach Burton was going to be pleased when football camp started. Christian was ready for starting role. Chip looked good too. He was going to give Jay a good run for the starting quarterback spot.

My family came up to camp for the family dinner on Friday night. They brought along birthday treats for me and my troop. They found Will and me at the pool as we were dismissing the sixth period free swim. Our first notice of their arrival was yells of “Unka Wih! Unka Ky!” as the twins charged through the crowd of departing scouts to the fence near us.

“Hey guys!” Will exclaimed as he turned and stooped down to their level.

“How are my favorite nephews?” I asked as I squatted down too.

“OK” Conner replied.

“We swim?” Noah asked.

“No, sorry big guy,” Will said. “You are going for dinner soon. You’re having chicken tonight.”

“Yeah!” both twins cheered. Andy caught up with his sons as they cheered the dinner menu. Will and I greeted our younger brother. Mom and Dad joined us half a minute later. Hunter was tucked in Dad’s baby backpack.

We greeted Mom and Dad. Hunter yelled “Da! Da!” and reached towards Will and me. He squirmed and tried to climb out of his seat. Mom pulled him out of his seat. Hunter reached towards the fence and begged “Wih... Wih...”

“Is he saying my name?” Will asked. Mom handed Hunter over the fence. Hunter clung to Will’s neck as he received his hug and kiss in greeting.

“We haven’t figured that out yet,” Mom said. “Hunter parrots many of the words that the twins say. We aren’t sure if he understands what they mean yet.

Noah and Connor fidgeted after losing everyone’s attention. “Unka Ky... p’ane p’ease” both twins begged as they wagged their “wings.”

Andy hoisted Connor over the fence and handed him to me. I gave my nephew a thirty second plane ride before setting him down on the pool deck. Andy handed me Noah, who got the same treatment. I took Hunter from Will so he could properly greet his nephews.

Hunter distinctly said “Ky” twice while I was giving him a hug and a kiss.

“You are a smart boy, aren’t you?” I commented. I snuggled his nose and got a laugh from my baby brother.

Will and I handed the three boys back across the fence to our family when we were finished greeting them. I noticed Liz was missing.

“Did Liz skip this evening?” I asked.

“Let’s just say she got distracted on the way to the pool,” Dad explained.

“Kyle and I have some work we have to finish here at the pool,” Will said. “Why don’t you guys meet Abby and go over to the parade field for the picnic. The two of us will join you after we close up the pool.”

Our family headed off while Will and I supervised the staff in closing down the pool. We made sure they turned in all completed and partial merit badge cards. Will and I would sign and sort them after dinner before the campfire.

Will and I caught up with our family just before the flag ceremony at the parade field just before six o’clock. I found out what distracted Liz earlier in the evening. Even though the troops were starting to line up, Josh Strickler was practically glued to my sister’s side. They each had an arm around the other’s waist, clinging together. They were oblivious to everything around them.

I tapped Josh on the shoulder, “You better get going. You need to line up with your troop now.”

“OK Coach,” Josh agreed. He reluctantly left Liz after giving her a good bye kiss, then a second and finally a third desperate kiss before he tore himself away. Josh jogged over to rejoin our troop.

“I thought Liz was going steady with Nate Good,” I commented under my breath to Andy.

“Nate is so yesterday Kyle,” Andy replied. “You got to keep up with things.”

“There is no way I can keep up with Liz’s love life,” I said. Will and I walked up to the other end of the field and joined the rest of our staff lined up across the front of the parade field.

John Holloway had warned the staff that today's parent night was our biggest ever. Between campers, leaders, staff and families we would be feeding over nine hundred people. Our poor kitchen staff literally had to work overtime for two days to prepare enough food for this huge crowd. We set up six serving lines, a director in charge of each one.

The serving lines ran amazingly smoothly. My pool staff manned my line. We processed around a hundred and fifty people in a little more than twenty minutes. The kitchen staff kept the trays of food arriving smoothly as we emptied trays onto the guests' plates. My staff kept their cool and made sure to smile and greet everyone as they came through. I was proud of how well my guys did. We served ourselves after the last of the guests went through and then found places to sit.

I joined my family along with Josh for dinner. Will, Abby and I got to catch up with what was happening with our family. Noah, Connor and Hunter entertained us as they explored around the crowd of scouts and parents from our troop. The scouts goofed with the little boys, which they loved. My little brother was getting adept at walking. He almost could keep up with the twins.

Josh and Liz were engrossed in each other and nothing else through most of the meal. Near the end of the meal they found Matt Sauder and had a short conference. I overheard them discussing switching Josh from Matt's crew in Algonquin to Liz's crew. Our Venturer Crew was making its every other year trip to Canada the second week in August.

Will, Eric, Dustin and I left Chip in charge of our staff for cleanup after dinner. We directors needed to get back to the pool and process the hundreds of merit badges kids had worked on during the week. The four of us spent nearly an hour checking, signing and then sorting all the paperwork for each badge by troop.

This week 102 kids earned Swimming, 74 earned Lifesaving, 92 Canoeing, 47 Rowing, 88 did the Mile Swim, 12 passed BSA Lifeguard and 18 passed Snorkeling BSA. Even Will, in his tenth season on staff, had never seen anything like this week. The kids and the staff worked their hearts out. It was fantastic and a credit to both groups.

The four of us dropped all our paperwork off at the camp office for John and Rob to put in envelopes for each troop's scoutmaster. We had to hurry to get to the closing campfire before it started.

The campers put on most of the skits for the evening. They did a decent job, though we saw a lot of repeats of skits done in the past. Nature, Campcraft and the Pioneer Scout staff were responsible for cleaning up after the campfire so I was off duty after the campfire. I had arranged with the cook to stop by the dining hall and pick up my birthday cake and ice cream after the campfire to take up to my troop site.

I left just before the closing song so I could get to the site with the treats before the troop came back. I grabbed the cake from the walk-in refrigerator and the bag of ½ gallon boxes of ice cream from the freezer and headed up the hill to our troop site.

I put everything on the table under our troop's big dining fly. I had a seat to wait for the scouts' return.

“Ooohh..... ooooooh, yeah....” I heard come from some distance away. “Unnhh.... Unnnh...” someone grunted. The sounds were coming from the Raven Patrol site. I walked over to see what in the hell as up. As I got closer I could distinctly hear two people grunting and panting.

“Oooohhh.... yeah... Ooohh... GOD!” a deeper voice groaned.

I saw a tent rattling from people moving inside it. The moans and grunts were coming from there. I walked over quietly and yanked the tent flap open. I wasn't prepared for what I found.

My nearly naked sister was spread eagle on a bunk. A naked guy with curly, dirty blond hair was drilling her good. He pumped his hard cock into my sister again before he realized I was there.

“Kyle!” Liz growled as she laid her head back to look up at me.

“What?” the boy exclaimed. He pushed his body up and stared at me. “OH FUCK!” he gasped when he looked into my eyes. “COACH?!?!?” It was Josh Strickler. He froze in fear. My flashlight illuminated his blond pubes and about half an inch of his hard cock that wasn't embedded in my sister's body as I shined it at them.

“Kyle, close the flap and leave us alone,” Liz demanded.

I let the flap drop again for modesty's sake. “You two need to stop right now,” I commanded. “The troop will be back in a couple minutes. You need to get decent immediately.”

“Leave us alone,” Liz countered. “We'll be ready soon. Just leave us alone.”

“Your brother's going to kill me,” Josh pleaded.

“I'm almost there,” Liz said, ignoring his plea. “Are you close too?”

“Yeah,” Josh agreed hesitantly.

“Good, don't stop,” Liz demanded. “Kyle will keep us safe. Do me fast so we can get off before everyone comes back.”

I stepped a few feet away from the tent. How had I become the lookout? I sighed and watched for the troop's return. My little sister could get me to do almost anything for her. I stood at the edge of the patrol site while Josh frantically thrust and bucked, trying to bring the two of them to orgasm in time.

"I see flashlights," I warned after a couple more minutes. Josh and Liz sounded close to their goal.

"AAaaaeeeeeeeeiiiiii," my sister groaned as she stifled her scream.

"oh fuck! ooohh....fuck.... oooohhhhh....." Josh moaned quietly as he came too.

"Shag your ass NOW!" I demanded. "You have about thirty seconds before people arrive."

"I love you Liz," I heard Josh say as he scrambled out of his cot. He shot out of his tent twenty seconds later, zipping up his pants after he tucked in his scout shirt. His semi-hard cock was noticeable but shrinking by the second. Josh slipped into the woods at the back of the campsite and disappeared. Liz made no attempt to be outside before the scouts returned.

The first scouts came into the campsite and headed for the big dining fly seconds after Josh disappeared. I headed over and joined the younger boys as they gathered.

"It's really great you celebrate your birthday at camp every year. Ice cream and cake is one of the highlights of camp," Ty Bomberger said. He was a third year scout.

"Actually you missed my birthday this year," I said. "It was last Saturday. My family knows how much you guys enjoy the cake and ice cream so we brought it a week late."

"We're glad you did," Bobby Chalmers said.

The rest of the scouts, leaders and my family gathered under the fly. Josh Strickler coolly walked into camp up the trail from the campfire area about sixty seconds after everyone else had returned.

"Where did you get to?" Mr. Good, one of our assistant scoutmasters, asked.

"I stopped at the bathroom at the pool," Josh lied. "I really needed to pee."

No one questioned the horny teen's story. He slipped right in among the other scouts like he didn't have a concern in the world. Liz showed up out of the shadows a minute or so later. Her hair was a little disheveled and she was flushed. Otherwise you never would have known that she was getting her pussy stuffed five minutes earlier.

“Did Liz sit with Josh and the troop at the campfire?” Andy asked. “She didn’t sit with the family.”

“Yeah,” I confirmed. “She was with Josh tonight.”

Will and I invited the Aquatics staff to join our troop for the celebration. They arrived en masse a couple minutes later. Dad and Mr. Clark organized things. The crowd sang happy birthday to me. I received the first slice of cake and bowl of ice cream. The service patrol in our troop rapidly fed the thirty-seven scouts, five leaders, seventeen aquatics staffers, Ed Fritz, and my eight family members.

My family had presents for me. Mom and Dad gave me cash and an upgrade to my cell phone plan. Andy and Liz both gave me gift cards for downloading music. That was cool. Dad presented me with a big, nicely wrapped box. It was from Kelly. When I opened it I found she had bought me an HD DVD player for my apartment. The note said she was looking forward to cuddling with me on the couch and watching movies together this fall.

It was really sweet of her. Kelly knew that Trevor, Damian, Jay and I had made out assignments for what each of us would bring from home. Trevor was bringing his big screen TV, Damian would equip the kitchen, and my responsibility was to get a DVD player. Jay would handle the sound system.

Noah, Connor and Hunter got passed around and played with by most of the kids in the troop. Surprisingly the three boys were wide awake and enjoying all the attention they received. I was sure they would crash by the time Mom, Dad and Andy got them back to the car to head for home.

After my family left I took Josh aside for a short talk. “Do you have any idea how much trouble you can get in doing what you did tonight?”

“What are they going to do?” Josh asked. “Send me home? I’m leaving tomorrow morning anyway. What could the camp do?”

“The camp can’t do much,” I agreed. “What about Mr. Clark? How would your Eagle Scoutmaster’s Conference go if you had to discuss screwing my sister on Friday night at camp?”

“Umm... not so good?” a chastened Josh replied. “You’re not going to tell are you?”

“No, I don’t think so,” I answered. “I know you’ve got hormones flooding through your body and you’re probably horny as hell all the time. Try to use some common sense and discretion. Jerk off if you can’t take it anymore but don’t take foolish chances like tonight.”

“OK, I promise Coach,” Josh agreed.

“One more thing,” I said. “Take good care of my sister or....”

“I know, you’ll kill me,” Josh said, finishing my unspoken threat. “I promise I will Coach.”

“Are you and my sister a couple now?” I asked as Josh turned to leave.

“We weren’t earlier tonight,” Josh responded. “We talked while we had your cake and ice cream. We’re an official couple now.”

“Congratulations,” I said. “...and remember what I told you.”

“Will do Coach,” Josh agreed. “Good night. I’ll see you in the morning.”

We headed to our tents. It was nearly 11:30 and I was glad Ed and I had spot up here on the hill instead of down with the staff this week. I settled into bed quickly.

“What the hell is that smell?” Billy Sensenig demanded. Billy was normally a shy thirteen year old who was tenting with Josh Strickler. Their tent was behind mine and Ed’s in the adjoining patrol site.

“It’s nothing,” Josh answered. “You know how laundry gets to stinking after a week in the heat. Open the back tent flap and air us out.”

I was glad Josh didn’t enlighten the innocent, soon-to-be eighth grader about what the smell really was – lust – the smell of two people copulating. I fell asleep a few minutes later.

Weeks Five and Six went smoothly after our trial by fire with the big crowd for Week Four. My staff continued to function well together. Gary Harrison was one of my CITs in the fifth week. Will and I were pleased to help him complete his BSA Lifeguard while he was with us.

I tried to give as much as of my time as possible over the last few years to act as a big brother to make up for Gary’s loss of his brother and my friend Greg. This summer I felt like he had become a friend, no longer just the little brother of a friend.

Gary was also developing into a first rate football player. He had sweet hands catching the ball. He was fearless going over the middle for a pass against the bigger kids in our group. His blocking even developed to the point that he put me on my can sometimes when we went up against each other. It was impressive given that I had six years head start on conditioning and I had a forty pound weight advantage over him. I didn’t know

what Coach Caffrey would do next month but I expected Gary would make the choice hard about whether to put him in JV or promote him to varsity for the fall season.

I felt good about how much I learned over the summer managing a staff of a dozen people. That experience would be good for me in the future when I was expected to be a leader on our football team and later when I was coaching youth.

Ed, Chip and I all made arrangements with John Holloway to take off on Thursday at noon. Kelly was leaving Pittsburgh after breakfast that morning to drive to Paradise. She would meet me at my house that afternoon. Ed, Kelly, all my friends and I would head out to the Green Iguana Club for a final night of fun together.

Ed and Jeremy had to leave on Friday to drive to their respective colleges. Jake Kring was leaving Saturday morning for Syracuse. Hal, Drew, Kenny and I didn't need to leave for college until Sunday. Our girlfriends would follow us there three weeks later.

Chip and I were talking Wednesday afternoon about our plans for the coming weekend. He invited Kelly and me to double date with a girl he knew from high school Friday night. The Cochranville Fire Company had a carnival with rides, games and good food. I agreed to check with Kelly, but thought it sounded like fun.

Will and John solved their short staffing situation coolly as usual. Eric Connell would come back to the pool when I left. He would supervise Lifesaving Merit Badge in Chip's place. The best two fifteen year old CITs were hired to be paid staff for the final three weeks. Will would supervise my Snorkeling BSA class as well as the BSA Lifeguards. Josh Hunsecker went down to the boatyard to replace Eric.

Things would get more complicated in a couple weeks when Matt, Cody and Dave left for our Venturer Crew's trip to Algonquin. I had confidence that Will and John would work it out.

Chip and I were excited as hell on Thursday morning. The clock dragged as we waited through the three morning periods for noon to come. I knew I was going to get laid for the first time in four and half weeks that night. I'm sure Chip had plans to bed some pretty girl back home that evening too. It had been many more weeks since he dipped his wick. The need had to be way beyond urgent now.

I called the pool staff together right after we dismissed the kids in third period.

"It has been my pleasure to work with all of you this summer," I said to the assembled crowd. "You've been great. Work just as hard for Eric as you have for me. I already put in my staff recommendations for next year with Mr. Holloway. I told him I want every one of you back here on pool staff. Thanks again and I'll see you. I've got a girl waiting for me at home."

“Thanks Coach!” “Thanks for everything Coach.” “See you later Coach.” The crowd called as I exited with Chip.

“I’ll talk to Kelly about tomorrow night when I get home and give you a call,” I said. “I expect Kelly would enjoy a fire carnival with you and your date.”

“I’m looking forward to it Coach,” Chip agreed. “I’ll see you tomorrow evening.”

We headed over to the office and checked out with Rob and John. John talked to both of us about returning next year. I promised I would. Chip said he would see how things went. Ed joined us just before John finished.

The three of us headed for our cars. I called out, “Race you home,” to Ed as I climbed in.

“You’re on,” Ed called back as he fired up the engine and took off. Chip followed us out the camp road and down to Route 322. He turned left and headed east for Chester County. Ed and I continued south for Lancaster and Paradise.

Ed beat me home by a couple car lengths plus a few feet. I never found a spot to get by him. I gave Ed a wave as I pulled over in front of my house behind Kelly’s mom’s minivan. Ed pulled into his driveway three doors down.

I climbed out of the car. I was hit by a red headed, boy friend seeking missile before I could close the car door. Kelly pushed me against the side of the car, kissing and hugging me madly.

“Come on loverboy,” Kelly begged, pulling at my arm. “We have the house to ourselves. Liz went out with her boyfriend for half an hour. Let’s take advantage of our opportunity.”

I willingly followed my girl’s lead. “You know, we don’t need to hurry,” I said. “We can lock the basement door and have our fun whether Liz and Josh are here or not.”

“If it doesn’t matter that she’s here it also doesn’t matter if she’s not,” Kelly countered. I didn’t even try to argue with that logic. “I have an ache that one thing will fix. Get your ass downstairs and in bed with me!”

I had no intention of arguing that point either. I locked the basement door as we headed down to our lair. I stripped out of my scout uniform and hopped in bed with my lover. I let Kelly take the lead. I knew I would enjoy whatever she wanted from me.

Thankfully after a little kissing she wanted to do some sixty-nine. I needed to have the edge taken off a little if I was going to be able to satisfy her with my cock. Kelly did her usual thorough job hoovering my cock. I didn’t last long. Kelly sucked down the first

load of semen before I could bring her to climax. I continued licking, sucking and fingering until she came too.

We kissed and cuddled for a few minutes while we recovered. Kelly took me in her mouth for a few moments to get me hard again. She wanted me to fuck her doggie style. I obliged her. In moments I was buried in her juicy twat and pounding away, to her absolute delight.

Kelly loved doggie style because she could play with her clitoris while I pounded her. She could control the frequency and degree of climax to suit her needs. That afternoon Kelly was quite needy. I blasted copious amounts of cum into her pussy during her fourth climax. I collapsed on her back, spent but feeling wonderful.

Kelly and I cuddled again, damp from perspiration and our juices. The front door slammed and two teens bounded upstairs while we were resting. Liz and Josh were back from wherever they had gone. Kelly started kissing me and rubbing my tummy, obviously interested in another round.

“Can we wait a bit?” I asked. “I need to get my things in from the car and start some laundry.”

“I guess I can wait,” Kelly agreed. “...but just a little. I have been denied for over a month. I have to catch up on your cock.”

I threw on shorts and a shirt from my dresser. The two of us headed upstairs. The sounds of two teens bumping bellies carried down the steps.

“Your sister is insatiable, isn’t she?” Kelly asked. “She and her boyfriend...”

“Josh,” I said.

“... Josh were screwing when I showed up this afternoon,” Kelly continued. “I felt kind of bad when I realized what I interrupted. Your sister came down to the door wearing nothing but a bathrobe. Her boyfriend... uh, Josh was hiding near the top of the steps in just his boxers.”

“The two of them will survive being interrupted,” I said. “It doesn’t seem to have slowed them down at all.” Liz punctuated my prediction with an orgasmic shriek. We heard Josh grunt and cum as we walked out the door.

Ed was in his driveway gathering things from his car. Kelly spotted him and yelled, “Hey Ed, how’s it going?”

Ed yelled back, “Hi Kelly.” The two of us walked down the sidewalk to meet our friend. Kelly gave Ed a hug and a kiss on the cheek. Ed asked, “You guys get Kyle’s car emptied?”

“No, we haven’t even started yet,” I said.

“We had certain priorities,” Kelly explained. “Things that needed to be done first.”

Ed eyed us. Both of us were sweaty and probably stank of pussy and cum. He gave us a wry smile. “Yeah, I understand about priorities. It must be nice to have that for a homecoming.”

“Yeah it is,” Kelly agreed.

“You need to get yourself a steady girlfriend,” I suggested.

“One that is dying for your cock,” Kelly added.

“I’m working on it,” Ed replied. “I believe Paige is planning on helping me out in that department tonight. I’ll see you guys after dinner. I’m guessing you still have more priorities to take care of.”

“Laundry, unpacking, afternoon delight,” I teased.

“Yeah, yeah, yeah,” Ed replied. “Get out of here.”

Kelly and I walked back to my car and unloaded my duffle bag full of dirty clothes. She carried it in. I carried a backpack full of belongings after her. The kids upstairs were quiet when we came inside. We didn’t even get to the basement door when Josh and Liz started up again.

“Man! Again?” Kelly said as we started down the steps. “How long have they been dating?”

“Two weeks,” I answered. “Do you remember how horny we were two weeks after we went to bed together the first time?”

“Yeah I remember,” Kelly agreed. “We were really horny then weren’t we?” She chuckled. “Of course we aren’t much better now. Let’s get this laundry started. I need that big dick of yours again.”

Kelly was disrobing me in the laundry room as I tried to sort my clothes and get a load started. Do you know how hard is to do laundry while someone is sucking your cock? I managed get the soap in, the lid closed and the washer started without blowing a load.

Kelly was naked too by the time we got to my bed. It was my turn to pick the position. I wanted some good old missionary. Kelly lay down, spread herself open and accepted my body into hers. I plunged into completely and started pumping in and out. We squelched

and slurped as we mated. It was sweaty, juicy and all together delightful. Kelly had a couple orgasms before I blew a big load of sperm into her belly.

We relaxed on my bed after our second coupling. “What time does your mom come home?” Kelly asked.

“A little after five o’clock most nights,” I replied.

“Cool!” Kelly cooed. “It’s 4:15. We have time for another go before she gets home with the little kids.”

“Sounds good to me,” I replied agreeably.

“I’m thirsty,” Kelly said. “I’ll go move the wet clothes into the drier and start the next load of laundry if you go upstairs and get us drinks.”

“You got it honey,” I replied. I pulled on a pair of boxers and went upstairs to the kitchen. Josh was sitting at the kitchen table.

“Hey Coach, how’s it going?” Josh asked.

“I’m good,” I teased. “I guess from the sounds upstairs you have had a good afternoon too.”

“You have no idea Coach,” Josh answered. “I knew Liz’s rep at school but still....”

“Rep?” I asked, arching my eyebrow questioningly.

“Not a bad rep,” Josh said quickly. “Far from it. Nobody considers her a slut or anything.”

“What exactly is my sister’s reputation at school?” I asked.

“Umm.... How do I explain this?” Josh responded. “Everyone knows she is sexually active. Your sister is choosy about who she dates. The guys she dates... all the guys at school get the impression that they love going with Liz. What is odd is that none of them will talk about what Liz is like in bed. Not one of them.”

“Oh?” I enquired.

“A couple of her ex-boyfriends accidentally dropped some hints about what she like,” Josh explained. “I was in Liz’s crew two years ago in Canada so I overheard her and Cody back then. Word around school is that Liz is very good in bed and very demanding. Not one of the guys she was with has said anything but good things about your sister. It says a lot.”

“Uh-huh,” I agreed.

Cody continued, “When Liz broke up with Nate I decided it was worth a try so I asked her for a date. I was pleased when she said yes. We did a couple dates and we really hit it off. I didn’t realize how lucky I was until that Friday night at camp. My first time in bed with your sister was mind blowing.”

“That was your first time?” I asked.

“Not hardly – it wasn’t my first time with a girl. I’ve slept with half a dozen others in the last two years. It was my first time with your sister. I don’t know but I think I did the right thing when Liz asked to lick her pussy. I had never done it before but I agreed to try. I think that was what convinced Liz to let me sleep with her.”

“I don’t doubt that at all,” I agreed. “Think about it. You give your girl pleasure freely and she returns the favor to you. I suspect that is my sister’s price for admission to her inner sanctum.”

“Yeah, that makes sense,” Josh agreed. “I’ll be real good to your sister Coach. Hell, why shouldn’t I be? The past two weeks have been the best two weeks of my life. I want to make Liz happy and keep our relationship going as long as I can. I know her history. I’m not fooling myself into thinking this will last forever. I’m going to treat her good, and do my best to make it last as long as I can.”

“You do that Josh,” I said.

“I know the penalty for spilling the beans about what we do too,” Josh explained. “Liz will cut off my balls if I say anything to anyone.” I chuckled and nodded. “...and you and Andy will hold me down while she does it.”

“We understand each other,” I said. “I hope the two of you have lots of fun in the afternoons this summer.”

“Oh, we haven’t done anything like today since we started going together,” Josh explained. “This is the first weekday off I have had since that Friday night. Liz and I managed to sneak off together four times since camp but today is the first time we had a free house and all the time we wanted to be together.”

“Are you guys up for one more time?” I asked. I noticed Josh was fully dressed.

“No,” he answered. “Liz is upstairs cleaning up. I have to leave soon. Dad would understand about what Liz and I did today. Mom definitely would not. I have to be home before she gets home from work.”

“Make sure you shower before that,” I suggested. “You reek of pussy. I don’t think your mom would understand that.”

“Thanks for reminding me Coach,” Josh replied. “I’ll clean up as soon as I get home. You and your girlfriend... uh?”

“Kelly,” I replied helpfully.

“....Kelly. Are you and Kelly going to go at it again?” Josh asked.

I laughed. “Yeah. I was sent upstairs for refreshments before we go again.”

“Have fun Coach,” Josh said. I went to the refrigerator and picked out two cans of soda. Liz came downstairs and wrapped herself around Josh’s back. She gave him a kiss on the neck and then nibbled his ear.

“Hey stud,” Liz purred. “Thanks for everything today.” Josh stood and turned around. He swept my sister into a hug and gave her a deep kiss.

“It was truly my pleasure sweetie,” Josh said. I headed for the basement door. “I’ll remember what you told me Coach. I promise to take the best care possible of your sister.”

“See you later Josh,” I said as I headed downstairs.

“Have fun with Kelly,” he called out as I shut the door.

I met my naked girlfriend in the middle of my bed. The two of us enjoyed our sodas before going back to the afternoon’s business – pleasuring each other in every way possible.

Kelly and I made love a third time that afternoon. That time Kelly rode on top of me for all she was worth. Kelly came repeatedly as she rode me. I lasted nearly twenty minutes before I emptied my balls into Kelly’s womb. The two of us barely had time to clean up before Mom came home with the young kids.

Noah and Connor nearly got an eyeful of naked tits when they charged down the steps in search of Unka Ky and Aun’ Keh-EE. Plane rides kept them diverted while Kelly finished dressing in the bathroom. They greeted her with hugs and sloppy kisses when she came out into the room again. I finished dressing while the twins entertained Kelly.

The two of us greeted little Hunter when we came upstairs. He was delighted to see ‘Ky’ when he saw me. There was no doubt, my brother was talking now and knew my name. I tried to get him to say ‘Kelly’ but he wouldn’t.

Mom had Liz prepare and start a roast that afternoon. Almost the entire family was home for dinner that evening. Undoubtedly would be our last dinner together for many months.

Andy's boss had him work half a day on his last day of work. Andy had to report to the University of Delaware tomorrow for freshmen football player orientation.

The roast was delicious and Mom's side dishes were good too. Mom had gone all out for this meal. She baked an apple pie last night for our dessert. It was delicious.

Mom and Dad quizzed Kelly and me about plans. We told them about our last gathering with our friends at the Green Iguana.

"Hey Andy," I suggested. "You are off work tonight. Why don't you come along too?"

"I don't have a date," Andy answered. "I don't think so."

"That's OK Andy," Kelly added. "I'll dance with you. I'm sure the other girls could spare a dance or two for you."

"You'd have fun," I said. "The music at the club is excellent. Food's good. You should get out while you have a chance."

"That's just it," Andy replied. "I leave for college tomorrow morning. I want to spend all the time with my boys that I can. I won't see them again for weeks." Andy gave us a weak smile. "Tonight is their night," he added with more determination.

Kelly and I didn't pester Andy more. Fair is fair. I knew how much Andy would miss his boys when he was down in Newark. They deserved this time with their dad.

Kelly and I went downstairs again after dinner and changed into some nice casual clothes for the evening. We hung out and watched a movie until it was time to go next door and catch a ride with Ed.

We bumped into Harrison at Penny's house when we walked down the street to Ed's house. Ed drove over and picked up Paige Anderson before heading for downtown Lancaster. We ran into Jake Kring, his date, Brandon McCafferty and Holly Cox.

Most of our friends were there when we got into the club. Penny and Harrison, Hal and Tammy, Jeremy and Kathy, and Kenny Weaver and his date Rachel were inside. The eight of us found tables and ordered drinks. Drew McCormick and Stacie Thompson came about five minutes after us.

Our gang of friends talked and caught up with each other's summers while we waited for the first band. Things started kicking when the first band started playing. We talked, had munchies and drinks and danced. Kelly and I spent a lot of time on the dance floor. We stayed until midnight. Jeremy and Ed had long drives ahead of them tomorrow.

Everyone encouraged Ed. We swore he would beat out Terrence Walker for the starting job down in Gainesville. Drew was in the lead for starting tailback job for the

Mountaineers but wasn't a lock yet. Kenny had an outside shot to start at weak side linebacker at Villanova. Jake had no shot to start this year. He was a red shirt freshman and would have to wait until the senior occupying the quarterback slot graduated in the spring. Of course Jeremy, Hal and I were assured to be starters for our teams.

The girls parted with hugs and kisses. The guys exchanged handshakes and best wishes for the coming football season before we drifted away. Ed dropped Kelly and me off at my house before driving Paige home.

Ed whispered to me before he drove off, "I doubt I'll end up sleeping in my own bed tonight. Paige has other plans." He gave me a wink. "I may not get as much nookie as you this summer but I am going to try to catch up."

"Good luck tonight," I replied. "Good luck next week. Kick Walker's ass!" Ed laughed and waved as he drove off for the Anderson house.

Kelly and I headed to my house. Mom and Dad left the porch light on for us but otherwise the house was dark. We made our way down to the basement without bumping into anything and without waking anyone up.

We stripped down and hopped in bed. I flipped on the Late Late Show since neither of us were tired yet. We cuddled together and watched for awhile. Even though we had made love repeatedly in the afternoon we hadn't quite quenched our desires yet. Kelly started kissing me. Things escalated quickly. I groped Kelly's lovely titties. Her hand slipped into my boxers, teasing my cock to full staff. We ended up making love slowly without the frantic urgency we had in the afternoon. One time was enough to satisfy us that evening. We fell asleep in each other's arms.

Kelly and I slept through Dad and the little kids getting up and off to work and day care on Friday morning. Mom took a vacation day so she could see her number three son off to college. Kelly and I got up and went upstairs by 8:30 so we could see Andy off too.

I made omelets for Kelly and me while Andy rushed around worrying if he had everything packed that he needed. We finished our breakfast and washed our dishes by the time Andy was scheduled to leave. We met Mom and Andy in the foyer.

"You go knock 'em dead bro," I said as I gave him a hug.

"Good luck Andy," Kelly added. She gave him a hug and a kiss on the cheek. "You're going to do great in Delaware."

"Thanks Kyle," Andy said. "Thanks Kelly."

"I guess this is it Mom," Andy said. I saw tears creeping out from the corner of his eyes.

“You will do great in college,” Mom said as she hugged Andy. “You will be great.”

Andy squeezed Mom tight to his body. “I can’t do this,” he choked out. “I can’t leave my boys. It’s not right.”

“Andrew Michael!” Mom said as she pulled out of the hug and stared into Andy’s eyes. “We talked about this already. The twins will get used to you being away from them while you are in college.”

“But what kind of father am I abandoning my kids?” Andy said. The tears were flowing now.

“The kind looking out for his sons’ long term future,” Mom answered. “Dad, Liz and I will take perfect care of your boys for the next month. They will miss you for awhile and then they will get used to this.”

“But... but...” Andy whimpered. “I can’t do this...”

“Buck up son,” Mom said in her command voice. “No son of mine is going to skimp on his education. You will manage for the next month. You can see your boys on Labor Day Weekend after your first game. You will meet us at Henlopen and enjoy a nice long weekend with the twins.”

Andy let out a sigh and wiped the tears from his eyes. “You’re right mom,” Andy said slowly. “This is almost as hard as the night I told you I got Crystal pregnant.”

“Exactly son,” Mom said. “That was a bad night for all of us. Look how well that turned out in the end. The boys will adjust to seeing you less. You’ll go to college, study and get your degree. You will get a good job, find a nice woman to marry and the two of you will raise your boys to be fine young men.”

“I hope your right,” Andy said.

“Now get out of here,” Mom said in her command voice again. “Everything will work out. Now get going!”

“Yes Mom,” Andy said automatically. The three of us followed Andy out to his car. He stepped inside. “I love you Mom,” he said.

“Love you too son,” Mom agreed. Andy slowly backed his car out of the driveway into the street.

“Good luck Andy,” I called out.

“You’ll do great,” Kelly added. The three of us waved as he pulled away. He gave us a weak smile and waved back.

“I wasn’t that bad when I left for college, was I?” I asked Mom.

“You?” Mom said before she chuckled. “You practically skipped out of the house when you left. Dad and I had to hurry to catch you outside before you left. You took off for your great adventure.”

“And it has been,” I said.

The three of us headed back inside. Kelly helped me sort through my things and begin packing for my Sunday departure. After lunch the two of us headed for Lancaster. I had a few items to pick up before I left. We stopped off at the CVS Pharmacy in Park City Mall first. I picked up toothpaste, shampoo and soap. I stopped by the movie store to buy to HD movies to go with my new DVD player.

I needed a new pair of sneakers too. We wandered down the Bon Ton wing of the mall. We stopped in the shoe store. I bought a nice pair of sneakers that would fill my needs for this fall.

The sporting goods store was next door. Kelly and I stopped to look at the display window. That had a nice Penn State display featuring four of our blue home jerseys. They were featuring #22 – Shawn Byrd’s number, #27 – Tyler Madden’s, #98 – Trevor Conwell’s and #87 – mine.

“That’s so cool seeing your jersey in stores,” Kelly said. “You’ve definitely arrived as one of the stars on the team.”

“I guess,” I agreed.

“You know, I should get one for my brother,” Kelly said. “It would be a good welcome to campus gift for him.”

“That’s a good idea Kelly,” I said “As a matter of fact, it’s my treat.”

“You don’t have to do that Kyle,” Kelly said. “They’re too expensive.”

“It’s my treat,” I countered. I gave her a wink. “You know we camp staffers stick together.”

We walked into the store and browsed through the rack. They didn’t have one in Mike’s size. One of the clerks saw us browsing and came over.

“Can I help you?” he asked.

“We are looking for this jersey in medium,” I said. “We can’t seem to find a friend. He is needs a men’s large size.”

“The Martin jerseys are flying off the rack,” the clerk said. “With him being from Lancaster County and all, we can’t keep them on the shelves.”

Kelly managed to suppress her laugh. I nodded in agreement. The clerk flipped though all the jerseys on the rack and found nothing Mike’s size.

“I’ll check in back,” he said. “We received a shipment this morning that we haven’t gotten on the racks yet. I’m sure I will be able to find the correct size.” He paused before he went to the back room. “We have a special going on the Penn State jerseys. Buy one and get the second for 50% off.”

“Just the one,” I replied. “I have other arrangements to get one of the jerseys for myself on Monday.” Kelly stifled a snicker.

The clerk went back to look for a jersey in Mike’s size.

“Aren’t you going to tell the clerk who you are?” Kelly asked while we waited.

“No, I don’t feel like dealing with autographs and fans today,” I explained. “I just want to spend some quiet time with you.”

“That’s sweet,” Kelly said. The clerk returned with the jersey. He rang it up. I gave him my credit card. He swiped it and waited for the approval from the card company. He didn’t look at my name until the computer printed out the signature slip.

“OH!” he exclaimed, “You’re....” I smiled and nodded.

“I am,” I admitted. “I am keeping a low profile today. I want to spend some quality time with my girl.”

“Ah, I understand,” the clerk agreed. “Would one autograph be too much?”

“I can do that,” I replied. The clerk handed me the credit slip for signature, scrambled around for another piece of paper and handed it to me too. I signed the credit slip and then signed my autograph for the clerk.

“Mr. Martin, would you mind if I asked you one question?” the clerk asked. I nodded yes. “Why did you switch from #85 to #87 last season? I’m stuck with a bunch of your old jerseys.”

“Sorry about that,” I replied. “I wore #87 all through high school. That number wasn’t available when I was a freshman. I had to wait until last fall to get my number back.”

“I see,” the clerk said. “I guess that make sense.”

“Hang on to those #85 jerseys,” I explained. “Bruce MacCauley has that number now. He is a very promising young receiver. I think he’ll be a star when he gets his shot.”

“Really?” the clerk said. “Thanks for the tip. Maybe I will hang on to them awhile longer.”

Kelly and I wandered around the mall for awhile, window shopping and enjoying our time together. Two people recognized me while I was there, which isn’t too bad compared to how crazy things could get sometimes.

The family dinner was quiet. Noah and Connor didn’t seem fazed by Andy’s absence. It wasn’t unusual for Andy to miss a family dinner with his summer work schedule. Kelly and I cleaned up after dinner and headed for Cochranville for the carnival where we would meet Chip and his date.

Kelly and I met Chip and his date in the parking lot behind the Cochranville Fire Company at five o’clock. He introduced us to his date, Courtney Richardson. Courtney was a 5’-8” inch blonde from Chip’s high school who was starting at Lebanon Valley College in the fall. I introduced Kelly to Courtney. The four of us walked over to the fair which was set up in the open field between the fire hall and the community building that used to house the local elementary school.

The carnival had half a dozen rides. We rode all of them repeatedly. We chowed down on corn dogs, cheese fries, deep fried breaded mushrooms and funnel cake for dinner.

We played some games of chance. I knew Chip had a strong arm. I found out he had played baseball as a pitcher in high school up until his senior year. Chip excelled at the games require you to throw balls at a target. He won Courtney a stuffed animal. I pounded the test of strength game into submission. The weight flew right to the top and rang the bell, winning a stuffed animal for Kelly.

After three hours of cruising around the small carnival it was growing boring.

“We ought to blow this place,” Chip suggested. “I know of a good make out spot nearby. I’m friends with a guy who went to Octorara High School. He told me about it.”

“Maybe we’ll just split,” I responded. “Kelly and I have all the privacy we need in my bedroom tonight.”

“You should check the place out guys,” Chip said. “There’s a deserted road down along the Octoraro Creek. It secluded, wooded and has a place to park right along the creek.”

“It sounds romantic,” Kelly said.

“What do you think Court?” Chip asked his date.

“I... don’t know,” she replied hesitantly.

“Count us in,” Kelly said. “Cuddling up with a sweet guy under the stars beside a gurgling creek. It’ll be fun Courtney.”

“You sure Kelly?” I asked.

“Sure it’ll be fun,” Kelly replied. “We haven’t done it outside for awhile.”

Courtney looked surprised when Kelly mentioned ‘doing it.’ She leaned in close the Chip and whispered in his ear.

“No, of course not Court,” Chip replied out loud. “I understand. This is our first date.”

“Good!” Kelly chirped. “It’s settled.”

I was surprised that Kelly wanted to make love out in the woods with all the insects. We had a perfectly comfortable bed at my house and all the privacy anyone could ask for. Oh well, I was game for it if she was.

Kelly and I both knew what the whispered conversation was about between Chip and Courtney a minute ago. She informed Chip that he definitely was not getting laid on a first date. I also knew Chip well enough to know that Courtney’s reluctance wouldn’t dampen his appetite in the least. He’d put on the full court press to convince Courtney to go all the way that evening.

Chip hurried as he led us back to our cars. I followed him when he turned left out of the parking lot. He went a couple hundred yards and turned right onto a side road off Route 10. I followed Chip through the countryside past farms and woods as we descended towards the creek. Chip made a right onto an intersecting street. After a mile he made another right. We followed that road half a mile until the paving ended.

Chip continued north on the dirt and stone road. ‘What was he getting me into?’ I wondered as I followed my friend. We were still driving by Amish farm fields. This couldn’t be the make out spot Chip knew about. After about a mile of dirt road we came to more paving. We passed a house on the right and then half a dozen on the left before we hit an intersection. I saw a house with an old, painted over sign on the side. It said, “Steelville Post Office.”

He turned left and followed the road across the Octoraro Creek. He turned right immediately and continued north on the Lancaster County side of the creek. A few

hundred yards later the road started uphill. We turned off on a narrow back road and continued along the creek.

We didn't pass any more houses. The hill rose steeply on our left. The creek was five or ten yards away on our right. The area was heavily wooded. This was what Chip was describing. He pulled off the road after half a mile where there was a stone area at the side of the road.

"What do you think guys?" Chip asked as he and Courtney climbed out of his car.

"It's beautiful down here," Kelly cooed.

Chip and Kelly were right. It was about 8:30 in the evening and the sun had set. The steep valley was in shadow but there was enough light to see our surroundings. This spot was wilderness, untouched by man except for the narrow roadway we followed to get here. The creek babbled as water washed over rocks and swirled in little whirlpools. There was a large level area between our cars and the creek. It was carpeted in grass and clover.

Chip pulled a blanket out of his trunk and said, "Come on Court. Let's go down by the creek. It's a really romantic spot." Chip stopped and gave Courtney a kiss directly on the lips. "It's a great spot to make out."

"We could do that," Courtney agreed. The two walked a little north and found a spot near the little waterfall.

"Do you still keep a blanket in your trunk Kyle?" Kelly asked.

"I do," I replied. I retrieved the blanket and walked down to the water's edge near a pool of water. I spread it out on the grass. Kelly and I sat down. We cuddled for a couple minutes enjoying our surroundings before we started to make out.

Kelly and I were topless five minutes later and I was sucking one of her big pink nipples when we overheard the other couple.

"Chip!" Courtney barked sharply. "You promised! Only above the waist."

"Sorry Courtney," Chip apologized. "I'll behave myself." After a short pause Chip added, "You're so beautiful Courtney."

"Mmmmm... that's nice," Courtney cooed. I didn't look over to see if my buddy was keeping within his date's limits or not.

Kelly and I continued to pleasure each other. I fondled and played with her tits, which she always loved. Tonight she seemed more turned on by titty play than usual. Maybe it was the couple thirty feet away that could overhear everything we did. Maybe it was that

we were out in the open and anyone could drive by and catch us. Whatever the reason, Kelly seemed nearly orgasmic before I got into her pants.

I slipped my hand across Kelly's tummy and snaked it into her panties. Before my fingers could reach her slot Kelly grabbed my hand and yanked it out.

"Kyle!" Kelly barked. "You know I don't let boys into my treasures. I'm too young." Kelly gave me a wink and a big smile when I stared into her eyes. I got it. We were role playing again. Kelly was playing a young girl.

"Aaaahhh... Kelly," I whined in my best frustrated school boy falsetto. "You know most high school girls go farther than that."

"We won't be in high school until September," Kelly protested. OH! I thought. We are playing really young now – barely fourteen. This would challenge my powers of seduction to imitate a clumsy fourteen year old boy while coaxing my virginal girlfriend into let me dip my cock inside her.

I concentrated on kissing and suckling at her tits for awhile. That got Kelly primed for more. I continued with the titty play long after I knew my real life twenty year old lover wanted more.

Kelly didn't protest at all when I slid one hand down and massaged her mound through her jeans. Kelly simple writhed and moaned as I worked her slowly. I continued until her signs indicated that she was close to orgasm.

"Kelly, sweetie?" I purred in her ear. "It will feel much better if you let me open your jeans."

"I can't do that Kyle," Kelly protested softly. "What would my girlfriends think if I let a boy do that?"

I kissed her breasts and then kiss a trail down her tummy until my mouth reached her jeans. "This will be real good honey," I cooed. Without waiting for a response I quickly unbuttoned her jeans and slipped the zipper down. I pried her jeans open enough to expose her soaking panties where they covered her clitoris and mons. I kissed her through her panties, aiming directly for her clitoris. It took only a few kisses and nibbles to bring her to ecstasy.

Kelly writhed and moaned as she enjoyed the first of many orgasms that evening. I let her recover for half a minute.

"Oooohh...yeah!" Courtney cooed nearby. "Up a little Chip..." Courtney gasped and panted for a few second. "Yeah... yeah... yeah... rub my clit!"

I chuckled to myself. So much for Courtney's resolve. Chip passed second base and was sliding into third. I knew him well enough to know he would make it to home plate if he got his fingers and tongue into Courtney's pretty little pussy.

"Lift your hips," I directed Kelly. "I want to do it again and I can do it better if I take your jeans off."

Kelly did as directed. I pulled her jeans down and slipped them off her legs. They ended up in a pile at the bottom of our blanket.

"You have to keep your pants on if mine come off," Kelly insisted. "We can't go all the way tonight. Daddy would kill me."

"Of course," I agreed. I kissed and nibbled at her labia and clit again through her panties. I massaged with my fingers around the edges of Kelly's panties as I licked, nibbled and kissed. Soon one finger then another slipped inside and stroked her labia while I concentrated my tongue on her clitoris.

"Virginal, barely teenaged" Kelly didn't object when I slipped my fingers in far enough to stroke them up and down her, juicy hot slit. After a few moments I pulled her panties aside enough to give my tongue direct contact to her clitoris. Kelly burst into deep throated moans when she climaxed again. I continued fingering her gently as she passed her sexual apex and descended into a stupor.

"MMmmmm... oooohh yeah.... Ooohhh.... Keep licking," Courtney gasped. I glanced over briefly and saw Chip kneeling over her, licking her bare pussy. Oh yeah, Courtney was going all the way tonight. There was no way she'd refuse Chip now. I turned back to my girlfriend.

My pants were off in a flash, the way any smart, sexual desperate fourteen year old would have done after bringing his girlfriend to climax. I stretched my longer body over Kelly and kissed her deeply as she recovered. My hard, boxer covered cock slipped against Kelly's mons. I rubbed it up and down her slot as we kissed. Kelly pushed herself back against it to increase the friction and good feelings.

After a minute Kelly slipped her hands down from my sides onto my ass.

"KYLE!" Kelly gasped. "Where are your pants?"

"What?" I asked, pretending to be innocent.

"Put your pants back on!" Kelly insisted. "We are not having intercourse tonight!"

"Of course we aren't" I purred into her ear. "I just want to kiss you." I drilled my tongue deep into Kelly's mouth. She moaned into my open mouth. "Doesn't it feel good to rub our bodies together?"

“Mmmm... yeah,” Kelly agreed. I continued sawing my cock up and down her slot, making sure to rub on her clit with every stroke. “Ooooh... keep rubbing me Kyle,” Kelly purred. “That feels so good.”

I rubbed and kissed her as the minutes ticked away. It was enough to excite my lover, but not quite enough to bring her to another orgasm. After a few minutes I slowed a little.

“Don’t stop Kyle,” Kelly begged. “I’m almost there.” I continued my slow pace, purposely avoiding Kelly’s clit now. She was desperate.

“Kyle, pleaseeee....” Kelly whined. “I need more. Do more”

“I’m getting tired honey,” I protested. “I can’t go much longer.”

“I need to cummmmm!” Kelly begged.

“Maybe if we remove our underwear it will feel better,” I suggested helpfully.

“Whatever!” Kelly moaned. “I need more!”

I kneeled between my lover’s legs and pulled her panties down. Kelly helpfully raised her hips for me. I stood and removed my boxers. I lay down on top of Kelly again and lay my hard, dripping erection between her outer labia. I sawed it back and forth through her sloppy, dripping slot. I let my cockhead press Kelly’s clitoris repeatedly. My lover needed all of thirty seconds to blow again. She shimmied and shook from euphoria.

I paused and sat back on my haunches while Kelly recovered. I glanced back at our friends. Chip’s seduction was progressing along. He and Courtney were down to the undies too. My buddy would be spearing the cute coed soon.

I turned my attention back to Kelly. I stretched my long body over her again, nestling my cock in her pussy lips. “Can we do that some more Kelly?” I asked sweetly. “It felt great for me. It was good for you too, wasn’t it?”

“It was wonderful Kyle,” Kelly cooed. “We can do it again as long as you don’t try to go further. I’m too young for sex.”

“Of course,” I agreed. I started rubbing my cock up and down through Kelly’s labia again. “I’d never go any farther than you say.”

My lover’s slot was saturated. It felt amazing sliding my cock through it. Kelly was getting excited again after a few minutes. I decided it was time to move further.

I dipped my hips further on the next thrust. The tip of my cock nudged against Kelly's hole. I pushed a fraction of an inch in. Kelly purred at first before she remembered her role.

"Kyle!" Kelly scolded. "You're almost in me."

I pulled my cock out immediately. "I'm sorry Kelly," I explained. "I got carried away." I went back to sawing my cock back and forth through her slot, bumping her clit repeatedly as I did it. "You're so beautiful Kelly. I love you so much."

I let my cock "catch" a couple more times as I stimulated her. Kelly didn't protest. I let it happen more often as Kelly's breathing became ragged. I knew she was close to orgasm again.

I lodged my cock inside her again, pushing almost an inch inside her. Kelly froze. "Kyle!" Kelly protested weakly. "You promised me you wouldn't."

"It feels so good Kelly," I begged. "Please.... Just let me put it in a little." I waited for a signal from Kelly. She stared into my eyes.

"Do you really love me Kyle?" Kelly asked.

"I love you passionately, totally and completely," I swore. No acting was needed for that answer. "It's supposed to feel really good. Pleaseeeee...." I begged as I pushed a little deeper.

"I don't know...." Kelly replied.

"Let me show you how much I love you," I said. "It'll feel great sweetie."

"You really love me?" Kelly asked

"Yes, more than you can imagine," I promised. Kelly took a deep breath and nodded her agreement. I pressed my hard erection into Kelly fully until our pubic bones bumped together. "Is that OK honey?" I asked sweetly.

"Ohhh... I'm so full," Kelly murmured. "You can keep going Kyle."

I banged and humped away. Any pretense was gone from our play acting. Now I was Kyle, 20 years old and lover of this fantastic girl for the last year and a half. Mature Kelly acted just like the cock hound she was as we shared our bodies with each other.

We had been going at it for a couple minutes when we heard Courtney shriek, "Oh Fuck! You're the best at sucking pussy Chipper." Kelly and I shared a laugh. We had heard Chip induce that shriek from his conquests many times at school last year.

I continued thrusting and pumping, using my seven incher to bring Kelly to another climax. Our concentration was broken a couple minutes later.

“What do you mean you don’t have a condom?” Courtney demanded.

“You made it clear when you agreed to the date that we weren’t going to do this tonight,” Chip replied. “How was I to know?”

“You got me all hot and horny and we can’t do it,” Courtney bitched.

“Could we try anal maybe?” Chip suggested.

“NO! That’s disgusting,” Courtney spit out. “We can make out but that’s it.” Things got quiet again after that. I glanced to our sides and saw Chip naked and sprawled on top of an equally naked Courtney.

I concentrated on pleasuring Kelly again. She belted out a full throated aria when I set her off again. I thrust back as her pussy throbbed and contracted around my big tool. When Kelly caught her breath again I went back to a steady thrust in, bump and grind her clittie and withdraw again.

I glanced sideways again. I missed the negotiations but somehow Chip and convinced Courtney to let him screw her sans protection. I just shook my head.

I continued working my girlfriend. After a minute Kelly spasmed and quaked again. I was closer to my limit this time. I was panting and could feel my neck and face flush. My climax was approaching.

Kelly recognized the signs as she stared into my face. “Kyle are you ready to cum?” she asked.

“Almost,” I grunted as I pumped her.

“You have to pull out,” suddenly switching to inexperienced young Kelly again. “You can’t squirt in me. This is a bad time of month.”

“Un-huh.... Ooohh.... Baby.... I’ll be careful,” I pledged.

“You better pull out now Kyle,” Kelly directed. “I can’t get a baby in me. Daddy would kick me out of the house.”

“A little more.... Ooooh.... Just a little..... Ooohh....more pleassseeeeeeee....” I whined.

My thrusts were getting ragged. “Pull out Kyle!” Kelly insisted. Belying her words, she wrapped her legs around my bottom so I couldn’t mistake her real intent. Blast a big load of sperm inside her.

“Yeah.... Unnh.... Yeah.... Unhh... unhh... I... will... pull.... Ooooh GOD!” I gasped for air and thrust a few more times. Kelly enthusiastically drove her abdomen up to meet each of my thrusts. My balls tightened and I felt my cock swell. I plunged in one more time and froze, my cockhead planted against the entrance to her womb.

Kelly watched me expectantly. I spat gobs of sticky white sperm into my lover’s womb. Kelly feigned shock and protested, “You were supposed to pull out!”

“Sorry.... Ohhh.... oooohh...” I grunted as I spewed more semen into her. “Oooh... too good.... Couldn’t.... stop,” I groaned. I collapsed on Kelly as I drained the last drops from my balls into my lover.

Kelly rolled us onto our sides but left my cock inside her. She kissed me on the forehead and said, “That was a good one Kyle. I almost believed I was a little girl again.”

“I’m glad you enjoyed it honey,” I replied. The two of us cuddled on the blanket and stared up at the stars above us. It was completely dark now but a nearly full moon illuminated the valley of the creek.

Kelly and I could hear the sounds of Chip and Courtney romping on the blanket a few yards away. Chip had primed Courtney enough and had sufficient skill as a cocksman to bring his date to orgasm as he pumped her.

Soon after Courtney’s shriek announced her orgasm Chip stiffened and bucked hard into her a few times.

“Noooooo!” Courtney shrieked again.

“Unnnhhh.... Unhhh.... Unnnhhh...” Chip grunted. He was ready to blow as he thrust hard and fast.

“You promised to....” Courtney screamed. Too late. Chip grunted a couple more times, stiffened and blew a load of cream into his date’s twat. “...pull out!”

My friend groaned as she pushed at him. Chip finally pulled away and dribbled the last few drops of cum on her belly.

“What the fuck are you doing?” Courtney demanded. “I told you that you couldn’t cum in me!”

“Sorry,” Chip apologized sheepishly. “I couldn’t stop.”

Courtney sat up and slapped Chip's face. "If you knock me up buster... so help me...." She said, implying the rest of the threat. Chip grabbed his clothes and quickly backed away out of reach of his irate date.

Kelly pulled on panties and her bra. "Courtney, can I talk with you?" she asked. Kelly joined the upset coed on the blanket. Chip retreated to his car to dress. I threw my clothes on quickly and joined him.

"What the fuck were you thinking?" I demanded of my partially clothed friend.

"I was horny and needed a piece," Chip replied lamely.

"That's no excuse for cumming in a girl without protection," I growled. "You've met Andy's sons. Is that what you want?"

"No," Chip replied.

"You need to get your act together dick-for-brains," I growled. "You plan on being a big time college quarterback. You will have all the pussy you want available to you. Do you plan on fathering a whole string of little bastards? What you do reflects on the whole university."

"Yeah, you're right," Chip agreed.

Kelly had calmed Courtney down somewhat while I lectured Chip.

"We're going to give Courtney a ride home tonight Kyle," Kelly said.

"Give Chip his blanket," I directed. "You get out of here Chip. Think about what I told you on the way home. I'll clean up your mess here."

"OK Coach," Chip said. "I'm sorry Courtney," he called out before he climbed into his car. Chip drove off. Kelly helped Courtney finish cleaning up and dressing. The girls sat in the back of my car while I searched for the way back to civilization.

I found the bridge over the Octoraro Creek that took us back into Chester County. Somewhere I made a wrong turn. I passed a golf course and then came to a T that I didn't recognize. I guessed and made a left. One hundred yards later I found another intersection. I knew Route 41 was to the east so I turned right. We came out at the red light opposite the Octorara Schools in a couple minutes.

The girls talked about Courtney getting the morning after pill at the drug store in the morning. Kelly promised that it would almost certainly take care of any possible complications from the evening. Courtney's last period ended four days ago. Odds were that Chip's sperm wouldn't survive long enough to find her next egg even without the morning after pill.

Courtney lived down near Chadds Ford. It took us a half hour to get her home and almost another hour for Kelly and me to get to my house. The two of us were tired and Chip's gaffe had killed our mood. We went straight to bed.

Kelly and I took advantage of the quiet Saturday to sleep in. We didn't stir until after eleven o'clock that morning. We grabbed some breakfast. Connor, Noah and Hunter all bummed some food from us. Kelly and I spent most of Saturday afternoon packing and loading my things into my Golf.

Mom had Dad grill some steaks for dinner. She wanted to give me a supper to remember for the next four months. I wouldn't be home with the family until Thanksgiving.

Most of my friends were off to college except Hal Long. Kelly and I invited him and Tammy to go miniature golfing Saturday night. They had other plans so Kelly and I went on our own. It was a fun evening. We stopped off at the ice cream store in the center of Strasburg before we came home.

Kelly and I made love that night without all the frills and role playing – just simply demonstrating our love for each other. It was slow, gentle and loving. Kelly and I cuddled together when we finished.

“That was wonderful Kyle,’ Kelly commented. “I love you so much.”

“I love you too,” I agreed. “It will be fantastic in three weeks from now when you get to campus. I have a private bedroom. We can be together any night we want.”

“It will be great,” Kelly agreed. “This year of school will be special.”

We exchanged kisses before we fell asleep.

Chapter 43

I unlocked the front door to Apartment #12 using the key I had picked up from the housing office in Pollock Commons a few minutes earlier.

“Hey! Kyle!” Trevor proclaimed. He hurried across our living room and gave me a slap on the back. “It’s after four o’clock. I wondered when in the hell you were going to get here.”

“Kelly came over this weekend to see me off,” I explained as I carried my suitcase inside. “We wanted to spend as much time together as we could.”

“Say no more,” Trevor replied. “Steph spent the last week at my place giving me a proper sendoff.”

“Hey roomie,” Damian said as he came from one of the back downstairs bedrooms. “Do you need a hand unloading?” He walked over and shook my hand.

“Sure,” I agreed.

“Jay! Kyle’s here,” Trevor yelled. “Come help him unload.”

My three roommates headed outside to the parking lot. We had my car emptied in twenty minutes. The guys had left me the downstairs bedroom behind the kitchen. Trevor had the other downstairs bedroom. Damian had the upstairs bedroom above Trevor. Jay’s was in the back corner above mine.

I set my new DVD player on the coffee table as my things were being carried in. Jay spotted it.

“Hot damn!” Jay exclaimed when he saw it. “Kyle’s got an HD DVD player.”

“Kelly gave it to me for my birthday,” I explained.

“Remind me to give that girl a big kiss when she gets on campus,” Jay replied. “This is going to be sweet this year. Kyle’s DVD player and Trevor’s LCD big screen combined with my sound system. We’ll blow the windows out of this place.”

“Sweet!” Trevor agreed. “Let’s set this baby up.”

“Go ahead guys,” I said. “I’m going to get things unpacked in my room.”

I finished unpacking around five o’clock. I went back out to the living room. My roommates were testing out the entertainment system. They had popped in one of the HD

DVDs that Kelly and I picked up at the mall on Friday. It looked and sounded great on the system we had assembled. I settled in and watched with my buddies until it was time for the first team dinner down at the Training Table.

We bumped into Christian Hunsecker, GJ DeLuca, Shawn Byrd and Denzell Hunt as we walked over to Pollock Commons and the Training Table for dinner. We talked about our summers away from campus as we walked down the road.

It was reunion time when we got upstairs into the Training Table. Somewhere between two-thirds and three-quarters of the team was in the dining hall already. Some were through the line and seated to eat. A large portion of the team were waiting patiently in line for their food. The eight of us joined the end of the line.

Bob Smith, Chris Richardson, Brian Henson and Etienne LeBlanc joined the line behind us. I greeted Brian with a slap on the back. "Damned good to see you here Brian," I said. "I was afraid last fall you were going over to the dark side."

Brian was one of our two prime wide receiver recruits. He had been very quick when we timed him last fall during his recruiting visit. He had verbally committed to Michigan a few weeks after his visit with us.

"No... I wouldn't do that," Brian replied.

"What made you change your mind?" I asked.

"You did," Brian replied laughing. I gave him a questioning look. "Actually it was something Zack Hayes reminded me of. He said, 'Look what they did for Kyle Martin. Both of you are big, strong, fast receivers. If the coaches can do that with him, they can do it with you.' I guess we'll find out if they can get me to play as well as you."

"I'm sure they will," I agreed.

Zack was right about Brian. He was a younger version of me in many ways. He was tall, only an inch shorter than me. He was a big receiver. He probably weighed a couple pounds more than I did when I started two years ago. I had seen his speed. The boy was damned fast.

Our team had produced successful NFL wide receivers – Bobby Engram, Joe Jurivicius, Glenn Tucker. Why couldn't I be next? Maybe Brian could follow me into the NFL. It would be a great thing if our school became known as a place to develop top QBs and receivers in addition to being a top school for linebackers.

My friends and I went through the line and found a table. This dinner certainly felt different from our first team dinner two years earlier. We knew most everyone in the room. We knew what was happening. We got to reconnect with our friends after a ten week separation. It was fun.

Tyler Madden stopped by our table during dinner and asked Trevor, Damian, Shawn, Jay and me to stop by his apartment after the team meeting that night. Tyler had team business to discuss with us.

After dinner Tyler Madden and Andrew Perkins asked the freshmen to come to the front of the room. They quizzed the kids on Penn State trivia. They couldn't answer most of the questions. Tyler and Andrew demanded they perform the alma mater.

The kids did surprisingly well. Marco Cuchiella, Jon Stafford, Bob Smith and Etienne or ET as we had nicknamed him last spring, led the group. Obviously someone had tipped the freshman off about this ritual.

When they finished Tyler made a sour face and declared, "That was dreadful! You guys have to do much better than that if you're going to be members of the Nittany Lions team. If you want dinner tomorrow night, I expect to hear something that sounds vaguely like our song."

Coach Burton reminded all of us that we had a team meeting in the auditorium at the Lasch Building at 7:00 pm. Don't be late! The large group carried their trays to the clean up line, filed through the line and headed over to the Lasch Building. The freshmen all carried their playbooks along. That was fine. They needed to have that book glued to them until they learned it. We upper classmen knew Coach Burton wasn't going to go into the playbook tonight. That would come tomorrow evening.

We filed into the seats in the auditorium and got comfortable for a long night. After my friends and I had found seats I saw Max Rosen walk by with Aidan Nagy and Alex Majerowicz. Apparently Max had managed to convince Coach Burton that he could keep his academics up and keep his nose clean this season.

Coach Burton took the stage and motioned for quiet.

"Welcome to all 112 members of this year's Nittany Lions Football Team. My coaching staff and I are pleased and excited that you are here. I am looking forward to us making our mark on our conference and nationally as we have done in the past."

Video clips from last season played as we watched. Karol making big hit after big hit on running backs, Jake sacking quarterbacks, Cuch making a crunching hit on a running back, Vic picking off a pass, on and on it went for three or four minutes. The team cheered as we watched our exploits last season.

I noticed one thing about the clips. Coach Burton was going to work on our psyche. All of the highlights were of ex-members of our team. I could see the punch line approaching. The clips stopped with a shot of the final BCS poll.

“Ranked number two in the nation,” Coach intoned. “That was a great season... but it’s over. Zack Hayes, number one draft pick of the Green Bay Packers – gone. Jake Washington, number one pick of the San Diego Chargers – gone. Evan Foster, number two pick of the New Orleans Saints – gone. Karol Zizka, number three pick of the Minnesota Vikings – gone. Shawn O’Conner, number three pick of the New England Patriots – gone. Jelani Hill, Pittsburgh, Dominic Cuchiella, Philadelphia, Vlad Lazlo, Miami, Hassan Jackson, Cleveland, Steve Cobb, Kansas City – all trying out in the NFL now.

“Pundits say we should have a strong defense. We return eight of eleven starters. I agree. We will have competition for those slots but we have excellent people to fill the holes. On offense the pundits say we will be weak. We lost eight of our eleven starters from last season, all of whom made it into the NFL training camps.

“We need a new quarterback, a new tailback, a new fullback, two new wide receivers, a new tight end and we need to fill three of the five offensive line slots. The challenge on offense is immense. We play Boston College here for our first game. That one is no gimme. Cincinnati visits the next Saturday. That game isn’t a gimme either. The third weekend we fly to Los Angeles and play the USC Trojans in their home stadium. If our offense hasn’t come together by then we will get clobbered!

Coach Burton paused for dramatic effect while the enormity of our challenge sank into the members of the team. The video started up again. The first clip was of me catching a touchdown against Michigan. He showed Damian plowing over a Michigan State linebacker. Wyatt made a cool move and zipped by a Northwestern linebacker. Jay threw a deep pass to Christian.

Chip completed another bomb to Aidan Nagy. Jibril Sloan came across the middle against Iowa, caught a pass in traffic, was nailed by two linebackers and still made a first down.

“We have talented individuals on offense on our team. It will be up to each of them to elevate their game to the rarified levels of their predecessors if our team will be successful this season. Can you put all the parts together into a unified team in the next six weeks? CAN YOU?”

The team chanted “we can,” in response. We responded twice more as Coach Burton repeated the question, louder each time.

“I believe you can,” Coach concluded. “To help us achieve that the coaching staff has devised some new plays to add to the playbook. Freshmen already have these in their books. Returning players, make sure you pick up the plays before you leave tonight and study the new plays.”

Coach Burton moved onto more mundane matters. He reviewed our schedules for the next three weeks. He talked about press relations, interviews, and team conduct. He

reviewed our smoking policy, our drinking policy, our drug policy and the expected sexual conduct of each team member. He reviewed the team's academic expectations and talked about the mentoring and tutoring services available.

The team meeting ended around 8:30 pm. Tyler Madden stood up and announced, "Those of you I talked to at dinner, we have a meeting in my apartment, #21, in ten minutes."

It took a few minutes for everyone to file to the front, grab the additions to their playbooks and leave the auditorium. My roommates and I headed back to our own apartment, dropped off our playbook additions and then followed the others over to Apartment #21.

Dermot McMillan invited us inside when we knocked at the door. Glenn Korbel and Salim Rogers, Tyler's other roommates handed everyone beers as they came in. We filled the available seating in the living room and dining area. A few, including myself ended up sitting on the floor. Tyler, Andrew Perkins and Jibril Sloan stood up in front of the group.

"Thanks for coming guys," Tyler started off. "Andy, Jibril and I appreciate you coming over. We want to talk about how our team will run this season. The three of us..." Tyler said as he gestured to the other two captains. "... are going to need your help to pull this team together this season. Each of you was invited because you are one the team's stars, will probably be a starter or are a key player for our team."

"There are 109 team members to watch," Andrew added. "It's too much for the three of us to monitor every team member. We're counting on all of you to help us keep the team on an even keel and out of trouble."

"I know you guys heard about the problems five or six years ago," Tyler said. "It seemed like every other week the newspapers would report 'Penn State players arrested.' Drinking, fighting, and sexual assault – it ran the gamut. All of us need to rein in the guys so we stay out of the news."

"Jibril, Andrew and I will make sure we have a minimum of three parties going on any Saturday night that provide a safe, controlled place for us to enjoy our free time," Tyler said. "We don't need to be downtown interacting with a bunch of drunks and crazies. This has worked for the past four seasons and should continue to work if we are careful."

"I want each of you to advise and mentor the guys I assign to you. Make sure they study their playbooks and are prepared on the field. Make sure the guys keep up with their classes. Become their confidant."

"Glenn and Jay, you're responsible for the quarterbacks – specifically Glenn you'll work with Chip and Colin. Jay you work with Bob and Jon. Ben, you work with the offensive line. Jibril will work with the tight ends. Kyle, you have the wide receivers."

I nodded my agreement. "...except I'll deal with our special cases," Tyler continued. "Aidan, Alex and Max are my responsibility. Wyatt and Damian, you'll work with the running backs. Trevor, you have the defensive line, Josh you'll deal with the linebackers. Shawn you help me with the defensive backs. Andrew will cover special teams with Kyle's assistance. Anybody have any questions?"

No one did. We relaxed and traded stories of our summers after the speech. They guys were absolutely envious of my Sunday at the Phillies game and dinner with Chase Utley and his wife. The seniors entertained us with their JoePa stories from their freshman season. Tyler and his roommates served us second beers later in the evening.

The meeting/bull session broke up around ten o'clock. Tyler grabbed, Jay, Trevor, Damian and me before we left. He had us wait until the rest of the crowd was gone before he got to his point.

"I want to ask the four of you a huge favor," Tyler explained. "You guys all are into rock music, right?" All four of us nodded yes. "Good. I need somebody to host parties on Saturday nights featuring rock and pop music. Ben and his roommates have hip hop/gangsta covered. Bill Daugherty and Josh Bruno will do country for me. Would you guys be willing to host weekly parties?"

"Why us?" Jay asked. "I know you're a huge alt rock fan. Why don't you do it?"

"I am, but this apartment isn't big enough for the parties," Tyler explained.

"What?" I asked. "Your living room and dining room is as big as ours. Why don't you do it?"

"Glenn and I have enough space for gathering," Tyler explained. "What I'm missing is enough bedrooms. Somebody...." Glenn, Tyler and Salim all stared at Dermot. "... was too damn slow getting his housing request in. We're stuck here in this garden apartment with only two bedrooms."

"And you want access to four bedrooms," I added.

"Exactly," Tyler replied.

"There is one problem," Jay observed. "None of us is twenty-one. Where will we get beer?"

"At least not until my birthday in the end of September," Trevor added.

"I will make sure you guys have all the booze you need," Tyler replied.

The four of us conferred for a minute and agreed to host parties for the team this year. We headed back to our apartment. I spent an hour finishing my unpacking. I hooked my computer up and sent off my nightly e-mail to Kelly.

I took my shower stuff and personal things over to the locker room at the Lasch Building before practice started on Monday morning. I took my playbook outside the practice fields, ready to begin work at 8:50 am. Most of the team was on the field already awaiting our coaches' arrival. It was funny seeing Anders Voight on dressed in khakis and a blue polo instead of practice clothing.

Coach Burton called for the team to huddle around him promptly at 8:55 am. Two minutes later two sophomores came out of the Lasch Building and dashed for the team huddle. They weren't fast enough to escape Coach's notice. They were sent on a two mile run around the three practice fields.

We did some stretching and warm-up exercises to get ready for the morning's activities. After twenty minutes the coaches split the team into four parts. Tyler, Jibril, Andrew and Ben Walker each led their quarter of the team off. I was with Ben's group. We went to be timed on a mile run first. I ran flat out, finishing the run in 4:40. The time was a couple seconds better than last year.

We went inside and went to the weight room. We met with Mr. Collins, our conditioning coach or with Matt Sheppard, his assistant. Mr. Collins tested my strength and agility. He was pleased with my results.

We went to the locker room next and drew our towels, practice T-shirts and shorts and other equipment. The freshmen drew their numbers. John Crosby, the freshman wide receiver from Damian's high school, ended up choosing Bo Cherry's old number #15.

The next group met us in the locker room before we left. Their group was buzzing with the news. Bruce MacCauley said, "Did you hear Kyle? The new kid Henson beat the team record in the 40. He ran a 4.29!"

That stung a little. I prided myself on being the fastest guy on the team. Aaron Morano, Shawn Byrd and Les Jones were the only three players to come close to my times in the last two years. Brian Henson was providing me with a big challenge.

Ben took our group out for the final station in the round robin. I did the vertical jump test early. I matched last year's 43" inch vertical jump. I stretched and tried to get my head together. Nobody was going to beat me without a fight! I let most of my group run the forty for the coaches before I ran.

"What's it going to be Coach? Who's fastest?" Coach Burton called just before the start. That drew more than a few funny looks from my teammates.

I got a good start when Coach Burton blew his whistle. I kicked as hard as I could as I drove myself down the field. I gave everything I had, willing my legs to kick harder. I pushed myself to the limit and kicked hard even after I crossed the end line. I slowed and turned back towards the coaches. Whatever the result, I knew I had given everything I had in the effort.

The coaches were all staring at the stopwatches. Anders gave me a huge grin and a thumbs up sign.

“Coach, what do you think you did?” Coach Burton called out as he waved me over.

“I have no idea Coach,” I replied.

“4.28 seconds,” Coach Burton announced loudly. “That’s team record and only the second sub 4.3 time we’ve ever had. That was fantastic! Good job!”

I accepted back slaps and congratulations from the teammates and coaches. I found out later that Shawn Byrd wasn’t far behind Brian and me. He ran a 4.30 second 40 that day. The coaches got the whole team together and had us do some ball handling drills before dismissing us.

The team headed down to the Training Table for lunch. After lunch we had position meetings. I scanned the room when Coach Adams had everyone’s attention. It was an impressive group. Brian Henson and Bruce MacCauley were extremely fast by any team’s standards. Christian Hunsecker looked slower but had an amazing burst of speed when he needed to create separation. Jared Cantrell was a good route runner and not slow by any means.

Tanner Riggs was a little bantam rooster. He was good over the middle in spite of his slight size. He slipped tackles and picked up extra yards by making the tacklers miss. John Crosby was green but Damian promised we would be delighted to have him on our team.

The three question marks among the ten receivers were our seniors. By all expectations they should be our starters but they weren’t. Alex Majerowicz was a talented receiver that didn’t put a lot of time or effort into studying the plays or video. Max Rosen had been in the Coach’s dog house so many times that he was certain to stay on the third string for the rest of his career at Penn State. Aidan Nagy was the odd one. He worked hard to prepare and was a good possession receiver. If he could rehab his reputation with Coach Burton, he might have a shot at a starting spot.

I was glad Tyler Madden was going to monitor those three. I could handle the receivers my age or younger. I wouldn’t have been able to get anywhere with these three.

Before Coach Adams started the receivers meeting Jared Cantrell asked, “Why did Coach Burton call you ‘Coach’ this morning? What’s that about?”

Christian laughed and said, “I can explain that. My brother worked with ‘Coach’ this summer as a lifeguard. The whole pool staff called him that because he helped them work on preparing for football every day during the summer.”

“That’s pretty much it,” I added. “It started back in high school when I blew out my knee. All I could do to help the team was help my coaches. The nickname started back then. I’d just as soon not use it here at college.”

“Hell no Coach,” Jared countered. “You deserve the name. You’re responsible for a lot of the progress I’ve made in the last year and a half. If it’s good enough for Coach Burton, it’s good enough for me.”

“Why does he get to be called Coach and I get to be called ‘Squirrel’?” Bruce protested.

“It fits!” was the near unanimous response from all other receivers. I noticed Aidan, Alex and Max didn’t share the other receiver’s enthusiasm for my nickname. I didn’t blame them.

I would have been upset if one of the younger guys came in and beat me out for a starter’s position. Look how I reacted in the morning when Brian threatened my title as ‘fastest man on the team.’ Of course if they had reacted to my challenge the same way I did to Brian, they would be the three starters at wide receiver and I would be a backup.

The coaches spent the afternoon practice doing drills – ball handling, tackling, blocking and fumble recovery. Practice ended around 4:30. I was pleased to see Jon Stafford grab Brian Henson and John Crosby and convince them to stay out late and catch some balls with him. That was exactly the example we needed for the younger guys on the team.

Tuesday brought more warm up stretching and drills, morning and afternoon. Wednesday we started running plays in the afternoon practice without pads or tackling. Jay, Chip and Glenn shared time running the first team. Glenn and Chip shared time at second string. Jon and Bob Herr, the quarterback from Lebanon, ran the third string with Colin O’Shea’s help.

I worked exclusively with the first string. Aidan, Christian, Tanner and Alex all split time between the first and second string. Bruce and Jared split time between second and third string. Brian and John worked exclusively with the third string.

Shoulder pads and helmets came out on Thursday. We practiced without tackling. It was starting to feel like real football. I was able to start to see where the quarterback competition was taking our team.

Glenn played solidly. He still didn't have the arm strength to throw the deep ball. He ran our offense efficiently with minimal mistakes. Our defense also kept us bottled up when he was at the controls.

Chip was excellent. He could heave the ball 50 or 60 yards without breaking a sweat. He zipped it in when needed. Chip hit timing routes and deception routes equally well with Christian and me. Our time playing together over the summer was paying off for him. It was almost like Zack was still behind center for us except for the interceptions. He threw too many in the first two days of practice.

Jay was the mystery. He hit the short and medium routes well. He didn't make many mistakes. He didn't throw a single interception in the first two days of practice. He could throw the deep ball too but without the accuracy I had come to expect from him in the past. The QB competition might be closer than I expected.

We ran our first special teams practice was Thursday afternoon. I caught a couple kick returns and a couple punt returns before Coach Ferguson sidelined me. Tanner Riggs and Brian Henson handled the rest of the kick returns for our practice. Christian Hunsecker and Bruce MacCauley handled the rest of the punt returns.

Full pads, red jerseys for the quarterbacks and tackling came on Friday. I was glad to play real football after days of playing touch. One play on Friday afternoon reminded me why I was so glad Tyler Madden was a Lion. I caught a ball about ten yards downfield over the middle. I managed one step before Tyler came flying in and nailed me, driving me into the ground and driving the breath out of me. He stood over me and offered me a hand up as I tried to gather my breath again. Damn! Tyler could hit hard.

We had a low key scrimmage Saturday morning. I caught a few passes, including a deep one Chip threw me for a touchdown in the first quarter. I was put on the bench by the second quarter. Jay ran the offense in the second quarter. He went 6 for 9 passing. The stats showed he gained 102 yards passing but that was deceiving.

Two of Jay's three missed passes were deep. 57 of his yards came on a seven yard completion to Christian. Christian made Denzell miss the tackle and streaked away in a flash. Some guys on the team were surprised. I wasn't. I had seen him do the same thing in high school too many times to be surprised.

Glenn ran the offense efficiently in the third quarter, but without managing to score on our second and third string defenses. Jon Stafford and Bob Huber split time in the fourth quarter. The freshmen made a lot of mistakes. Jon also made one brilliant play. He had to dodge a couple tacklers in the backfield and then found Brian Henson thirty yards downfield coming back to him. He nailed Brian in stride. Brian then broke a tackle and ran in for a touchdown to give the Blue team the win.

Coach Burton gave the team the rest of Saturday off. Tyler gave us the seed money left over from last year's parties so we could buy supplies. We put a hat or basket out at every party where attendees could contribute to the expenses. Zack said he never had a problem covering expenses from the hat. I didn't expect we would either.

Trevor and I went out to Walmart to get snack food, ice and coolers for our party that night. Jay went to the beer distributor with Tyler and Jibril to pick up booze for the party. We weren't required to attend dinner at the Training Table on Saturday evening. A bunch of us went downtown and had barbecue at Beulah's instead.

Damian, Jay, Trevor and I headed back to our apartment and set things up for the evening's party. Guys started to come around eight o'clock. By past years, this was a tame party. It was all guys. The girls wouldn't arrive on campus for another two weeks. We watched TV and a movie, drank our beer and chowed down on the munchies. It was a decent party but not spectacular compared to what we would have later in the year.

'Squirrel' MacCauley had a bit too much to drink. Chip and Jared Gray, our sophomore backup kicker and Squirrel's roommate, helped get him back to Hartranft. Damian, Trevor, Jay and I had a lot of clean up to do after everyone left but we decided it could wait until the next morning.

The meal plans the athletic department provided to us football players was convenient. We could get our meals from the dining halls in Pollock Commons or we could spend the allotment at the Mix or other on-campus convenience stores. I walked over to The Mix around 11:30, after I showered. I picked up a Philadelphia Inquirer and a breakfast sandwich.

A lot of the team ended up hanging out in the player's lounge Sunday afternoon. We played cards, pool and foosball as well as watching TV together. It was a pleasant way to unwind from football for a day.

Monday's practices started to clarify the quarterback competition. Glenn Korbel worked strictly with the second team. The coaches didn't make any announcements but all of us, including Glenn, understood what that meant. He was not going to be our starter.

Glenn took the bad news like the consummate team player he was. He worked as hard as anyone studying, working out and preparing for football. Unfortunately he wasn't blessed with the same physical gifts and athleticism as Jay and Chip. He made the most of what he had but he wasn't ever going to be the caliber of a starting quarterback for a BCS contending team.

Chip and Jay were given equal time running the first team offense. Chip ran the team well, for the most part. Once or twice every practice we'd hear Coach Schroeder or

Coach Burton yell, “Brinton, what the hell was that?” after an interception or a missed hand off.

Jay didn’t make nearly as many mistakes as Chip. Unfortunately he still couldn’t complete very many deep passes. The ball would float on him or it would fly off somewhere five or ten yards from his intended target. He couldn’t consistently throw deeper than about 15-20 yards. This problem made the QB competition much closer than it should have been.

Monday evening Coach Burton and Coach Schroeder unveiled a new wrinkle for our offense. I suddenly understood why I was getting so few reps with our special teams. We were installing a wildcat formation and I was the designated wildcat. The coaches didn’t plan one or two plays with the formation. They drew up a dozen plays from it to keep our opponents guessing.

I would line up behind the left guard and slightly closer to the center. The QB would line up behind the right guard, also shifted slightly to the center. The two of us were only five feet apart. The center could easily snap the ball to either of us.

Sometimes I would take a direct snap and take off running – either to the strong side or the weak side, depending on which play was called. I also had the option to take the snap, sprint out wide and pass. The snap could go to the QB who would then pitch the ball to me. We also could snap the ball to the QB and have all five receivers run pass routes from the formation. I was excited about trying something new.

The actual execution on Tuesday morning left something to be desired. I hadn’t taken shotgun snaps since I was a senior in high school and was our team’s emergency quarterback. I bobbled a few of the snaps. None of the blockers were sure yet where they were going. The coaches were unusually patient with us as we learned this offense. By the end of the afternoon practice we didn’t look like a circus clown act anymore.

Wednesday was media day. I must have done twenty interviews – Sports Illustrated, ESPN, all the broadcast networks, HBO Sports, my home TV stations, Philadelphia stations, Pittsburgh stations plus newspaper reporters. Most of the questions were the same. Who was going to be the quarterback? Did I have a preference for the quarterback? They all got the same answer. I was good friends with both Chip and Jay. I would catch ball from whomever Coach Burton put behind center for the first game.

Mr. Montgomery, the reporter from Lancaster’s paper caught on to my new/old nickname immediately. We talked about the name for a bit. Mr. Montgomery noted how much Coach Burton seemed to enjoy using my nickname. Whether I liked it or not, the name was here to stay.

I brought Jared Cantrell, Bruce MacCauley, John Crosby and Brian Henson together a couple evenings after meetings were over to review the playbook with them to help them learn what they needed to know. Jared was my best salesman in convincing the other

guys to give up free time to work on the playbook. Anders Voight came in the second time to assist too. Both John and Brian were smart and picking up our plays well. Squirrel (Bruce) was getting better at concentrating as we worked. I knew we had a good set of receivers to carry the Lions into the future.

Things weren't going better for Jay as the week went on. He and I were standing on the sidelines while Chip ran the first team offense. We had just missed connecting deep yet again for the third time in the morning. My patience was wearing thin.

"What the hell is wrong?" I demanded. "You made passes like that a year ago without breaking a sweat."

"It's my follow through," Jay explained. "I'm still rehabbing my left ankle and it isn't 100%. I can't put the same zip on the ball."

"You do realize that our whole offense is predicated on spreading the defense with the deep threat, right?" I asked. Jay nodded yes. "If this were a real game it won't take long for defense to figure out that you can't get the ball deep. They'll move up closer to the line, double all the receivers short and bottle up our running back. We become a three yards a play, grind it out offense. That isn't what Coach Burton is looking for."

"I know," Jay agreed.

"What are you going to do about it?" I demanded.

"I'm working hard at my rehab with Mr. Collins and Matt," Jay said. "I WILL get there eventually."

"Will Coach Burton wait to name a starter until you're ready?" I replied. "You may find yourself sitting on the bench watching Chip start if you don't get your shit together."

"That's just what you want, isn't it?" Jay snapped. "Get your buddy in as starter."

"My buddy?" I exclaimed. "What the hell do you think you are? Who did Damian and I turn to first when we were looking for roommates? I've always considered you to be one of my closest friends on the team."

"Why did you help Chip so much?" Jay asked. "You practiced with him all winter and spring helping him improve. You dragged him off to your scout camp this summer so you could work out together."

"You were on crutches last winter and couldn't throw a football," I replied. "You could have come to camp with me to work out. I would have arranged it if you wanted to do that."

"I had to stay on campus to continue my rehab," Jay answered.

“I know,” I agreed. “That’s why I didn’t suggest it to you. We’re having this conversation BECAUSE I’m your friend. If I wanted Chip to be the starter I wouldn’t say a word. I’d just watch you fail and smile to myself. What are you going to do about this?”

“I’ll keep rehabbing as hard as I can,” Jay said. “Hopefully Coach doesn’t name a starter before I get back to 100%.”

“I want you to understand something,” I said. “I hope you do get to 100% in time. Regardless of that, I will bust my tail for whoever is the starter when we line up against Boston College, whether it’s you or Chip. If Chip wins the job I expect you to be a loyal team member and support him in every way possible. I’m going to tell Chip the same thing. If you get the starter’s job I expect him to suck it up, smile and support you in every way possible. Our team can’t afford to be split into pro-Brinton and pro-Nicholson factions.”

“That’s fair,” Jay agreed.

I leaned in closer. “Seriously, you and I got to hook up deep or you’re going to be toast,” I said. “I’ll do anything I can to help you. If you want to work out some after practices, I’m willing. I bet if you ask Christian he would do it too.”

“I don’t know if that will help,’ Jay said. “What I need is for my damn foot to heal. I’ll keep working with Matt on my exercises.”

I hoped things did work out for Jay. He’s a damn good quarterback when he’s physically ready. The Thursday afternoon practice didn’t go better for Jay. He managed to complete single deep pass on five tries. Chip completed four of five when he was with the first string. He also threw another interception.

Friday morning I had the same conversation with Chip that I had with Jay on Thursday. I made it clear I had no favorites between them, that I would help both of them any way I could to make their case to be the starter and that the loser was going to have to be a loyal team player and support the starter when the decision was made.

Coach Burton had another scrimmage on Saturday morning. I played the first quarter. We gave our wildcat formation a good workout. I managed to complete a touchdown pass to Christian and rip off a couple good runs too. The team was improving. Jay didn’t complete any deep passes in the quarter he played.

Trevor, Jay, Damian and I did another party Saturday night. The money collected in our hat last weekend more than covered our expenses. We had Tyler pick up some of the fancier beers for this party. The guys talked, played poker, watched movies and listened to music as they enjoyed their beers. It was a tame party compared to most of last year’s.

The good news was that next Saturday the rest of the students would be on campus and we'd have girls! Wahoo!

Kelly and I kept in touch daily. Andy and I exchanged e-mails every couple of days. My brother was too busy with football to stay in the funk about missing his kids for long. Andy had many of the same experiences I had two years ago when I was a freshman. He was shocked at the size of the playbook. He didn't expect the guys to be so big and fast in college. His two-a-day practices were brutal, just like ours. He said he never worked harder in his life. Andy said Coach Keeler had him among the four guys trying out for punt and kick returner on the team.

Week three's Monday and Tuesday practices went much as the previous week. After dinner Tuesday night the team received a shock. Coach Burton announced to the assembled team that Chip Brinton would be that starting quarterback in ten days when we opened our season against Boston College. Coach wanted the starter to get as many repetitions as possible before we played BC.

Coach announced the other starters as well. There weren't any other big surprises. Damian was chosen over Wyatt Smith as starting tailback. Christian Hunsecker won the strong side receiver spot and Tanner Riggs would be our slot receiver. Aidan Nagy and Alex Majerowicz stayed third string with the freshmen. Max Rosen was the one guy who improved his spot among the guys in the coach's doghouse. He would back up Tanner in the slot.

The only contests on defense were for Will (weak side) linebacker and left cornerback. Jarrell Cook beat out Tony King for the Will spot. Denzell Hunt beat GJ DeLuca for the cornerback slot. Coach Burton exhorted us to practice hard for the next week and a half. We had two home games followed by a trip to Los Angeles to play USC in their home stadium. We needed to come together as a team immediately.

Jay did not take his demotion well. He stormed out without speaking to anyone when the team meeting was over. I cautioned Chip not to celebrate. He was lucky Jay's left foot still needed rehab. I also reminded him of all the blunders he made in football camp. He was going to have to improve his game if he was going to retain the starter's spot for the whole year. Trevor, Damian and I found Jay locked in his room when we got back to our apartment. He refused to come out or to talk with us.

Jay was uncommunicative on Wednesday at practice. He did exactly what he needed to do to run the second team offense but otherwise had little to say. Ironically he completed two of three deep passes that afternoon. I don't know if he was playing through pain or if his rehab was finally getting his foot in shape.

It didn't matter what the cause was after lunch. Coach Burton revealed his decision to the rest of the world at a press conference. Through persistence Trevor broke through to

Jay's wall of silence after dinner. Trevor got Jay to sit down with him, Damian and me to talk about the demotion.

Jay was frustrated that Coach Burton didn't wait longer before choosing between him and Chip. Jay insisted he just needed a few more days until his foot was fully healed. Jay was mad at himself too. There must have been something he could have done to give him that little edge he needed to beat Chip. I reminded him about the commitment I asked from him last week. He promised to do his best to be a loyal team member.

Jay's final comment was instructive. "Who knows what life may bring," I explained. "Chip may screw up as the starter and Coach Burton gives me another chance. My foot is getting better every day. God forbid, if anything happens to Chip I will be ready to play. If I get a shot at starting again I won't give that up without a huge fight."

"That's fair enough," I agreed. Jay really believed he still had a chance to take back the starting spot. Time would tell if that was realistic or not.

I received multiple e-mails that evening. Liz sent a brief e-mail with half a dozen pictures from her trip to Algonquin. The group came home the previous afternoon. I looked the beautiful pictures over and dreamed of lying back along the shore of one of those quiet lakes and watching the world go by. My career path was taking me in a different direction but it was nice to remember that wonderful place.

Mom sent me an e-mail to recounting my sister's trip. Mom was much more descriptive than Liz. The two crews had seen a dozen moose during the trip. Howling wolves had lulled them to sleep nearly half the nights. Amazingly Liz and Josh's relationship had weathered ten days of intimate contact. They were still as infatuated with each other as they had been last month. Mom was running out of excuses for getting Hunter and the twins out of the house when the two kids wanted privacy.

I sent an e-mail off to Will commiserating with him about missing the Algonquin trip. This was the first one he missed in ten years. John Holloway could have found a replacement for Abby in the health lodge for the last week of camp. Will couldn't be spared. Two years ago Rob Young ran the pool while Will went to Canada. Rob's National Camp School certification to run aquatics programs had expired since then.

I received an e-mail from Ed Fritz later that evening. Coach Burton wasn't the only coach ready to name his starter. Coach Meyer named Terrence Walker to start over Ed. Ed was unhappy but he promised to soldier on for the good of the Gators. I replied expressing my sympathy and telling him about the battle between Chip and Jay. This hadn't been a good week for my roommates/tentmates.

Incoming freshmen and transferring Commonwealth Campus students reported on Thursday for orientation. Coach Burton modified our practice schedules while orientation was going on. We would practice Thursday and Friday mornings and then scrimmage on Saturday. The afternoon and evenings were ours so we could prepare for the start of classes. Next Monday we would switch to our normal fall practice schedule – 3:45 pm to 5:00 or so daily with night meetings as needed.

Dinner at the Training Table wasn't mandatory Thursday or Friday. The freshmen and sophomores had house dinners and meetings. The rest of the team was welcome to eat at the Training Table but weren't required to eat there. I decided it was time for us to christen our kitchen. Damian, Trevor and Jay were all for it.

I drove to the local supermarket and picked up supplies to do one of the casseroles that I learned to make in Boy Scouts. My foodie roommate Damian volunteered to go along and to make dessert for us. I made Turkey Tetrazzini over lunch time to cook before dinner. Damian made a chocolate strawberry torte.

Kelly's mom Kathleen took the Thursday off from work to bring Kelly and her younger brother Mike to campus. Kelly phoned me when they arrived on campus right after lunch. Kathleen planned to get Mike checked in first. He was rooming in McKee Hall in West Halls near the Rec Hall.

Kelly called around two o'clock, soon after I finished my casserole. They had Mike checked in. I hopped in my car and drove over to the Loft Apartments on Bellevue Avenue. The apartments are on the side of the hill overlooking the valley along Route 26. Each apartment building was three stories high with the bottom story a garden level apartment.

I pulled up in front of Apartment 52 and parked beside Kelly's mom's mini-van. The ladies were inside. I mounted the steps to the first floor and rang the bell at their apartment. Kelly launched herself at me when she opened the door, hugging me and kissing. "Sweetie! It's so good to see you," Kelly enthused.

"Hello Kyle," Kathleen added when Kelly released me. "It is so nice of you to come over to help us move Kelly in."

I gave Kelly's mom a hug and a kiss on the cheek. The three of us got to work unloading all Kelly's things into her apartment. Since Bev, Cindy and Jen wouldn't arrive until tomorrow, Kelly had the pick of bedrooms. It took us about two hours to move everything into her room.

Kelly rode with me on the trip to my apartment. Kathleen followed along in her mini-van. Trevor, Damian and Jay greeted Kelly's mom warmly. I popped the casserole in the oven. We had 45 minutes to relax and talk before dinner was ready. Kelly helped me get a salad together and make garlic bread to go along with the casserole.

Kathleen got to know my roommates as we talked and waited for our dinner. The casserole turned out to be good. It was nice to christen our kitchen properly with a friendly dinner party. Kathleen had to head back to Pittsburgh after dinner. She had to work tomorrow. I promised I would give Kelly a ride back to her apartment afterwards. Kelly kissed her mom good bye and gave her a hug before she left.

I hadn't been specific about exactly when I would give Kelly a ride home. Both of us planned for her to spend the night in my room. Kelly, Damian and I settled in to enjoy a couple movies on my new DVD player. The rest of my roommates had other plans.

My roommates didn't mind Kelly staying overnight with me. The two of us retired to my bedroom around 11:15, after we caught a bit of the late news. We made love before we fell asleep. I'm sure Trevor, Damian and Jay heard. They would just have to learn to live with it. Anyway Trevor and Damian's girlfriends were both returning to campus on Friday. They would have an opportunity Friday night. Jay would have to go out and find himself a girl, a task I knew he was up to.

Kelly and I were cuddling after our cums when I gave her a kiss and asked, "Do you want me to get up early and give you a ride back to your apartment sweetie?"

"What time do you need to get up?" Kelly replied.

"I have to be over at the Training Table for team breakfast at 8:00," I said. "I guess we'd need to get up around seven to have time for showers and to drive over."

"Do you mind if I sleep in tomorrow?" Kelly asked. "I don't have anything until 1:30 pm. I have to meet my advisor then. I can take the bus back to my apartment. It comes with a free CATA pass."

"Cool!" I replied. "That's sounds good to me."

"Are you free for supper tomorrow night?" Kelly asked.

"Yeah, Coach isn't making us eat at the Training Table this weekend," I said. "What's up?"

"I promised Jen, Bev and Cindy I would make dinner tomorrow night while they finish unpacking. I was thinking we should invite you, Christian and Mark to come too."

"That sounds great," I agreed. I gave Kelly a kiss on the lips. "I'm going to love the two of us having our own apartments. This year is going to be great."

"It will lover," Kelly agreed. The two of us rolled over on our sides and spooned together for the night. I draped my arm over Kelly's stomach. She clasped it with both hands as we fell asleep.

Most everyone was keyed up at Friday morning's practice. Those team members with girlfriends were eagerly anticipating reunions. Those without girlfriends were eagerly anticipating the arrival of girls to our campus after living like monks for the past three weeks. They dreamt of strolling down campus streets observing, meeting and getting to know some of the lovelies flocking to campus.

The coaches, along with our captains, Tyler, Jibril and Andrew, endeavored to keep us focused on football. This was the sloppiest practice we had by far this month. Coaches made us run the plays again. At eleven o'clock they sent us off the field with a warning to do better at tomorrow morning's scrimmage. I showered and went back to the apartment.

I had lunch and then headed for a 12:30 pm appointment with my advisor, Dr. Henderson. I loved going to see Dr. Henderson almost as much as I loved going to see my dentist to get a cavity filled. He made me wait five minutes before he admitted me to his office. We reviewed my schedule briefly – Anthropology 45-Cultural Anthropology, History 161-Battle of Gettysburg in Memory, Geography 30-Geographic Perspectives, Geography 115-Landforms of the World and SS ED 411-Teaching Secondary Social Studies.

Dr. Henderson was almost civil throughout the counseling session, at least until the end. He shot me with a zinger before I left.

“You’re one of the most promising education undergraduates in your class Mr. Martin,” he started. I smiled at the praise. “It’s too bad you fritter away your time on football. You could make something of yourself in the education field otherwise.”

I pasted a fake smile on my face, throttled my urge to scream, thanked him for his time and marched out of his office as quickly as I could go. WHAT IN THE HELL DID THE IDIOT WANT? I made Dean’s List for three straight semesters. Dr. Henderson was a puffy red inflamed boil on the posterior of my life.

I stopped by the bookstore on the way back to my apartment to get this semester’s books. The title of my history book was interesting – “The Battle of Gettysburg in Historical Memory” by Dr. Katherin Brennan. This is one way to sell your book. Who was I to say anything? Dr. Brennan was simply the best professor I had at Penn State.

I gathered up the rest of the armload of books I needed and headed for the checkout counter. I happily gave the clerk the charge card the athletic department supplied to every scholarship athlete. The final bill came to \$473.19. Thank you Joe Paterno and Bob Burton for giving me my scholarship!

I dropped my books off at the apartment and headed up the hill to the Natatorium. I signed in and then headed outside to help lifeguard the freshmen swim tests. Mr.

Coleman assigned me to scan ID cards as the freshmen were pulled out of the pool when they successfully completed their swim tests. Chip arrived a couple minutes after me for his first afternoon of work. Mr. Coleman had Chip monitor freshmen as they took their tests.

I'd been working a couple hours scanning IDs and was getting a little punchy when I heard someone say, "Hey Kyle. How's it going?"

I focused and looked up. "Hey Mike," I replied. "It's good to see you. Are you getting settled into Penn State?" It was Kelly's younger brother Mike.

The eyes of the guy standing beside Mike bugged out. "You're.... you're.... you're...." he stuttered. I smiled and nodded agreement. "I saw your picture was in the paper this morning."

"Kyle Martin," I said as I extended a hand shake to the young man.

"Kyle, this is my roommate Jim Hill," Mike said as we shook hands.

"You're the star receiver on our football team," Jim gushed.

"I do play football," I replied. "It's good to meet you Jim."

"You've been on campus for twenty-four hours Mike," Jim demanded. "How do you know Kyle Martin?"

I laughed and explained, "I go steady with Mike's sister. We've known each other for a couple years."

Mike and Jim hung around as I scanned IDs of the others in line behind them. Mike and I talked about how our summers went at our respective scout camps. I hadn't heard what Mike's major was. He was going for architectural engineering. I found out Jim was from Pottstown and was majoring in Food Science. Jim seemed like a nice guy.

After a few minutes talking Mike suggested, "We should probably stop bothering you and let you work."

"My boss will probably appreciate that," I agreed.

"See you later," Mike said as he and Jim started to leave.

"Hey, you guys should stop by my party tomorrow night," I said. "Kelly, my roommates and I are throwing one."

"Sis didn't tell me about that," Mike said.

I chuckled. "I forgot to tell her last night," I explained. "We got a little busy with other things. The captains on the team asked me and my roommates to host it for the team."

"Yeah, I can understand how that can happen when you haven't seen your girlfriend for awhile," Mike replied. "Are you sure it's OK if Jim and I come? I don't want to get in the way of something the team is doing."

"It's fine," I replied. "We have non-players at our parties all the time. We'll have plenty of good beer, girls and good music. It'll be fun."

"We'll be there Kyle," Mike said as they left.

As they left I overheard Jim gush, "I can't believe it! I've been here a day and have an invitation to party with the football team. I'm glad I'm rooming with you Mike."

A few other freshmen recognized me that afternoon as I worked. The pool closed down for freshmen swim tests at 5:00 pm. I headed back to my apartment to change and then headed over to Kelly's apartment for dinner.

Christian Hunsecker and Mark Armstrong were already there, having helped their girlfriends move in during the afternoon. Kelly made pork chops, mashed potatoes and corn. She served a cake she bought for dessert. She did a fabulous job. Everyone complimented her on the meal.

I helped Kelly do the dishes after dinner was over. This gave me an opportunity to tell Kelly about the party.

"Honey, I forgot to mention it last night," I began. "Tyler Madden asked me and my roommates to host Saturday night parties for the team this year. The same way Zack and Leigh Ann did last year."

"Every Saturday night?" Kelly questioned. Her body language told me this wasn't as great an idea as I had thought.

"Just the ones when we have home games and then after the season ends," I replied.

"What about going out to other parties?" Kelly asked. "I don't know if I want to be tied down to this all year. This is a lot of work."

"Jay, Damian, Trevor and Stephanie will help too," I said. "It's not just you and me. It'll be fun. You enjoy working with Steph. It'll be like last year when you and I helped Zack and Leigh Ann."

"That was fun last year," Kelly agreed. "...but we weren't the hosts. We could leave anytime we wanted to. I don't want to be tied down on Saturday nights."

“I’ll talk to my roommates,” I said. “We’ll work it out so we can visit other parties too on Saturday nights.”

“That’s good,” Kelly said. “I bumped into Cameron Miller at the bookstore today. He invited us to Omega Chi’s ‘Start the Year Bash’ tomorrow night.”

“I’ll make sure we are able to put in an appearance,” I agreed.

It was a beautiful evening in the high seventies. Kelly and I decided to walk downtown. The Lofts doesn’t seem that far out of town but it is. It took us twenty minutes to get to Shortlidge Road at College Avenue. My Golf is going to get a lot more use this year than it did the past two years. This is nothing like the six minute walk we used to have when we lived in the dorms.

We window shopped for half an hour and grabbed ice cream cones before we walked back to Kelly’s apartment. Kelly offered to spend the night with me again but I had to pass.

Tyler Madden was on everyone’s cases to get a good night’s sleep so we were prepared for tomorrow morning’s scrimmage. It was our tune-up before we played Boston College next Saturday. BC was ranked #25 in the nation. The polls had us ranked #17. I didn’t blame the pollster. We lost a lot of people to graduation last spring. We were going to have to prove ourselves to get respect this year.

Jay said Bill Robinson came over for dinner at the apartment with Damian that night. The two of them disappeared after dinner. Damian wasn’t home when I returned at 9:30 pm. Undoubtedly the two friends had hooked up with their girlfriends Melanie Burnett and Sarah Wood.

I relaxed in the living room with some music and studied the playbook to make sure I knew the wildcat plays by heart. I was sure Coach Burton was going to run them tomorrow. Damian came in around eleven o’clock. Jay, Trevor and I all recognized the ‘I just got laid’ look on our roomies face. Certainly Melanie was sporting the same smile.

My teammates and I took Tyler Madden’s lecture at the end of yesterday’s practice to heart. The locker room was buzzing with excited players when I came in a little before 8:00 am. We taped up, dressed and prepared for our final scrimmage.

Even though the weather was perfect outside Coach Burton decided to have the scrimmage inside Holuba Hall. I presumed that meant we were going to run plays that the general public did not need to see, namely the wildcat formation plays.

The Blue Team featured the first string offense and second string defense against the White Team's first string defense and second string offense. The remaining players were split between the two teams.

The first string played in the first half of the scrimmage. Chip did a decent job against our defense in spite of a good pass rush by Trevor Conwell and Bill Daugherty. He went nine for fourteen passing for 142 yards. Unfortunately his two touchdowns were balanced against an interception.

Coach C and our defense double covered me with Shawn Byrd and Tyler Madden. I still caught three passes, including a couple long passes. Chip smartly used his second and even his third options when I was covered.

He threw one touchdown to Christian on a check down. The pass went about ten yards. Denzell Hunt missed on the tackle when Christian spun away. Christian was gone in an eye blink. I knew how that was. My friend had an amazing ability to accelerate after the catch. He streaked down the field to make a forty-two yard touchdown on the play.

Damian scored on a tailback screen to finish another long drive. My roomie really was showing off his receiving skills. I was glad the coaches recognized his ability to complete this kind of play. He didn't get that kind of chance last season.

Our first chance with the wildcat offense went well. I had a couple good runs, gaining 22 yards. Chip and I also got the defense to bite on the run fake so I could throw a deep pass to Christian for his second touchdown of the morning. The Blue Team was ahead 24-20 when the first string players were benched at half time.

The second and third string played the second half. Jay played with determination. He completed 12 of 19 passes in his two and a half quarters of play. He threw three touchdowns and no interceptions. Jay completed one of three deep passes while he played. He rallied the White Team to a 30-24 lead before he took the bench.

Glenn, Colin, Jon and Bob Huber shared the remainder of the playing time at QB. Jon led the third string Blue players to a touchdown to pull out 31-30 victory for my Blue Team.

The coaches seemed pleased with the scrimmage. We still had work to do but our team seemed almost ready for our season to start in seven days. We would be ready for the Boston College Eagles when they arrived next Saturday.

I showered, grabbed some lunch and then headed back to the Natatorium. John Coleman needed all the help he could get for freshmen swim tests. Freshmen had the option to take the test anytime in their first year on campus. Nearly everyone came the first weekend to get it out of the way. I ended up along the side of the pool that afternoon watching as kids swam and floated for the ten minute test.

Kelly met me at my apartment after I finished my shift. We decided to try one of the restaurants outside downtown since we needed to drive out and pick up snacks and things for the night's party. I drove us down to Ruby Tuesdays.

The restaurant is noted for good burgers, so Kelly and I decided to try them. Kelly had a turkey burger with swiss cheese and portabella mushrooms. I went with the smokehouse burger, with bacon, barbecue sauce and onion straws topping a big juicy burger. Kelly and I shared our burgers with each other. This place was a good change-of-pace place to go after two years of eating downtown every weekend.

We stopped off at the nearest grocery store and picked up food for the party. Kelly and I made it back to the apartment around 7:30, early enough to finish setting up before our guests arrived.

Trevor and Tyler had the beer, wine and liquor ready when we returned. Damian and Stephanie prepared some hors d'oeuvres for the evening. Kelly and I put out our snack foods. Guests started to arrive around eight o'clock. My apartment quickly filled with teammates, friends and lots of girls.

I knew some of the girls who hung out with the team from last year. The guys had invited many new girls to the party. Freshmen, sophomores new to our crowd, they were all welcome.

Whoever was closest to the front door let partiers in as needed. By chance Kelly was refilling the snack bowls when the doorbell rang. She peered out the window that looks on the front door at our prospective guests.

“Mike?!?” Kelly gasped.

Kelly opened the door and let her brother and his roommate Jim inside.

“Hey sis,” Mike replied. “I take it this is where Kyle’s party is.”

“What in the world are you doing here?” Kelly asked.

“I invited your brother and Jim,” I explained as I caught up to my shocked girlfriend. I briefed Mike and Jim about the refreshments, where to find the beer and that they should enjoy themselves and make themselves at home.

I thought I had done the right thing inviting Mike but Kelly pulled me aside into the hallway between my room and Trevor’s room.

“Why would you invite my little brother?” Kelly demanded. “Things get pretty wild around here”

“He’s not so little Kelly,” I replied. “Mike is eighteen and a freshman in college. He will be fine.”

“What if...” Kelly protested.

“You survived our parties as a young freshman,” I countered.

“I was on campus six months then,” Kelly said. “I had a boyfriend.”

“No, I mean back in the fall when Tanner Riggs brought you as a date,” I replied. “You survived that.”

“Yeah, I guess,” Kelly said.

“Mike will be fine here,” I said. “He’ll have a few beers, get to talk with some of the team and maybe met a girl. Nothing bad.”

“I guess,” Kelly agreed.

We had a good turnout of team members, girls and other guests at the party. My high school friends Karl Weaver and Jason Harting both dropped in.

Trevor and Steph were perfect hosts for our gathering. Kelly and I enjoyed working with them. Tyler Madden helped act as a host even though we weren’t at his place. Damian stuck around for an hour before splitting. He and Billy had other plans with their girlfriends. Jay, in addition to inviting many of the girls who were attending, played DJ for our music.

Our guests enjoyed the booze. A few got more than a little drunk. The unattached guys flirted with the available girls at the party. Some like Jay, Chip, Brendan Hayden, Tanner Riggs and Joe Ricci, were noted for their smooth ability to coax females into bed with them. Three of the freshmen players seemed intent on following in their more senior teammates’ footsteps. Brian Henson, Marco Cuchiella and Caleb Fuller, our freshman backup punter, hung out with the cluster of girls that we used to call ‘Zack’s harem.’

I was surprised when one of the first guys to score a temporary coupling was Mike’s roommate Jim. Jim had been talking up and then making out with a cute blond freshman that I didn’t know. Jim didn’t realize that he could borrow one of the bedrooms here. He and the cutie had a brief conference with Mike and then disappeared; probably back to Jim’s dorm room to share a romp in bed.

Beer and booze flowed. More of my friends achieved their night’s goal – bed a coed. Brian Henson was one of the lucky ones that evening. I spotted him dancing with and later kissing and pawing a cute brunette. He was funny when he approached me a little later that evening.

“Ummm... Coach... Amanda and I were wondering...” Brian stuttered. “....we wanted to uhh...” Brian turned bright red. “Marco said it’s OK if.... Well, you know....”

“You’re looking for a bedroom?” I offered.

“Yeah,” Brian agreed as he broke into a relieved smile. “The one in the back behind the kitchen is empty. Who should I talk to?”

“That’s my room,” I replied. “Go have some fun.”

“Thanks Coach,” Brian answered. “It’s been too long since... you know.”

“Do you have condoms?” I asked. Brian blushed bright red again.

“Yeah, I’m covered Coach,” Brian said.

“Have fun,” I added as the young couple hurried to my bedroom.

I limited myself to two beers that evening. I didn’t need to go too crazy. Kelly was a couple beers ahead of me and had a nice buzz going. We played good host and hostess as our friends enjoyed the party.

Kelly’s brother Mike fixated on one of the girls at the party, Beth Naylor. Beth was a sophomore I knew from last year who was working her way through the available guys on the football team. I didn’t expect Mike to have any chance with Beth. I was surprised when I spotted Beth escorting Mike upstairs when Damian’s room became available.

Ten minutes later the two kids reappeared. Mike was sporting a goofy ‘I just got laid,’ grin. He was oblivious to Beth’s less than enthusiastic look. The two kids parted at the bottom of the steps. Beth rejoined a cluster of her girlfriends. Mike sauntered to the kitchen for another beer. I was going to have to have a talk with Mike. That kind of ‘stick it in and get off’ performance wasn’t going to get you in bed with any of these girls when word got around.

Kelly reminded me around ten o’clock that I had promised we would drop by Omega Chi’s party to that evening. The two of us talked with Trevor, Steph and Jay. They sent us on our way. Everything was under control with our party.

We walked across town to Omega Chi’s frat house. Brandon Lewis, a junior we knew well from previous years, welcomed us inside when we arrived. Kelly and I each grabbed a beer and mingled with the crowd. We bumped into Joel Peterson and his girlfriend Beth Mason as we circulated around the room. Soon after that we met up with Cameron Miller and his date Erin Hart.

We talked with Joel, Beth, Cam and Erin for awhile, catching up on the summer’s events.

I asked, “Are you taking History 161 this semester?”

“Well, duh....” Cameron responded. “I’m a history major from Adams County who loves the Civil War and the Battle of Gettysburg. What do you think?”

“I think I’ll see you in class on Monday afternoon,” I responded laughingly.

“I’m going to get more beer,” Kelly said. “Who else wants some?”

Kelly paid no attention to my warning look as she took orders from everyone except me. The bottle I was nursing was still over half full. I didn’t need another. Kelly returned a minute later with six bottles. She gave one to each of us.

“I didn’t need this,” I said as Kelly handed me another Troegs.

“Oh, you’re a big boy,” Kelly responded. “You can handle it.”

I didn’t argue. She probably was right. I could handle a fifth beer without becoming too inebriated. Kelly was now gulping down beer number six for the evening. She was buzzed when we left my party. She was passing intoxicated and heading for totally smashed.

I diverted Kelly’s attention from drinking by getting her out on the dance floor. It worked for awhile. Eventually Kelly went back for the beer I abandoned and insisted on downing it. My girl passed smashed and was heading for comatose if I didn’t intervene soon.

“Honey, I think it’s time to go to bed, I suggested as she put down the empty beer bottle.

“Party’sh jusht shtarting,” Kelly slurred. “I’m not shleepy.”

“I’m suggesting we go back to my room to make love,” I whispered to her.

“BANG ME!” Kelly spouted. “Hell yeah! Shtuff me wit’ your shalami. Pork me! Lesht’s go!”

“Shhh!” I cautioned. “We don’t have to announce it to everyone.”

“Jusht one more beer and I’m ready,” Kelly said.

“You’ve had enough honey,” I said as I helped her to her feet. “Put your arm over my shoulder.” I slipped my arm across Kelly’s back and under her arm pit. That provided just enough steadyng so she could walk. It was a mile and a half back to my apartment. Progress was slow and very unsteady.

Kelly made vulgar comments to some of the people we passed about ‘riding my pink pony’ or about me ‘stuffing her beaver’ as we walked back. It was an embarrassing performance.

It was after 12:30 in the morning when I finally dragged Kelly into my apartment. I took her straight to my room. The door was shut and I heard the sounds of two people having sex. I lugged Kelly back to the living room and plopped her in the sofa beside her brother Mike. Mike looked slightly more alert than his sister though he had a good supply of empty beer bottles on the end table beside him.

“Can you watch your sister for a few minutes Mike?” I asked. “She’s had a bit too much to drink tonight.”

The apartment had mostly broken up. A few couples were still hanging out. Trevor, Steph, Tyler Madden and his girlfriend Kayla Allen were cleaning up the mess. I joined in to help while I waited for my bedroom to clear out.

Jared Cantrell and a cute looking light skinned black girl came out of my room. My protégé blushed a little and said, “I hope you don’t mind us using your room Coach.”

“It’s fine Jared,” I agreed. “I hope you and your girl had fun.”

“We did,” Jared replied. “Let’s go Ronelle. I’ll walk you back to your dorm.”

I followed Jared and Ronelle out the hallway to the front door. I said good bye and then went to retrieve my lover. She was asleep on the couch leaning against her brother.

“Mike, can you give me a hand getting Kelly you my room?” I asked.

“Sure thing Kyle,” Mike agreed. Kelly woke up a little and helped us walk her to my bed.

“Kyle’s gonna shtuff me full of cock!” Kelly cackled. She followed it with a laugh. “Shtuffed full!”

I laid her down. I asked Mike, “Are you heading back to your dorm soon?”

“No,” Mike replied. “Jim’s got a girl in our room tonight and....”

“And?” I asked.

“The poor guy hasn’t had a girl in six months,” Mike added. “I can’t go back and kick her out, can I?”

“I guess not,” I agreed.

“Can I crash here tonight?” Mike asked.

“I guess I could put you on the couch,” I said.

“Thanks man, I appreciate everything Kyle,” Mike said. I grabbed my camping pillow from my pack in the closet, got a blanket and led him back to the living room.

Mike helped Trevor, Steph, Tyler, Kayla and me clean up the apartment. We ended up with two big bags of trash to dispose of. They would wait until the morning. I said good night Tyler and Kayla. They headed back to Tyler’s apartment. Mike bedded down on the couch. I returned to my room.

Kelly was comatose. I couldn’t wake her even to undress her. I worked to undress her down to her panties. I put one of my T-shirts on her and then laid her out in bed. I joined her after I stripped down to my boxers.

There is one huge disadvantage with letting other couples have sex in your bed. It was a mess of pussy juice, cum and sweat. I used two towels to cover the worst of the mess. Here I was sleeping in the mess left by half a dozen couples. I was hard as steel and had a passed out girlfriend.

I hosted a party where nearly everyone got their rocks off tonight. I mothered a drunk girlfriend. I had to try to sleep on sloppy sheets and was still hard and horny. Talk about life being unfair!

I decided would need to buy another couple sets of sheets for future Saturday nights. There was no way I was going to bed in a mess like this again. I also needed to have the long delayed talk with Kelly. I managed to keep my drinking under control tonight but she didn’t. This couldn’t continue.

I woke up around 10:30 Sunday morning. Kelly was dead to the world. I was still horny from not getting any last evening. I knew Kelly was going to be hung over this morning when she finally woke up so there was no point in hanging around in bed in hopes of some wake up sex. I headed upstairs to the bathroom.

Damian’s bedroom door was open. The bed was used last night but hadn’t been slept in. Apparently he spent the night with Melanie. I climbed into the shower to clean up. I jerked off to relieve a little of the frustration while I was in the shower.

I overheard Jay talking with whoever he slept with last night as I left the bathroom and headed back downstairs. Trevor and Steph were still asleep, as was Kelly. Mike was crashed on our couch, looking like foot long hot dog in too short a roll. Mike stuck out beyond both ends of my couch.

I went down the street to the Mix in Pollock Commons. I used credits from my meal plan to buy a dozen eggs, half a gallon of milk, bread, and a pound of bacon. It would make a nice breakfast for Kelly and me today and leave me leftovers for later this week. I picked up the Philadelphia Sunday newspaper too.

I passed Jay and his conquest from last night one the way back to the apartment. He introduced her as Brooke Dillard. Brooke was a sophomore studying nursing. They were going downtown for breakfast.

I put my groceries in the refrigerator when I got back to the apartment. Mike was stirring but still asleep when I came back. I checked on Kelly. She was dead to the world. I put aspirin and a glass of water on the night stand so I was ready for my sweetie's inevitable first request when she woke up.

I sat down at the table, spread my paper out and began reading. Mike woke up a few minutes later. He stirred, shook his head, sat up and stretched.

"Morning Kyle," Mike said amiably.

"Good Morning," I responded. "I hope the couch wasn't too uncomfortable."

"It wasn't any worse than the cots at camp this summer," Mike replied.

"I understand," I agreed. "My camp has bunks with mattresses for the staff. The campers sleep on army cots. My friend and I spent a week on those when my troop came to camp."

"I survived the night," Mike said. "What time is it?"

"11:15"

"I guess Jim's girl has left by now. Maybe I'll head back now," Mike said. He chuckled. "I hope it wasn't a problem with me crashing here last night. Poor Jim hasn't gotten laid since last Christmas. He's overdue."

"I noticed you got an opportunity last night too," I observed.

"Yeah," Mike replied, grinning wickedly. "Yeah, I did."

"Do you consider us friends Mike?" I asked.

"Friends? Hell, you're practically like my brother," Mike replied.

"Can I give you some brother to brother advice?" I asked. Mike nodded yes. "How long were you upstairs with Beth?"

Mike furrowed his brow. "Beth?" Mike asked. "Who's.... oh, Beth. The girl last night." He paused to think for a few seconds. "I don't know. The usual amount of time?"

"Ten minutes?" I asked.

"Maybe, I don't know," Mike replied.

"Did Beth come?" I asked.

"Ummm... I don't know," Mike replied. "I know I did."

"Would you like to sleep with her again?" I asked.

"Hell yeah!" Mike agreed enthusiastically. "She was a good lay. Can you arrange that?"

"No, I can't 'arrange that,'" I explained. "Beth is a free agent. She makes her own choices. Do you think she'll want to be with a guy who takes her upstairs, undresses, pokes it in and humps for a couple minutes and then blows his load in her?" Mike's face fell as I accurately described his time with Beth. "When you were done you got dressed and came back downstairs. Did she enjoy it? You don't know."

"You make it sound so bad Kyle," Mike protested. "It wasn't that...." Mike hung his head. "It was that bad, wasn't it?"

"Yeah, probably," I replied. "There's a minimum standard of performance that Beth was expecting. You didn't meet it. Have you ever done oral?"

"Oral? You mean like a blow job?" Mike asked. "Blow jobs are great. I've had them."

"No, oral as in you going down on your girl," I explained. I got the usual 'are you kidding' look I usually got when I brought the subject up with unenlightened guys.

"You have got to be kidding!" Mike replied. "You do stuff like that with my sister?"

"All the time Mike... all the time," I explained. I spent about ten minutes giving Mike the same lecture I had given my brother Andy, my best friend Ed and a couple of my teammates here a year or two ago. At the end I summarized, "If my girl doesn't cum, I haven't done my job. Making love is about sharing and making each other feel great."

"I blew it with Beth, didn't I?" Mike asked when I finished.

"Very possibly," I agreed. "You might be able to salvage something if you called and apologized to her. Maybe you could make it up to her by offering to take her to dinner and movie sometime."

“Think that would work?” Mike asked hopefully.

“I don’t know,” I replied. “At least you won’t look as inconsiderate and thoughtless as you did last night.”

“Thanks for the advice Kyle,” Mike said. “I kind of wish Bill was more like you – at least when talking about sex. My family does NOT discuss sex at all. Whatever I learned I learned from my friends in the locker room at Catholic school. You can imagine how little we knew about sex. The only girls we had to learn from were nice Catholic girls. You can imagine how little experience any of us guys had in high school.”

“Nice Catholic girls can be fun when they get away from home,” I replied.

“I guess you and sis do have a lot of fun together,” Mike teased. “She has dropped a few hints by accident. Bet you had more fun than I did last night, what with spending the whole night with Kelly.”

“Not as much as you assume,” I replied. “Kelly was pretty drunk last night. She passed out before we could do anything.”

“That’s a bummer,” Mike said. “Sis was really drunk.”

“You did use protection last night, didn’t you Mike?” I asked. I remembered how anti-birth control Kelly was when we started dating.

“Beth insisted,” Mike replied. “I’ll probably have to do a few Hail Marys after confession next week.”

“I guess,” I agreed. Poor kid. Catholics do have their hang ups. I guess we Presbyterians do to, though birth control wasn’t one of them.

“Thanks for the talk Kyle and thanks for the invite to the party,” Mike said. “I’m going to head back to McKee and see how Jim’s night went.”

Mike headed out after folding my blanket and leaving it with the pillow on the couch. I went back to reading my paper. A few minutes later Steph Kolmar came out of Trevor’s bedroom dressed in a bath robe.

“Morning Steph,” I said in greeting.

“Good Morning Kyle,” she answered. “I’m going to use the shower upstairs, OK?”

“Help yourself,” I agreed.

“This is kind of weird for me,” Steph said. “I’m used to Trevor staying over at my apartment overnight not the other way around.”

“Our place is your place,” I replied. “You’re always welcome here.”

“Thanks Kyle,” Steph said. “It is a lot more convenient to stay overnight here if we’re going to have parties every Saturday night than to drive back to my apartment.”

“Kelly and I are going to enjoy these arrangements this year too,” I agreed.

Steph headed upstairs for her shower. I went back to my newspaper. Trevor came out of his room a couple minutes later and used the half bathroom downstairs. He read part of my paper while he waited for his turn in the single shower in our apartment.

A groan came from the back of the apartment, from my room. I headed back to see how my lover was faring. She was awake and shielding her eyes from the sunlight sneaking around the edges of the curtains in my room.

“How are you doing?” I asked solicitously. I received another groan in response. “Here are two aspirin and some water.”

“Thank you,” Kelly said quietly.

“You’ll feel better after a nice hot shower,” I said. “I’m afraid there’s a line though. Steph’s in there now and Trevor’s waiting for his turn. What would you like for breakfast?”

“Breakfast? Yech....” Kelly groaned. “Maybe toast and coffee in a bit.”

“I’ll have it ready when you get out of the shower,” I replied.

Kelly needed half an hour to shower, dress and begin recovering from her night of drunkenness. Trevor and Steph headed downtown to the Waffle Shop for brunch. I made myself some scrambled eggs and bacon while coffee brewed.

I served Kelly toast with butter and jam when she joined me. I served myself my bacon and eggs. Kelly was quiet while she ate. After she finished she asked, “Do you feel as horrible as I do honey?”

“No, I don’t feel bad,” I replied. “Remember my resolution last spring? Cut down on my drinking. It works. I feel fine the next day.”

“I wish you had reminded me last night,” Kelly said. “I might not feel like shit today if you had.”

“I did ask you to slow down your drinking,” I said.

“I don’t remember,” Kelly replied. “I don’t remember a lot of things from last night.” Kelly seemed contrite. I decided to push on with the postponed discussion the two of us needed to have about drinking too much.

“I had fun last night and only had four beers,” I said. “You had seven… eight…”

“I don’t know,” Kelly admitted.

“You feel like your head is about to explode this morning,” I continued. “What do you remember about the party at Omega Chi?”

“Umm… we talked with Joel, Beth, Cam, and uhhh… his date?” Kelly said haltingly.

“Erin,” I added. “Do you remember talking with Cole and Andrea?” Kelly shook her head no. I rattled off half a dozen other acquaintances we talked with at the party last night. Kelly didn’t remember meeting any of them. “Do you remember how you got back here?”

“I have no idea,” Kelly replied.

“I dragged you back,” I growled. “No offense intended, but slim as you are, it was a pain in the ass dragging you a mile and a half back to my apartment. Do you remember telling complete strangers at the light at Atherton and College that you were going to ‘ride my pink pony’?” Kelly shook her head no. “You told a young couple we passed on Pollock Road that ‘I was going to stuff your beaver.’”

“I didn’t say that,” Kelly protested.

“You did,” I asserted.

“I had a fun evening drinking less,” I explained. “At least I had fun until you got sloppy drunk.”

“You had fun when you ‘stuffed my beaver’,” Kelly countered.

“No, we didn’t make love last night,” I snorted. “You passed out by the time you hit the couch here. Mike had to help me carry you to bed.”

“I don’t remember,” Kelly said.

“I’m not asking you to give up parties or drinking,” I said. “I just want you to think about cutting down a little. I had four drinks last night and enjoyed myself. You had twice as many, did stupid stuff and are hung over today. We can both have our fun Saturday nights and not feel like crap the next day. Can you think about that?”

Kelly took in a deep breath and let it out. "Yeah, I guess I can," she replied. "Not feeling like shit makes sense right now."

Kelly and I finished our brunch together and then settled on the couch and read the Sunday paper the way we always did. I felt happy that I finally had explained myself to Kelly after that badly botched attempt last spring that led to so much trouble. We could have our fun at parties, act smarter, have fun and keep ourselves out of trouble.

Later in the afternoon after we finished the paper Kelly asked, "Do you have an eight o'clock class tomorrow Kyle?"

"No," I answered.

"We missed out being together last night," Kelly suggested. "Maybe I could stay overnight tonight and make it all up to you."

"We could do that honey," I replied. "My first class tomorrow morning isn't until 11:15."

"Can you give me a ride back to the apartment sometime so I can change and get clothes and books for tomorrow?" Kelly asked.

"Sure, why don't I give you a ride before I go workout this afternoon?" I suggested. "I have dinner at the Training Table with the team. I can pick you up after I'm done there."

"That sounds good Kyle," Kelly said. She laughed. "Bev, Cindy and Jen are going to wonder if I am ever going to stay in our apartment. With tonight, I will have slept here three of the first four nights of the semester."

"It can't be like this all the time," I replied. "We can't do this any Friday. I'll be at Toftrees or on the road. We probably shouldn't do this on nights before classes either. We need to keep our grades up."

"You're right," Kelly agreed.

I was one of the football players chosen to attend the freshmen welcome rally and dance Sunday evening at Rec Hall. Patrick Clark, the new man in the Nittany Lion suit made a point of talking with me before he went out to entertain the crowd. He did a good job in front of the crowd. Our mascot's future seemed secure for the next three years.

I ducked out of the dance soon after it started. I drove over and picked up Kelly. She spent Sunday night with me as planned. She had recovered from her hangover by bedtime. The two of us made love twice before getting to sleep. We probably drove Jay, Trevor and Damian a little crazy. They needed to deal with it.

Chapter 44

The start of a new semester always excites me – new topics to learn about, new professors and new classmates. I had two geography courses, more history, an anthropology course and finally something meaningful in my major – a course in teaching secondary school social studies.

Geography 30 – Geographic Perspectives in Sustainability and Human-Environment Systems was my first class in room 26 in the Hosler Building. It was the usual big lecture hall with a good 150-160 students in the class. Ms. Amelia Stewart, a nicely dressed, slim lady in her late twenties was our instructor. We would learn about how humans interacted with the environment over the span of human existence.

The class met Mondays and Wednesdays in the big lecture hall. The class was divided into eight sections. Twenty-two of us would meet with Ms. Stewart in separate sections during the week. By chance, my section met immediately after the lecture upstairs in a smaller class room in the Hosler Building. Ms. Stewart was an engaging lecturer who was quite pleasant to look at too. I decided this course would be fun.

I ate a sandwich I picked up at the Mix on the way to the Thomas Building for my next class – History 161. Dr. Brennan, the professor for the course, was simply the best professor I had in my two years plus at Penn State. To make it better, she was teaching about my favorite battle in the war I had studied more than any other in my life. It doesn't get any better than that!

Dr. Brennan was already seated at the desk in the front of room 215 when I walked in. “Welcome Mr. Martin,” she teased. “Imagine my surprise seeing you in this class.”

“Gettysburg, Civil War, you’re teaching the course – where else would I be this period?” I countered.

“Is your better half taking this course too?” Dr. Brennan asked.

“Kelly?” I answered. “Of course. She should be here any minute.”

Cameron Miller walked in and had a seat in front of me. Dr. Brennan gave Cameron a big smile and said, “Mr. Miller, it has been a long time since we’ve met, hasn’t it?”

Both Cameron and Dr. Brennan laughed before she explained to the eight other students in the room, “I’ve led three tours at Gettysburg this summer. Somehow Mr. Miller has managed to bump into my group every time I show up.”

“I spent most of my summer roaming the battlefield,” Cam replied. “You could have come ten times and probably would have found me somewhere every time. I’m a history major. It’s what I love.”

Dr. Brennan continued greeting and teasing students as they arrived. She seemed to know nearly everyone in the room already. She greeted Kelly by name when she came into the room and asked about her summer. Kelly sat down beside me when Dr. Brennan turned her focus onto the next student to follow Kelly into the class.

Dr. Brennan started off with a brief overview of the course syllabus. After that she handed out six readings that we were to review for Wednesday’s class. All of them related to the fight between the 3rd Arkansas and the 20th Indiana and 86th New York regiments over possession of west end of Houck Ridge near Devil’s Den on afternoon of July 2nd. She had a letter from a Union participant, two accounts from Official Records, an account from Battles and Leaders and finally an account from memoirs by a sergeant from the 3rd Arkansas Regiment. I had read accounts of this fight in Pfanz’s and Sears’ books. This was going to be an interesting assignment.

Kelly had come from Statistics before our class together and had News Media Ethics immediately after our class. Kelly had a nasty schedule Mondays – four straight classes from 10:10 am until 4:25 pm. Wednesdays were worse. She started at 9:05 am and didn’t finish until 6:30 pm with a single break during the day. Fridays were full but not quite as bad – she had two free periods during that day. The nasty schedule did have its blessings. She had no classes on Tuesdays or Thursdays.

My Tuesdays and Thursdays were packed. I had a single class on Friday – History 161. Kelly and I were going to have to make the most of our weekend time together. We couldn’t eat in the dining hall together anymore and our schedules were so different.

I headed over to the Lasch Building after history to do some video study of our first opponent, Boston College. They were 9-4 last season. They played well but weren’t ranked at the end of the season. They were returning most of their starters. The preseason polls ranked them #25 in the country. They would not be push overs, especially for a team with as much turnover as we had.

I was pleased to find Chip in the video room studying when I arrived. Jay showed up about fifteen minutes later. He studiously avoided Chip, sitting down at a machine at the opposite end of the room from us.

Things were strained between Chip and Jay since Chip was named to start for our team. I couldn’t blame Jay. Losing the battle to be starter was a bitter blow. So far I had no reason to complain about Jay’s attitude or performance as Chip’s back up. He kept his mouth shut during practices and did his job.

Practice ran well Monday afternoon. We had a game plan to practice now. Friday’s silliness was long forgotten as my friends and teammates prepared for our debut game.

Chip, Christian, Tanner, Jibril, Damian and I took extra practice on our passing routes after practice was over. If our offense didn't click this year it was going to be on the shoulders of the six of us.

I started Tuesday's classes off with Geography 115 – Landforms of the World at 10:10 am. Dr. Antonio Diaz taught the course. We had two lecture classes a week and one lab on Wednesday mornings. We would study how tectonics, volcanoes, water, wind and ice formed the mountains, valleys and rivers of our world.

Anthropology 45 was immediately after Geography 115. I hurried up the mall to the Sparks Building. Cultural Anthropology was another big lecture hall style class. Dr. Thomas J. Pearson was our professor. We would be talking about how humans developed cultures, comparing and contrasting cultures around the world and how they change and evolve over time. Dr. Pearson was animated and talked a mile a minute about this topic that he obviously loved. I'd have to pay attention to every second of his lectures so I wouldn't miss anything.

I didn't feel like rounding up my own lunch so I stopped by Pollock Commons instead. I found Chip Brinton, his roommate Matt Frye, Jeff Knox and ET LeBlanc at one of the tables. I sat down beside them.

"Hey Coach," Chip said in greeting. "How's it going?"

"Hey Coach" "Good to see you Coach" "How's things Coach?" The other added their greetings. I allowed myself a bemused smile. I was shocked at how quickly Coach Burton and Chip had spread my nickname around. I think Christian was one of the few guys left on the team that didn't call me Coach now.

I returned their greetings as I started eating my meatball sub, tater tots and salad. The guys peppered me with questions about our game against Boston College two years ago. I tried to describe the game as best I could remember. It was only my second game after coming to Penn State. I assured my teammates that we would have our hands full with BC on Saturday.

The guys were excited about the news in the Daily Collegian. The game start time was moved from 12:30 to 3:30 pm. ABC decided to make our game one of the regional late afternoon games. It wasn't surprising. Both Penn State and Boston College had significant numbers of fans in the northeast and would deliver good ratings.

Matt, ET and Jeff all had classes after lunch. Chip and I headed over to the Lasch Building and studied video. Chip was surprised when I got up to leave at 2:15. He assumed I couldn't fit in a class before football practice at 3:45 pm. Technically he was correct, I couldn't fit it in. Coach Burton had given me permission to arrive late to

practice since my next class was only offered a single time and was required for graduation.

I headed over to Chambers Building for my SS ED 411 class – Teaching Secondary Social Studies I. I was excited about this class. I finally was going to do work in my major. I was a little surprised to find myself in a small classroom instead of one of the large lecture halls when I got to room 224. I settled into a seat as other students arrived. Some of the guys and girls looked familiar. I probably had seen them in one of my freshmen education classes.

A couple minutes later Chad King walked in. He spotted me and took a seat beside me. “Hey Kyle, how’s it going?”

“I’m good Chad,” I replied. “I didn’t realize you planned to teach social studies. I thought you planned to teach science.”

“I changed my mind,” Chad explained.

Chad and I caught up on each other’s lives. We had EDSPY 15 and EDTHP 114 together when we were freshmen. The two of us were part of the informal study group that included Chad, me, Josh Bruno and Chelsea Walters that year. The group had lost touch last year when none of us shared any classes together.

“My friends on campus don’t believe I know you,” Chad commented. “They think I’m bullshitting them when I tell them I used to study with two of the starters on the football team.”

“You can tell them I said they’re idiots,” I replied. “I’d also enjoy it if you want to study together for this class or work on projects together. I thought we got along well two years ago.”

“That’d be cool,” Chad agreed.

The professor walked in. He was in his early to mid-sixties. He was short, bald and had a ring of white wispy hair around his head. He introduced himself as Dr. Herbert L. Ward, Jr. Dr. Ward’s manner and looks reminded me of my grandfather Martin.

I scanned the room to see my classmates and fellow future social studies teachers. There were nine girls and eleven guys in the class. Dr. Ward took the roll. A couple girls and most of the guys turned to stare at me when I answered “here” to his “Kyle Martin?” query. I definitely was recognized.

Dr. Ward reviewed the curriculum for our course, his homework and test policies and the course schedule with us. He then launched into a lecture about the importance of social studies in developing well rounded, educated youth. His lecture was interesting and well presented. His style – well, his style could best be described as comfortable. It reminded

me of watching David McCullough talk about one of his books on TV. I knew immediately that I was going to like Dr. Ward.

He wrapped the lecture up about five minutes early and dismissed the class. I went up front as the room emptied.

“Dr. Ward, do you have a minute?” I asked politely.

“Certainly,” he agreed.

“I wanted to warn you,” I began. “If your class ever runs a few minutes late, I’ll have to get up and leave. I don’t mean any disrespect by it. I play football and ...”

“Ah, hah!” Dr. Ward replied beaming ear to ear. “I wondered if there was more than one Kyle Martin on campus or if I was teaching our team’s star wide receiver.”

“That would be me,” I said. “I’m supposed to be at football practice at 3:45 pm normally. Coach Burton gave me permission to be late because of your class. I have to be dressed and on the field at 4:15 sharp or I run laps. If I leave before the lecture is done...”

“Think nothing of it Kyle,” Dr. Ward replied. “I want our best receiver practicing pass catching not running laps. You do what you need to do to keep your coach happy.”

“Thanks sir,” I replied.

“Run along and get to practice,” Dr. Ward added as I headed out the door. “I’ll be cheering for you at the game on Saturday. Beat those Eagles!”

I jogged from the Chambers Building over to the Lasch Building. I marveled at the reception my professor gave me. Why couldn’t Dr. Ward be my academic advisor instead of Dr. Henderson? I dressed and made it out to the practice field with about ninety seconds to spare before Coach Burton’s deadline.

Our team practiced the wildcat formation every day that week. We didn’t plan to reveal all our plays against Boston College. We would do conventional things against them where I would take all the snaps in the formation. I had the option to run or pass depending on pressure and pass coverage. The offense worked well enough when we got the blocking down for it to get big plays from our defense. Of course they knew what was coming and it still worked.

Chip took all the plays with the first string offense. Jay and Glenn shared the duties with the second string. Chip did pretty well running things though he made at least one or two gaffes a practice.

“Brinton, what the hell was that?”, “Brinton, he’s not your primary receiver!” or “Do your reads! He was covered!” the coaches would scream after each gaffe.

Coach Peterson, Coach Schroeder and Anders huddled with Chip in the evenings to reviews plays closely so he would be ready for Saturday. Jay wasn’t happy about any of it. He kept his mouth shut, except at our apartment, and did his job as QB2. Jay was convinced if he bided his time, Chip’s inexperience would give him an opening and convince Coach Burton to switch him to QB1.

I received an e-mail from Dad on Tuesday night letting me know who was coming up to the game on Saturday. Liz and her boyfriend Josh had planned to use the tickets since Mom and Dad were busy that weekend. With the late start to the game Mom, Dad and Josh’s parents decided the kids would have to pass on this game. None of the parents wanted Josh driving through game day traffic at ten or eleven o’clock at night. I e-mailed back the Liz and Josh were welcome to campout on my apartment floor Saturday night. Dad e-mailed back Wednesday that he gave the tickets to one of his insurance clients. Josh and Liz would visit some other weekend when we had an early game.

I read the History 161 readings Tuesday evening. I read the official reports of the colonels of the 3rd Arkansas and 20th Indiana first. I read the Confederate colonel’s report first then the Union colonel’s. It didn’t seem like they were describing the same action. The Confederate sergeant’s letter home a couple weeks after the battle didn’t make anything clearer. The Battles and Leader’s account was exciting but didn’t help me sort things out. The memoir the Union sergeant wrote late in life was exciting too but seemed unrelated to the other accounts I read.

All of these accounts were primary sources. This is the gold standard when you’re researching in history. Dr. Brennan clarified things Wednesday afternoon. She reminded us of the purpose of the official reports. They weren’t a place where the writer could report accurate facts, especially if things didn’t go well for your unit, as happened to the 3rd Arkansas Regiment.

The letter home would necessarily suffer this defect. The letter home had the limited perspective of the writer, i.e. concentrate on firing your rifle as often as possible. A sergeant wouldn’t have a lot of time to view what was happening outside his immediate 8-10 man squad.

The Battles and Leaders account was written at the height of the “Lost Cause” myth promulgation. Reconstruction politics greatly influenced interpretations of actions during the war. The last account, the memoir, was written fifty some years later. How well did a seventy-four year veteran remember the action half a century earlier?

Dr. Brennan explained that these kinds of questions were going to be asked constantly during the course as we studied the Battle of Gettysburg. Who wrote the account, what was his perspective and did he have an agenda other than accurately reporting what he

observed during the battle. It was an eye opening question for me. I had never considered that before.

Living a mile apart made it harder for Kelly and me to spend time together. We met Thursday for lunch between my Anthropology 45 and my SS Ed course in the afternoon. I dropped in on Kelly for an hour or so on Wednesday and Thursday evenings after I was done with team meetings and workouts. Kelly and I made plans for a late dinner Saturday after the game and then for her to spend the night at my apartment.

Coach Burton assembled the team for a meeting after dinner on Friday night. He reviewed our responsibilities for the coming game and the arrangements for the team for the rest of the evening and before the game tomorrow. Buses picked us up from the Lasch Building and took us over to Beaver Stadium for the first pep rally of the season.

Over 20,000 students, fans and alumni showed up for the rally. I was impressed by the support they showed us. The Blue Band, the cheerleaders and the Lion entertained the crowd and got everyone wound up. Coach Burton spoke for a few minutes and then introduced the starters on the team. The defense was introduced first. Tyler Madden got the loudest ovation though Trevor Conwell, Shawn Byrd and Josh Bruno all were warmly applauded too.

The offense received scattered applause as each member was introduced. At least until it was my turn. The cheers and applause loud and sustained for me. Hopefully I was going to be able to live up to my fans' hopes. Chip, Christian and Damian received polite applause, more in hopes of what they would do than what they had done last year. Coach Paterno went on last, as was fitting for our coach emeritus. JoePa wound the crowd up to fever pitch before sending the team off the field.

We took buses over to Toftees for the evening. For some reason the athletic department roomed me with Trevor instead of Damian. He ended rooming with Jay. It didn't really matter. The four of us, along with Shawn Byrd, Josh Bruno, GJ DeLuca and Christian all ended up in my room playing poker until lights out.

I checked my e-mail before I went to bed. I was surprised to get one from Matt Sauder. He wanted to update me on my high school team's progress. There weren't many surprises as he listed the expected starters. The only big surprise was the name of the starting tight end – Gary Harrison. My young protégé had managed to impress Coach Caffrey enough to step up to varsity. I sent off a thank you to Matt for the news and asked him to congratulate Gary for me on Monday when he saw him again.

Coach Burton left the team sleep until 8:30 on Saturday morning. After breakfast the buses took us back to the Lasch Building. We had position meetings with our coaches to review the game plan and to make sure everyone understood their roles for the day. After lunch we dressed and took our blue buses over to the stadium.

Fans were flooding into the stadium as we arrived. We got off the buses by the team entrance. Trevor, Tyler, Shawn, Josh, Chip and I worked the lines of fans between us and the door. I shook hands, signed a few autographs and accepted the kind wishes of the fans as I made my way inside.

We went through our pre-game preparations. Some studied the playbook, others kibitzed, some talked and joked while others listened to music to get themselves in the right frame of mind. I made my rounds of the wide receivers on our team, talking with and encouraging them. Tanner was keyed up and nervous about his first start. Christian was cool as a cucumber.

Jay and Chip both studied the game plan carefully as they prepared, just like Zack Hayes taught them to do last year. Damian zoned out on music while he got his game face on.

We headed out to the field for warm-ups about an hour before game time. The stadium was about 80% filled then. I spotted Kelly, Bev, Cindy, Steph Kolmar and Jen's "Kyle Krazies and Christian's Crew" sign. I gave the girls a wave. I also noticed Kelly's brother Mike and his roommate Jim were sitting with the girls.

It was a hot afternoon with temperatures in the low nineties. Big cumulus clouds hovered to the west of our stadium. The weather report said there was a 60% chance of late afternoon or evening thunderstorms. Coaches and trainers preached that we must keep ourselves well hydrated during the game.

We warmed up on the eastern end of the stadium. I helped Chip warm up his arm with some deep passes. One of them carried me close to the center of the field. I noticed every one of the Boston College players had a black oval with the letters "GH" embroidered in the center. I thought of Greg Garrison immediately but dismissed the thought. Greg had died three and half years ago. It certainly couldn't be that.

I caught a couple of Andrew Perkins' kickoffs to get ready. I fielded half a dozen of Mitch Jackson's punts. I reassured Mitch that he would do fine today. This was his first start.

As warm-ups were ending I jogged over to the 50 yard line. I recognized one of the BC players - #29, the defensive back that had covered me two years ago the last time we played.

I called out, "Hey Cordell!" I knew from my study of their team that his name was Cordell Hughes. He was a senior from Worcester, Massachusetts and played right corner back. He probably would be covering me a lot that day.

Cordell gave me a funny look and then answered, "Martin, what's up?"

“Do you mind a nosey question?” I asked. “I saw the GH patch on your uniform.” Cordell visibly relaxed when he realized that I wasn’t going to trash talk. That wasn’t my style. My play could speak for itself.

“What is it Kyle?” Cordell responded.

“That patch, what does it stand for?” I asked.

“Coach wanted to memorialize one of our players who should have been a senior this year. He was killed in a car accident...” Cordell explained. “...well, technically I guess he was a recruit.” I bit my lip and tried to control the emotions welling up in me. I batted my eyes to try to keep the tears back.

“Greg Harrison?” I asked haltingly. Cordell looked startled by my response.

“How did you...” Cordell asked. “Ohh... he was from Pennsylvania. Did you play against him?”

“No, we were from the same high school,” I explained. “Greg was a very close friend. We went out on a double date the night he died. He dropped me and my girlfriend off at my house, took his date home and was heading back to his house when that drunk T-boned him.”

“I’m sorry man,” Cordell said sympathetically. “I met Greg on campus. Both of us did our official visits the same weekend. He seemed like a really great guy.”

“He was,” I said.

“Coach Spaziani felt we should recognize Greg even though he didn’t get to play for us,” Cordell said. “This would have been his senior year. Coach is inviting his family up for our final home game, our Senior Day.”

“That’s a really nice gesture,” I said. “I’m sure his parents and brother will appreciate it.”

“Did Greg’s little brother follow him into football?” Cordell asked. “Greg was so proud talking about his little brother. What’s he now – like twelve or thirteen?”

“He’s fourteen and started ninth grade on Thursday,” I said. “I just heard from one of the guys on my high school team last night. Gary made the varsity team.”

“As a ninth grader?” Cordell asked. “Do you guys have a really small school? No one plays varsity before tenth or eleventh grade at my high school.”

“Our high school isn’t that small,” I said. “Gary is only the third guy in our school’s history to make varsity as a ninth grader.”

“Probably ride the bench though,” Cordell observed.

“No, my high school coach wouldn’t put a young player like him on varsity if he wasn’t going to play,” I said. “I worked with him over the summer. Gary is going to be a really good tight end.”

“He must be if he’s going to play varsity as a freshman,” Cordell said. “Maybe Coach and I need to work on him when he visits later this fall. We could use another good tight end.”

“You’re going to have some competition recruiting him,” I replied. “I’d like to see him in Blue and White four years from now.”

“Good luck in the game today Kyle,” Cordell said. “We’ll see a lot of each other.”

“I know,” I agreed. “I saw that on the video. You have a good game too, but not too good a game.”

Cordell chuckled and shook my hand before we split up and returned to our respective locker rooms.

Boston College won the coin toss and elected to receive the kickoff. Andrew Perkins booted the ball into the end zone. The BC returner caught the ball and decided to come out anyway. Coverage looked OK at first as he passed the 20 yard line. Jeff Knox got blocked out of position. The returner cut back into the hole and streaked away from our pursuers. Andrew Perkins managed to catch his leg as he tried to get by. The pursuit took him down before he broke away from Andrew.

Boston College took possession of the ball on our 33 yard line. It was not an auspicious start for our season. They ran the ball on the first two plays. Our defense kept the runners bottled up. Coach C blitzed on the third with five yards to go. Unfortunately BC fooled us with a quarterback draw. He carried the ball down to our 9 yard line before Tyler Madden took him to the ground. BC faked a run up the middle on the next play. The quarterback drifted back and tossed the ball into the gap between Salim Rogers and Denzell Hunt. Their tight end caught it. We were down 7-0 before we knew what had happened.

Per our game plan, Coach Ferguson sent me out to return our first kickoff. I dropped back a few yards from the five when BC’s kicker boomed the ball downfield to me. I advanced behind my blocking wedge waiting for a hole to open. The Eagles did a good job covering their lanes. I shot through a small crack between Jarrell Cook and Joe Ricci. Too many players were crowded around me. I managed to get the ball out to the 34 yard line before three guys gang tackled me.

My offensive teammates met me out on the field. Chip was overexcited when he called the first play. Thankfully Coach Burton foresaw the challenge. Our first play was a tailback run off tackle.

“Take a deep breath and relax Chip,” I directed before we broke the huddle. “You’ve run fifty or sixty plays on this field already.”

“I know,” Chip replied. “This has been my dream my whole life.”

“You’re doing it,” I agreed. I left the second half of my thought unspoken. ‘Don’t screw this up!’

The play ran exactly as Coach Burton diagrammed it. Greg Nowicki, our center shot through the defensive line and tied up the middle linebacker. Ben Walker and Elijah Berks pushed the right side of the defensive line back. Jibril Sloan, captain and tight end blocked the strong safety away from the hole.

Chip wheeled and handed the ball to Damian, who blasted into the gap between Elijah and Jibril. He crunched into the outside linebacker coming to fill the hole, bounced free and picked up a couple more yards before the defense collapsed on his strong back. My roomie gained six yards on the play.

Coach Burton kept things simple to start. Damian carried twice more into the teeth of the defense for five yards and then seven more. Classic Burton playing calling would have sent me deep on the next play. We didn’t do that.

We ran a play action pass where I started out sprinting like on a deep route. Cordell Hughes, the cornerback covering me stayed close. The outside linebacker drifted over too watching for a shallow pass inside. The free safety headed over my way too after taking half a step towards the line on Damian’s fake run.

Fifteen yards downfield I stopped and took two steps back towards the line on a hitch. Cordell missed the move and continued downfield. The free safety help was deep. The linebacker was covering inside and I was outside stepping towards the sideline. Chip rifled the ball into my hands. I turned and started up field again. Cordell and the linebacker took me to the ground after I picked up a couple yards. We had the ball on BC’s 33 yard line.

Jared Cantrell sprinted onto the field yelling for Damian to come off. It was wildcat time. Chip called the play and then broke the huddle. Jared took my split end spot while I lined up with Chip in the backfield. Greg gave me a nice snap, which thank God I didn’t bobble. I streaked right behind Chip while he ran forward in search of someone to block. I scanned downfield. Tanner and Christian both were covered as they ran downfield. Boston College was well coached. They obviously knew that I could throw the ball.

I tucked the ball in tight to my chest and sprinted for the end of the line so I could get around the corner. Jibril blocked the pursuing outside linebacker away as I turned the corner. I sprinted down the sideline. The free safety, right cornerback and middle linebacker caught me and pushed me out of bounds at BC's 21 yard line.

The crowd roared its approval of our new offensive twist. Coach Burton sent Damian back in. The call was for a quick strike to me in the corner of the end zone. Three defenders flooded my corner of the end zone when the play started. Chip's second read was Tanner coming across the back of the end zone in the middle, then Christian in the right side. Jibril would be available in the middle about three yards short of the end zone. Damian was his outlet if he wasn't needed to block on a blitz.

Chip correctly read that I was covered. He checked to Tanner. Chip spotted him crossing along the back of the end zone and fired the ball towards him. Unfortunately he didn't see the nickel back hovering nearby. The nickel back cut in front of Tanner, intercepted the ball and kneeled down for a touchback. Eagles ball on their 20 yard line!

The crowd was stunned into silence. Our promising opening drive misfired. We trotted off the field to make way for our defense. Coach Adams huddled with Chip immediately, reviewing what had gone wrong on the play. The rest of us waited dejectedly on the sideline for our next series.

Coach C usually needs two or three offensive series to fine tune his defense to shut down our opponent. Our defense shut down the Eagles. Three plays later I was lining up on our 33 yard line to accept their punt.

Jeff Knox was embarrassed by his costly mistake to start the game. He came out onto the field fired up and determined to make amends. I settled back a couple yards and caught the punt as it fluttered down from the sky. I started ahead, scanning my blocking as I went. Jeff pancaked the would-be tackler he was responsible for. I accelerated through the hole Jeff provided.

I dodged a lunging linebacker and scampered down the field. I tried to use a straight arm to get past the punter. He clung to my arm and slowed me enough so the backside pursuit could catch me. I went down at BC's 36 yard line. The crowd started buzzing when the defense made its stand. Now they were at a full throated roar approving of my play.

They cheered as the offense jogged out to the field. Coach Burton kept his confidence in Chip. Our first play was a pass. Tanner took my split end spot while I lined up in the slot between Jibril and Christian. I went in motion across the backfield before the snap, arriving beside and a step behind our big left tackle Joe Cleveland. I sprinted diagonally across the field on a slant route.

The position swap and motion had confused BC's defense momentarily. I found myself covered only by their nickel back, who couldn't keep up with me. Chip spotted the mismatch and drilled the ball to me a dozen yards down field. I accelerated away,

angling for the goal line pylon. I dodged as the free safety lunged for me around the ten yard line and danced into the end zone.

Cheers and applause reverberated through our big stadium as 109,000 fans voiced their approval. I tossed the ball the referee and jogged for the sideline. Chip, Christian and Tanner met me part way off the field to give me back slaps and congratulations. The Nittany Lion wrapped me up in a bear hug as I went by. He held my arm aloft in the classic champion fighter pose for a few seconds.

“Good job Kyle,” Patrick, the occupant of the Lion suit, said so only we could hear him.

“Thanks man,” I replied. “Keep the crowd revved up for us.”

“You betcha!” Patrick answered.

‘Automatic’ Andrew Perkins went out and evened the score to 7-7 with his PAT.

Our defense continued dominating. Memhed Marsic and Mike Pollard were firm in the middle of our line. Josh Bruno, Brendan Hayden and Jarrell Cook, our linebackers flowed to any holes. Trevor and Bill Daugherty on the ends of the line were holy terrors on passing downs. They did not leave any time for the QB to think or pass properly.

BC’s quarterback wasn’t a hot shot, high percentage passer to begin with. His record last season was 52% completions. He didn’t do better under pressure that afternoon. We were able to keep our hero (strong safety) Salim Rogers up close to the line to help with run plays. Shawn Byrd, Denzell Hunt and Tyler Madden could prevent any pass completions if the QB happened to dodge Trevor, Bill and company.

Our defense allowed one first down on six plays before forcing Boston College to punt the ball back to us. As called for in our game plan, Christian Hunsecker took the punt return this time. I would get one more chance in the second half before yielding my duties to Christian. Christian brought the ball out to our 32 yard line after an eight yard return.

Chip settled down now. Coach Burton called a more run centered offense on our second possession. Damian and Wyatt were up to the task. Nine plays, six runs and three passes. I caught a 12 yard slant, Christian a fifteen yarder and Tanner a key ten yard grab on third and six. Damian capped the drive off by rumbling in from BC’s seven yard line to score a touchdown. Andrew booted the PAT to give us a 14-7 lead.

Coach Adams praised us for a well executed drive was we came off the field. Chip huddled with Coach Adams, Anders and Jay to prepare for the next drive. Meantime our defense continued dominate BC. They punted the ball back to us after seven plays netted them only 18 yards.

We started moving the ball well on our next drive. Coach Burton called another wildcat play as we neared midfield. I took the snap and rolled out to the right again. This time the BC defense was worried about me running. They left Christian in single coverage. I planted, and tossed the ball over the onrushing defense to my ex-roommate. Christian caught the ball, broke loose of the defender and sprinted away. The free safety managed to intercept Christian and push him out of bounds after a twenty-five yard gain.

Joe Cleveland got called for holding on the next play, moving us the wrong direction. The following play Chip overthrew me. That was fortunate. I was triple covered. On third and twenty the Eagles defense sacked Chip, taking us out of field goal range. Mitch Jackson punted the ball from BC's 49 yard line. Mitch angled the punt just right, sending it out of bounds at BC's five yard line.

Boston College tried to bull their way out of the end zone. They picked up two yards on their first run, and three more on their second. Both Trevor Conwell and Bill Daugherty broke free of their blocker and chased the QB back into the end zone. In desperation he heaved the ball out towards his flanker. Shawn Byrd fielded the badly thrown ball at BC's 22 yard line.

Coach Burton wasn't interested in fancy right now. Smash mouth football would do as long as we scored. Chip hit Jibril on a curl for seven yards. Damian went off tackle left for five more yards. Coach called for a fade route to me on the third play. The whole stadium knew what was coming.

Three defenders crowded around me as I went for the corner of the end zone. Chip put the ball up where I had to leap for it. Either I got it or the ball went out of bounds. Chip's pass was perfect. It should have been. The two of us practiced this one all summer. I managed to get a couple inches higher than Cordell, snag the ball with my finger tips and come down in bounds. The defenders jostled and pawed at the ball, trying to knock it loose before I landed. I still had the ball in my hands when I stood up off the turf.

Andrew Perkins kicked the PAT to give our team a comfortable 21-7 lead. Neither team managed more scoring before half time. We were relieved to have a comfortable lead as we headed into the locker room. We had three penalties, two sacks and an interception. Our team wasn't the offensive juggernaut of last year.

Coach Burton and Coach Schroeder preached patience. Our offense would be fine if we cut out the dumb mistakes. Coach C praised the defense. They weren't letting Boston College get anything going at all. We headed back out for the field. Tanner Riggs would handle the second half kickoff. Boston College's strong legged kicker booted the ball into the end zone. Tanner took the touchback to give us possession at the 20 yard line.

Damian, with an assist from Wyatt Smith, carried much of the offensive load to start the second half. The two tailbacks carried the ball six straight times, moving us across midfield. Coach Burton called another wildcat play. This time to keep BC guessing,

Greg Nowicki snapped the ball to Chip instead of me. I swung out to the left and Chip pitched the ball out to me. I sprinted downfield, trying to follow Jared Cantrell's block. I picked up ten yards before the pursuit took me down on BC's 40 yard line.

On the next play Chip found Tanner slanting across the middle. Tanner dodged the nickel back's tackle and sprinted downfield until the free safety could get over from covering me to take him down at the 8 yard line.

Our inexperience showed as we tried to score. The offensive line drew a false start penalty. On the next snap Chip bobbled the hand off to Damian when Ben Walker stepped on Chip's foot. We lost three yards on that one. We picked up the three yards again when BC defended our delay draw up the middle well. We had third down and goal from BC's 18. The defense blanketed the end zone and Chip smartly threw the ball away. Andrew Perkins came in for nailed a 35 yard field goal to increase our lead to 24-7.

Our defense continued dominating Boston College. They punted back to us six plays later. Our offense got a good drive started but it fizzled out with a third and long sack. We punted the ball back to them. That is how the third quarter went.

Boston College got there first break of the game at the start of the fourth quarter. Trevor and Bill disrupted their first and second down plays. BC was forced to pass on third and eight yards from their 39 yard line. The QB rolled right to get away from our defensive ends. Shawn Byrd backpedaled to stay with his receiver but tripped as he went. The QB launched the ball downfield and his uncovered receiver scooped it up. He sprinted into the end zone before Tyler Madden could get over and tackle him. Our lead was reduced to 24-14 our favor.

Jibril Sloan is normally very quiet and reserved. Everyone in the huddle was a little surprised when he spoke up as we gathered for the play call.

"We farted around with these fuckers long enough!" Jibril growled. "Penalties, interceptions, dumb shit like that – it has to stop! Take the God damned ball down the field and stuff it in the end zone."

"Damn straight!" Ben Walker added. "These assholes haven't stopped us today. Play like we did in practice yesterday and this game's ours."

Chip clapped his hands and said, "Focus on the next play guys," Chip commanded. "Let's get this done!"

I scanned the eyes of my teammates in the huddle as Chip called the play. I saw determination in the eyes looking back at me.

Chip handed the ball to Damian who carried it up the gut of BC's defense for a six yard gain. Jibril, Ben, Chip or I exhorted our teammates in the huddle after each play to focus,

maintain your block, run precise routes... in a word execute! Play by play we pushed the ball down the field. Damian carried the bulk of the load.

We did one more wildcat play. BC forced me to keep the ball. I gained six yards on the play. We kept the chains moving and the clock running down. Everyone concentrated and knocked off the mistakes that hurt us throughout the game.

Coach Burton called the coup de grace play when we got down to BC's 27 yard line. Tanner and I swapped positions again. This time BC moved Cordell Hughes over to cover me. He followed when I went in motion across to the weak side. I ran an out route while Tanner's route crossed mine and slanted across the field. Cordell and the nickel back got tangled up with each other momentarily.

That was all the opening I needed. I turned on the jets and separated myself from Cordell as I streaked down the field. Chip hit me with the ball in stride at the 10 yard line. I sailed into the end zone, dodging the free safety's desperation tackle at the goal line. The crowd roared in approval as I held the ball aloft. Andrew drilled the PAT to increase our lead to 31-14.

We left 5:25 on the clock for Boston College. It wasn't nearly enough time for them to overcome our commanding lead. Trevor Conwell and Bill Daugherty spent almost all their time in BC's backfield terrorizing their quarterback. Seven plays later Shawn Byrd intercepted their fourth and twelve pass to clinch our victory. Chip brought the offense out and handed the ball to Damian repeatedly until the clock wound down to 0:00.

The fans cheered as we celebrated our victory. I trotted out to midfield after Coach Burton met Coach Spaziani at the center of the field. When the two coaches separated I followed Coach Spaziani.

"Hey Coach, you got a second?" I asked as I jogged along with him. Coach Spaziani stopped and stared at me for a second. It took him a couple seconds to recognize me.

"What's up Martin?" he asked.

"I wanted to thank you for the memorial patches your guys are wearing for Greg Harrison," I replied.

Coach stared at me blankly for a couple seconds before he said, "Oh, right. You're from Lancaster County too. Did you know Harrison?"

"We started varsity together," I explained. "We were close friends. It's really classy what you are doing for his family."

"It was the right thing to do," Coach Spaziani replied. "I could see an extremely promising young man. I wish he had been playing today. We might have had more of a chance. By the way, you had a hell of a game Martin. You absolutely killed us."

“Just doing my job,” I answered.

“I’m glad my team doesn’t play yours again until after you graduate,” Coach said.
“Good luck on the remainder of your schedule.”

“You too Coach,” I replied. The two of us shook hands before heading our separate ways.

I did about a dozen interviews before getting clear of the field. All the Lancaster/Harrisburg/York TV stations talked with me along with ABC. The rest were newspaper interviews. I was one of the last guys to get into the locker room. Trevor Conwell and Chip Brinton were the only guys to come in after me. That was appropriate. Their performances were keys to our victory.

My stats were excellent on the day: two punt returns for 45 yards, one kick return for 32 yards, eight catches for 124 yards and two touchdowns, two carries for 22 yards and one 25 yard completion. Damian carried twenty-seven times for 140 yards and a touchdown. Chip went completed 15 passes for 205 yards on 24 attempts with two touchdowns and one interception. It was a decent first start for my friend. Chip had a lot of small things to work on to improve but it was a good start.

The blue buses took us back to the Lasch Building to shower and change. The big black clouds to the northwest of State College finally delivered the promised thunderstorm as we rode back to the locker room. I called Kelly on my cell phone when I got to my locker.

Kelly, Bev and Steph met Trevor, Christian, Jay and me in the lobby of the Lasch Building. Joe, the night watchman was kind enough to let the girls wait inside the lobby instead of outside in the rain. We decided order sandwiches from the Fraser Street Deli and have them delivered to our apartment. We didn’t have a lot of time before our party.

Kelly asked Bev and Christian to help host the party. My roommates and I appreciated the extra help setting up. We had most things ready when the deliveryman brought our sandwiches. We finished our sandwiches before the guests started to arrive.

We had an excellent turn out of people for our party. Damian and Melanie along with their friends Billy Robinson and Sarah showed up as things were getting started. Kelly’s brother Mike and his roommate Jim came again. I guess that was to be expected. Mike and Jim had been on campus a little more than a week and hadn’t really had a lot of time to make friends or get invitations to other parties around town. I let them both know that they were welcome to borrow a bedroom here if they happened too get lucky again. Neither of them needed to sleep on our couch for the night, though they were welcome to if needed.

Kelly didn't have invitations to any other parties so the two of us concentrated on being a good host and hostess. Kelly took our talk the previous Sunday to heart and moderated her drinking.

Apparently word got around about Mike's performance the previous Saturday night. In spite of Mike's and Jim's best efforts, neither guy managed to talk girls into sleeping with them. I did overhear Mike talking briefly with Beth Naylor, the girl from last Saturday night. Mike apologized for being inconsiderate and thoughtless when they were together.

Beth didn't comment one way or the other about the possibility of the two of them hooking up again. At least Mike had enough class not to try and talk her into bed with him again. It would have looked insincere and more than a little desperate to try to coax her into bed with him again after the apology. I decided to ask Kelly to talk with the other girls later and let them know Mike wasn't a total loser. They ought to give him a chance again some time.

Chip and his best friend from home, Austin Dilworth, landed a couple cute girls at the party. The foursome disappeared to my bedroom around 10:30. The foursome were in my bedroom an unusually long time. As it approached midnight they were still at it and other couples looking for privacy were backing up waiting for a turn in one of the bedrooms.

Marco Cuchiella got desperate enough to make it with his girl in the half bathroom downstairs. God knows how the two of them found enough room to screw in that tight little room.

Colin O'Shea, who had been making out with Rachel Moore half the evening, lost his patience. He banged on my door and shouted, "C'mon Brinton. You've hogged the bedroom too long. Make room for someone else!"

Normally something like that might be a turnoff for the girl you're trying to convince to sleep with you. Rachel was drunk enough that she thought it was funny and helped pound on the door. Chip ignored the pounding.

Colin brought me over to help with the situation. "Chip, c'mon," I said loudly. "You need to show consideration for the other people here."

"Let us alone!" another voice other than Chip's replied.

"This is my bedroom," I answered sharply.

"Yeah Coach," Chip's voice replied from behind the door. "Give us a couple minutes to get decent." I could hear grumbling from in the room from Austin and the girls. "It IS his room," Chip countered to the complaints. "We'll go back to my room. Matt won't mind." The occupants of my room spent a couple minutes scrambling around getting dressed. The four emerged drenched in sweat, hair plastered down. They looked like

they had run a marathon. Chip, Austin and the two girls breezed by me, Colin and Rachel without a word. They passed Matt Frye, Chip's roommate on the way through the living room.

"Shelby, Blair, Austin and I are going back to our room," Chip said. "You'll have to find another place to sleep."

Matt's face momentarily showed shock before he shook his head, "What in the hell am I supposed to do?" he asked no one in particular.

Damian saw the exchange too. "Mel and I and Bill and Sarah are going back to their apartment for the night. You're welcome to crash in my bed."

Colin commented, "Someone's going to have to take that prick down a peg or two."

"Don't you think the coaches will be doing that Monday when we review the game tapes?" I replied.

Colin chuckled. "Yeah, they'll rip him a new one for some of those plays today." Colin wasn't athletically gifted but had an excellent grasp of how football should be played. He laughed a little more and added, "Coach Burton and Coach Schroeder will have a field day on Monday afternoon."

Colin and Rachel took my empty bedroom for their evening fun. Kelly and I mingled with our guests. The two of us were well behaved that evening. I cut myself off after four bottles of my favorite – Troegs Amber Ale. Kelly stopped at four too. I had a nice buzz going. Kelly, being eighty pounds lighter than me, was a little drunker, but not so drunk as to stop our fun when the party was over.

Matt Frye continued his quest to bed the freshman girl he had been talking up all night. He had extra incentive now. He had a private bedroom for the night. Unfortunately for Matt, all he got when the party started to break up around 12:30 was a hug and deep good night kiss.

Trevor, Steph, Kelly, Matt, Jay and I got to work cleaning up as the guests left. Jay's frequent date last spring, Molly Reed, stayed to help us clean up too. We found out why when the apartment was squared away. Jay and Molly went upstairs to Jay's room for the night. Matt said good night and went to bed in Damian's room.

Kelly and I headed for my bedroom. Thank God I bought extra sheets during the week. My bed was a mess. Kelly and I stripped it down and put on clean sheets before we lay down.

The room smelled of sex, pure animal sex. I opened the window to air things out. Still the smell heightened the passion Kelly and I already built up making out and listening to

others couple during the evening. It wasn't as frantic as our first time this semester but it was quite intense.

I managed to give Kelly a couple orgasms before I shot off too quickly our first time together. I was able to make things last and give my lover a proper fucking the second time, bringing her to a string of climaxes. Kelly still wasn't ready to quit. We went one more time, slow and gentle on our side, me behind my lover. Trevor, Stephanie, Jay and Molly were still at it when the two of us finally went to sleep. Poor Matt heard everything. The poor guy must be busting a nut trying to cope with the sounds.

The Daily Collegian did a profile on Chip in Monday morning's edition of the paper. It was extremely complimentary of my friend. I was concerned. Chip didn't need to get his ego puffed up. I understood in spite of winning that he hadn't performed well on Saturday afternoon. Chip excitedly showed the article to anyone who would listen to him as we dressed for practice.

Monday afternoon's practice went as expected. Coach Burton and Coach Schroeder rode the offense's asses hard. We went over the game plan for Cincinnati during the practice. After dinner we went over the video of our game against Boston College at the offensive meeting. The coaches definitely knocked some of the cockiness out of Chip, along with any other team members satisfied with our first victory.

The polls were unimpressed with our victory over Boston College. We stayed at #17. BC fell out of the top 25. Our next opponent, Cincinnati, wasn't ranked in the top 25. Pundits had them at third or fourth in the Big East, after West Virginia, Pittsburgh and possibly Rutgers.

I had studied video of Cincinnati after history and before practice to help prepare myself for the Bearcats. I was impressed with what I saw from them. They ran a balanced offense, 51% passes, 49% runs. Their QB had a 62% completion rate and threw almost twice as many touchdowns as interceptions. Last season they had fumbled too much and had given up more sacks than average. That was going to be good for us.

Tyler Madden, Jibril Sloan and Andrew Perkins echoed the coaches' harsh reminders about mistakes as we practiced during the week. I didn't mind. As a matter of fact I kept after the other receivers myself. I expected we could win against Cincinnati as long as we cut down on the mistakes.

I received an e-mail from Dad Wednesday evening. He let me know that Matt Sauder and Josh Strickler were using my family's tickets on Saturday. My family was heading to the Delaware shore for their long Labor Day weekend. I sent off e-mails to Matt and Josh inviting them to have dinner with Kelly and me. I warned them that they would need to pay their own way since they played high school football and were potential recruits.

I also received an e-mail from Andy the same night. He said Coach Keeler was going to have him return punts and kickoffs on Saturday when Delaware played West Chester to open their season. Andy expected to see a few plays as a wide receiver too.

I had to chuckle at the first match up they had. Football Championship Series team Delaware playing little Division II West Chester. I guess FCS teams can have their easy teams to tune up on like we do in the FBS. Unfortunately our athletic department “forgot” to give us easy tune up games to start the season. Two of our first three non-conference games were against ranked opponents. No one could accuse us of having a soft schedule this year.

Kelly and I were settling into our school routine albeit with less time together than last year. Kelly and I both had cramped schedules Mondays and Wednesdays. We grabbed lunch together on the run outside the Thomas Building before History 161. Thankfully Kelly’s class after history was in the Thomas Building too so we could catch a few extra minutes together in the hallway before she went to class.

The two of us got together in the evenings after I finished with football to study at my apartment or at her apartment, which ever was convenient that night. One night Christian caught a ride to the Lofts to spend time with Bev the way Kelly and I did. They were suffering just as much from not being in adjoining dorms the same way Kelly and I were.

My lover and I were anxious for the long Labor Day weekend. We could spend two whole days together after I finished the football game thanks to no classes on Monday. It would be wonderful.

Our team improved as the week’s practice wore on. The offensive line cut down on the false starts. Chip went through two practices without an interception. Things were crisper and cleaner. The coaches had our attention. My work in the wildcat went well. I completed a couple passes every practice from the formation. We didn’t plan to reveal anything new against Cincinnati. We would be satisfied with our future opponents seeing the base wildcat offense for now. Ohio State, Michigan and our conference opponents could see the fancy stuff later.

One good thing became apparent that week as we practiced. Jay finally had his foot properly rehabbed. He completed deep passes three times on Wednesday and again on Thursday. This newly reacquired ability made Bruce MacCauley and Max Rosen look good too when they caught those passes.

The already tense relations between the two quarterbacks became more strained. Chip had a subpar but winning performance the first game. Jay was the older, more knowledgeable backup who wanted Chip’s job. They weren’t overtly hostile but the camaraderie they had last year when the roles were reversed was gone.

Kelly stopped by my apartment Friday afternoon after her Broadcast Journalism course let out. We managed to spend half an hour together before I had to go to the Training Table for our team dinner. Kelly and I reviewed our preparations for Saturday night's party before she left. We were fortunate this week. Penn State vs. Cincinnati wasn't a big draw on TV. Our game would start at 12:30 pm tomorrow afternoon. We would have plenty of time to take Matt and Josh to dinner and then get back for our party.

The coaches held position meetings after dinner Friday night to make sure everyone was fully prepared for our game. We took our blue buses over to Toftees for a peaceful evening. Trevor and I hosted the usual crowd for our pre-game poker party before our curfew.

Coaches had us up at 7:30 Saturday morning, eating breakfast at 8:30 and the getting bused over to the Lasch Building after that. We went through our normal pregame preparations and rituals. Jay, Chip and I all followed our football mentor Zack Hayes' example – study the game plan carefully so you are properly prepared mentally.

We grabbed some lunch around 11:30 and then the blue buses took us over to the stadium. A lot of fans were clamoring to shake Chip's hand or get his autograph as the team filed in. Trevor, Shawn, Tyler, Josh and I shook hands and thanked fans as we followed Chip inside. We headed outside to warm up once we got our things settled into the locker room.

It was a beautiful late summer day for State College. The sky was deep blue and clear. The winds were gentle. The temperature was around seventy-two degrees. I did a little stretching, jogged a bit and then caught some passes to help Chip warm up his arm. Coach Ferguson had me shag a few punts for Mitch Jackson too. I knew he wanted me to keep in practice at that. I stopped by and chatted with Kelly and her gang of friends before I went back inside.

Tyler Madden and Coach Burton both spoke to the team before we took the field. The message was similar. Play smart football. Knock off the penalties that could have killed us last week. Cincinnati would make us pay if we got sloppy.

The team jogged out into the tunnel and waited for our introduction. As I did before every game, I tapped the piece of duct tape in my helmet with the #82 on it for luck and said a short prayer in Greg Harrison's memory before I went outside. The crowd cheered wildly as we took the field.

Our team got lucky on the coin toss. We would receive the kickoff. I took my spot down on our 5 yard line and waited for the ball. The Bearcat kicker boomed it into the end zone. I retreated back a couple yards deep into the end zone and caught the ball. Dave McCall shouted for me to go ahead and return it.

I glanced up field and saw what Dave spotted. Joe Ricci and Jeff Knox opened a nice slot in the coverage for me. I zoomed through it, cut left and made a tackler miss and sprinted for the sidelines. The kicker whiffed entirely as I speeded by him. Dave McCall and Chris Richardson escorted me down the field and into the end zone.

I coolly tossed the ball to the referee as Beaver Stadium erupted in cheers and applause. That was a nice twelve seconds of work. My special teams teammates mobbed me in the end zone and celebrated our success. Andrew Perkins kicked the PAT as always. It would be a cold day in hell when our kicker missed his first PAT of his career.

Andrew pinned the Bearcat kick returner in the end zone on the kickoff. They started their first drive at their 20 yard line. They ran twice for eight yards to start off. On third and two yards to go, the Bearcats tried to go deep on a play action pass. Shawn Byrd had the play covered perfectly. Bill Daugherty and Trevor Conwell chased down the quarterback and sacked him before he could get the ball off. They lost nine yards on the play.

I lined up at our 39 yard line to take their punt. Cincinnati had the lanes covered so I ran behind my blockers until I ran into the tangle of bodies and was knocked to the ground. I picked up eight hard yards on the return. We would start out on our 48 yard line.

Normally our team slipped a deep pass in sometime early in our first drive. Coach Burton sent a deep route in for our first play. I lined up and eyed the cornerback across from me. He lined up about ten yard off the line of scrimmage. I chuckled as I waited for the play to begin. He was going to need more cushion than that.

I was by the cornerback in a flash. Their free safety frantically rushed over to cover me as I sprinted deep. I got position on him and waited for Chip to fire the ball to me. He did – too high. I watched helplessly as it flew half a dozen feet over my head.

I was pleased even though the pass was incomplete. When I reached the huddle I said, “That play is there all day Chip. They don’t have the speed to cover me.”

“SWEET!” Chip answered. “Sorry about that last play Coach. The defensive end hurried me.” Chip gazed across the huddle to the offensive lineman. “Give me time boys. We’re going to light this place up.”

Coach Burton sent a running play in. Cincinnati had backed off their defensive backs to allow for my speed. It left plenty of room for Damian and his blockers. He picked up seven yards on the play.

It didn’t take long for us to score. On our fourth play Christian and I both went deep. I drew double coverage while Christian was covered by a single DB. Chip spotted the mismatch and launched the ball to my friend. Christian out-jumped the DB, spun away and took off. With the free safety covering me, no one was backing up the other

cornerback. Christian sprinted into the end zone for a 39 yard touchdown. Andrew kicked the PAT to bring our lead to 14-0.

Cincinnati wasn't deterred by our early lead. Hell, you don't give up your game plan four and a half minutes into a football game. They came at us with their balanced attack, mixing runs and passes. We also found that our defensive line was stronger than their offensive line. Mehmed Marsic and Mike Pollard were immovable in the center of our line. Trevor Conwell and Bill Daugherty pinched off anything to the outside and pressured the QB on passes. This freed up Josh Bruno, Brendan Hayden and Jarrell Cook to flow to the ball and make play after play.

Christian's deep touchdown early forced the Bearcats to keep the free safety off me. When they tried to double cover both of us, Tanner Riggs came free. He caught a fifty-two yard touchdown on the next drive. I got open deep on the following drive, hauling in a forty-two yard TD.

Damian wasn't cut out of the action. In addition to averaging almost six yards a carry, he also nailed the Bearcats when they blitzed while we were running a tailback screen. My roomie rumbled forty-seven yards before they gang tackled him. That drive was the only one of the half marred by a penalty. Joe Cleveland got called for holding on a play when Chip hit me in the end zone for what should have been a touchdown. We settled for a field goal instead.

Our offense was on a roll. It was almost like #6 was still in the backfield running things. Chip didn't get sacked or throw an interception, we cut out the penalties and other dumb things we did last week. We scored on every drive in the first half, leading 31-7 at half time.

The coaches decided the first team offense would go at least one series in the second half before we gave the second team playing time. Cincinnati took the second half kickoff but failed to do anything offensively. They were forced to punt the ball back to us. Christian made a nice return, giving us possession of the ball on our 41 yard line.

A couple runs by Damian and short pass across the middle to Jibril got us a first down and put us on the Bearcat's 45 yard line. Coach decided to go for the money on the next play. Christian and I both went for the end zone. The Bearcats rolled the safety my way as I ran downfield. I glanced back as I went, expecting to see Chip passing to Christian in single coverage.

Instead I was shocked at the ball flying my way! It was underthrown, so I tried to come back for it. The cornerback, who I had beaten, was in my way. I jumped and tried to reach over him for the ball. He snagged it before I could get my hands on it. I grabbed at the ball anyway, trying to strip it free or to knock it loose. He managed to twist and bring the ball into his belly as the two of us crumpled to the ground.

Possession: Bearcats at their 5 yard line. I wasn't real happy as I jogged back to the sidelines. I headed straight for Chip.

"What the hell happened?" I questioned.

"The end came loose," Chip explained. "I threw off my back foot and couldn't get it deep enough."

"Why'd you throw to me?" I asked. "I was double covered! You should have gone to Christian."

"I thought the safety was rolling the other way on the play," Chip said. "I had already thrown the ball when I realized who he was covering."

Coach Adams interrupted the exchange between Chip and me. "First String – Good Job! You can take a seat now. You're done for the day."

Chip restarted our conversation only to be interrupted again by Coach Burton's yell. 'MARTIN! THOMPSON! On me.'

I trotted down the sideline to my coach. When Damian joined me Coach announced, "Keep your selves ready. You're going to play the next series. We're going to do the wildcat."

"Why are..." I started.

"Why am I trying to run up the score?" Coach Burton replied, finishing my thought. "I'm not. We're running the wildcat because future opponents need to see it on this game tape. If they don't see this play, they can't prepare for it and we can't use the plays we designed to trip up their defense. Make sense Coach?"

"Yeah, I think so," I agreed.

I stayed with the second team offense and waited for us to go on the field again. That didn't take long. Our first string defense played this series while Coach C's sideline assistant prepped the second stringers.

Our defense stacked up against the run. The Bearcats managed two yards on the first two plays. Trevor and Bill chased down their QB in the end zone. He barely got the ball out without a sack and a safety. It went incomplete.

Christian took their punt at midfield. He picked up nine yards on the return to give the ball to our offense on their 41 yard line. Coach Burton called the wildcat play immediately. Damian lined up as a second tight end on the left side of the line. Max Rosen had my normal split end spot. Bruce MacCauley lined up as our flanker on the opposite side. I lined up in the backfield beside Jay.

“Eleven months!” Jay said as he gave me a grin. “It feels good to be on the field again.” He called, “Blue 42! Blue 42! Hut... Hut...”

The snap came back to me. I nestled it into my stomach as Jay mimicked the same motions, pretending he had taken the ball. We both spun to the right. I followed behind Jay as he turned and went after a defensive back. I scanned downfield for my key. The cornerback covering Bruce was shadowing him, not coming to tackle me. That meant I should keep the ball and run.

Jay plowed into the defensive back with gusto. I knew he was in agreement with Zack Hayes. Blocking on these plays was fun for a QB. It was about the only time they got to hit somebody instead of being hit.

I sprinted past Jay’s block and scanned downfield again. Bruce’s DB was still with him. I tucked the ball tight to my side and turned downfield and sprinted as fast as I could go. The cornerback finally turned to try to tackle me. I tried to spin away from him as he pushed me towards the sideline. The free safety hit me and guaranteed I didn’t gain more yards. I went down at the sideline.

I looked around and saw I was down to Cincinnati’s 24 yard line. I tossed the ball to the referee and headed back to the huddle.

“Nice job Kyle,” Jay said as we met in the huddle. “I hope you stay on the field for awhile.”

We both looked at our sidelines. We spotted Jared Cantrell and Wyatt Smith trotting out towards the huddle. Damian and I were done after all. We trotted off the field to the sideline.

Coach Adams smiled as he greeted us. “Damian, Coach... you’re done for the day. Relax. That was a nice run Coach.”

“Thanks Coach,” I replied.

Coach Burton was satisfied to have Wyatt and Charlie Taylor take turns running the ball at Cincinnati, taking time off the clock as well as keeping the Bearcats from scoring. Jay’s drive pushed down within ten yards of the goal line before bogging down. We settled for a field goal to increase our lead to 34-7.

Our second team defense went in with our 27 point lead. Cincinnati’s first team finally got their act together against our second team. Our defensive tackles weren’t quite as strong up front and Cincinnati’s offensive line could get some push. Our second team linebackers weren’t as experienced. The Bearcats balanced play calling allowed them to move the ball downfield. Disaster struck on the eighth play of the drive. Chris Richardson slipped covering a play action pass. The QB delivered the ball to a wide

open receiver. David McCall, our free safety, tried to get over to tackle him, but he wasn't able to catch him before he ran into the touchdown. Their kicker booted the PAT to narrow the score to 34-14 our favor.

Our special teams missed the signs on the ensuing kickoff. Cincinnati surprised us with an on-side kick, which they recovered. Cincinnati had fifty-four yards to score. They patiently worked the ball down the field as our coaches shouted encouragement to our defense. Our second string down linemen couldn't get enough pressure on Cincinnati's first string offensive line. They pushed the ball into the end zone again. The successful PAT brought our lead down to 34-21.

I watched to see if the coaches would send in the first string again to make sure the Bearcats didn't come back to steal a victory. Coach Burton sent Jay and our second string out again. Tanner Riggs had a good kick return, giving Jay the ball on our 32 yard line.

Coach Burton went back to our balanced play calling. Jay commanded his troops and drove them down the field smartly, exactly as I knew he could do. Coach Burton unleashed the long ball on the seventh play of the drive. Jay got good protection. He launched the pass down to the strong side sideline where Brian Henson had beaten his man. Jay hit Brian in stride forty yards down the field. Brian sprinted into the end zone before any Bearcat could react.

Andrew drilled the PAT to put our lead back to a respectable 41-21. The first string offense relaxed again. We wouldn't be needed after all.

Coach C adjusted things slightly for the second string defense, letting them do a better job containing and slowing down the Bearcats. They turned them away without allowing another score until the final two minutes when our third string was playing prevent defense. The final score was 44-28 our favor.

Chip was ecstatic at his stats for the day. He completed 18 passes on 28 attempts for 221 yards, two touchdowns and one interception. The interception hardly mattered. It was the equivalent of a punt, pinning the Bearcats against the end zone and giving us great field position for the subsequent drive. His quarterback rating was 143.1, a great performance for his second start.

Jay was pleased too. He finally got to play football again. He performed well too. Most important for him, he completed a deep pass when he needed to. Hopefully his foot was completely healed. It certainly couldn't hurt our team to have two guys who could play top notch football at that position.

My personal stats were good too. I made six catches for 124 yards and a touchdown. I completed my one pass for a touchdown to Christian. I made one kick return for 102 yards and another touchdown. My punt return of 8 yards paled beside my other stats.

I did some interviews before I headed inside to the locker room. My teammates were in a buoyant mood. We had cleaned up our act from the previous week. We still had some work to do but we had improved dramatically. Hopefully we would be prepared when we faced USC the following Saturday.

I placed two phone calls after the buses delivered us back to our locker room in the Lasch Building. Kelly, Steph and Bev were going to meet us outside the Lasch Building. I called Matt Sauder too. He and Josh would look for Kelly and the other girls outside.

Chip heard Matt was outside so he asked to go out for dinner with us. Trevor, Christian, Chip and I met the girls, Matt and Josh outside around a quarter to five. The group decided pizza would hit the spot. We headed downtown to Hi-Way Pizza.

Matt and Josh got comfortable with our group quickly. They knew Chip and Christian from camp. Both guys had met Kelly too. Bev is so sweet everyone who met her liked her immediately. The two boys were excited to meet and talk with Trevor. The guys were amazed at how many times Penn State fans stopped for autographs from Chip, Trevor and me. Christian was uncomfortable every one of the half dozen times fans stopped to congratulate him and to get his autograph. He had been anonymous the past two years.

Matt and Josh dropped some not so subtle hints that they would like to drop by our party when they heard about it. I was skeptical but they assured me their parents wouldn't mind if someone (read Trevor and me) would give them a place to crash for the night. After much begging, Trevor and I agreed one of them could sleep on the couch while the other slept on the floor in my sleeping bag.

Matt and Josh called home after we agreed. It took about five minutes of pleading and begging for each boy to convince their parents to allow the overnight visit. Each parent talked with me so I could reassure them that I would look after their son. The two guys were hyper-excited to be coming to a real college party as we walked back to my apartment.

I put the boys to work helping set up for the party when we got back to the apartment. They didn't complain. They were used to taking orders from me. Anyway, they knew they were imposing on me asking to stay the night.

Guests started arriving around eight o'clock. The beer, wine and liquor were ready. Jay had the tunes cranked up. Kelly, Trevor, Steph and I had plenty of snack food for the crowd.

I pulled Matt and Josh aside early in the party. "I want to go over the ground rules with you guys," I directed. "One beer each..."

"One?" both high schoolers protested in unison "CoOOach! Come on! We have more than that at parties back home."

“All right, two beers,” I agreed. “Mingle with my teammates, have some fun, and remember my limit – two beers.”

“It’ll be cool to meet guys on the team,” Matt agreed.

Josh looked past me as a couple good looking coeds came in the front door. “...and the girls,” Josh added.

I fixed his eyes in my stare. “You’re my sister’s boyfriend,” I said coolly. “Remember that fact.” I turned my gaze to Matt. “You’re going steady with Liz’s best friend. It’s OK to talk with the girls, maybe flirt a little but no more.”

“That’s cool Coach,” “You got it Coach,” my young friends agreed.

The guys headed back to the living room and hooked up with Chip. Chip and some of the other guys with reps as lady’s men gathered with a group of pretty girls. Matt and Josh enjoyed the sights and conversation but stayed faithful to their girls back at home.

Chip’s already healthy ego got a big boost that afternoon. Not inaccurately, he compared his performance that afternoon to Zack’s frequent half or half plus a few minutes performances last year. His numbers were good today but Chip still had a long way to go before he should compare himself to Zack Hayes. I would need to sit my friend down and talk about being humble. It would help him with his teammates.

Jay Nicholson was in a good mood in spite of Chip’s bragging. He played real football for the first time since his accident last fall. Physically he was finally in good shape. I knew he was proud to have completed the long touchdown to Brian Henson. That was the one element of his game that he needed to demonstrate for our coaches.

Damian, Melanie, Billy and Sarah helped host the party this evening, giving Trevor, Stephanie, Kelly and me a bit of a break. The four of us had a couple beers, sat, talked and enjoyed the music at the party.

Matt Sauder and Josh Strickler were well behaved. They had their permitted two beers and then switched to sodas. Josh pumped Matt Frye and Shawn Byrd for tips and ideas about playing cornerback. Matt hung with Chip, Colin and Jon Stafford, asking all kinds of questions about their experiences playing quarterback in high school and college.

The usual parade of guests borrowed the four bedrooms for privacy. My clean sheets would be handy when it was time for Kelly and me to go to bed. Marco Cuchiella was developing a reputation similar to his older brother’s – good for an evening of fun with a bedmate. Brian Henson celebrated his first touchdown by getting his jollies with Erika Foster, a freshman who made our parties the past two Saturdays.

Kelly and I were on our third beer around 10:30 when her cell phone rang. She went to the hallway in the back so she could hear better. Kelly bounced back to me, grinning from ear to ear.

“Jen just called,” Kelly said. “There’s a kicking party going on down at Mark’s apartment building. She said we should come down for some fun.”

“Now?” I asked. “It’s late. Let’s just hang out here tonight.”

“Jen said it’s wild. We should go,” Kelly replied. “Damian, Mel, Billy and Sarah have things covered here. Let’s go.” Kelly slipped her arm around mine and tugged me towards the door.

“A wild party at a downtown apartment building,” I said hesitantly. “I don’t think that’s such a good place for me to be. That’s the kind of place where players have gotten in trouble in the past.”

Tugging more insistently Kelly reassured, “It’ll be fine Kyle. Come on, it’ll be a blast.”

“NO, I can’t,” I insisted. “I promised Mr. Sauder and Mrs. Strickler that I would look after their sons. I can’t go.”

“The kids are fine here,” Kelly said gesturing towards Matt and Josh. They were talking with Colin O’Shea and Matt Frye about football. Kelly tugged harder on my arm. I slipped my arm out from hers.

“I’m NOT GOING!” I insisted. Kelly stepped back and glared at me.

“FINE!” she snapped. “I’ll just stay here at this boring party.” She stalked off to the kitchen for another drink. I let her go. I knew there wasn’t any point in arguing with her now. I would give her time to cool down before we discussed our agreement to cut down our partying.

I chatted with friends while I gave Kelly space. Kelly used the time to down more beers. The one time I tried to warn Kelly that she was drinking too much she nearly snapped my head off. I let her alone to work things out.

I got a text message from my brother Andy around 11:30 that night. It said: “DE 30 WC 7 KR-2/56 PR-4/51 RCV-1/15. C twns tmrw YEAH! Lv l’bro” Translating it, I understood Delaware beat West Chester University 30 to 7. Andy was slotted as the primary punt and kick returner for the Blue Hens. He had a good day, but had a ways to go to catch up to my stats. He must have gone in at least one or two plays as a wide receiver since he had a catch. It was a decent start for his college career. I texted back that he was to give my love to the twins and the rest of our family when he caught up with them at the beach tomorrow.

Trevor, Steph, Damian, Mel, Billy, Sarah and I cleaned up when the party wound down around one in the morning. Jay was still in his bedroom with his female du jour. Matt Sauder and Josh Strickler helped us clean up too. Kelly was curled up on the couch, suffering from way to many beers for a person of her size.

I changed the sheets on my bed and then Matt and Josh helped me walk Kelly to my bed. I gathered up a spare blanket and pillow along with my sleeping bag, camp pillow and mat for the two boys.

“You throw some pretty wild parties,” Matt observed as we left my bedroom

“Pretty fuckin’ dull,” Kelly slurred from her position flat on the bed.

“Kelly certainly can drink a lot,” Josh said after we left the bedroom.

“This wasn’t real wild as college parties go,” I replied when we were in the living room. “Football players need to keep a low profile. Underage drinking is a quick way to lose your spot on the team.” I explained what had happened to Aidan, Alex and Max last season.

“Your comment about Kelly’s drinking was on the mark Josh,” I added. “I’ve been there too, way too many times.” I put the sleeping gear on the couch. “Who sleeps where?”

Josh’s “scissors” beat Matt’s “paper” so Josh took the couch and Matt took the mat & sleeping bag on the floor. When they were settled I headed for my room.

“Thanks for putting us up tonight Coach,” Matt called out.

“Yeah, thanks Coach,” Josh added.

“No problem guys,” I called back as I left. “Have a good night’s sleep. Nobody here will be up early.”

Soft moans were coming from Trevor’s room as I passed his door and headed to my own room. Trevor and Steph were doing the same thing I wanted to do with Kelly. I locked the door behind me.

“C’mere shweetie,” Kelly begged. “I need shcrewin’ lover”

“I can do that,” I agreed as I ripped off my clothes. I lay down beside my lover. We rolled together and began kissing.

It was good, but not as good as usual. Kelly was clumsy and uncoordinated. After a year and half together the two of us normally meshed together like gears in a Swiss watch. We kissed for a few minutes before I slid down and demonstrated my appreciation of her

lovely breasts. This got Kelly excited enough that she suggested we try some “shixty-nine.”

I flipped around so I was facing aft. I went to work on Kelly’s pussy. She tried to take my cock in her mouth. Her drunkenness made the experience less than satisfying for me. After a couple minutes I flipped around again so I could concentrate on satisfying Kelly.

I brought Kelly to orgasm after a couple minutes. She demanded that I “fuck her good” as soon as she was coherent again. I did. It was awkward. Our movements were out of sync with each other. I fell out twice when she pulled away at the wrong time. Eventually I managed to give her another orgasm before I came too. Kelly promptly rolled over and fell asleep.

I cuddled with her. I didn’t fall asleep immediately. I thought about how to approach Kelly with another discussion about too much drinking. I wasn’t looking forward to it but I needed to have the talk with her. She got totally wasted two of the three weekends this semester. This wasn’t how I wanted to spend Saturday nights this year.

I woke up around ten o’clock Sunday morning. Matt and Josh were still dead to the world when I checked on them before I took a shower. Both of my young friends were awake when I came back downstairs. I offered them towels so they could clean up before they headed for home. I went down the street and picked up a Sunday newspaper along with eggs and sausage at the Mix.

Matt was clean and back downstairs watching ESPN quietly on our TV when I got back. Josh rejoined us downstairs a few minutes later.

“You guys want some breakfast before you go?” I asked.

“That’d be cool Coach,” Matt agreed.

“What do you have?” Josh asked.

“How does sausage and scrambled eggs sound?” I replied.

“Cool!” “That’d be great,” the two replied.

I started cooking the food while the two guys hung out with me. “Do your girlfriends live with you all the time here at college?” Matt asked.

“Just Saturday nights usually,” I explained. “They have their own apartments. I hope the sounds we made weren’t too distracting to you last night after the party.”

“It wasn’t too bad,” Matt allowed.

Josh chuckled. "We wacked off when we had to listen to you and Kelly, Trevor and his girlfriend and Jay and his girlfriend all doing it."

Laughing Matt added, "It sure sounded like Canada last month, all these couples having sex. That was a great trip."

"For most of us," Josh added. "You probably didn't hear about this Coach. Word around the school is that Ryan Lapp knocked up Brenda Mattingly when we were in Algonquin."

"Yeah, that's the rumor," Matt confirmed.

"You guys shouldn't gossip," I said.

"It's more than gossip," Josh countered. "I'm in first period Math and second period history with Brenda. She bolted one of the two classes every day this week when she was sick."

"Ryan has been really out of it this week," Matt added. "He's worrying about something big but he won't talk about it when I asked if I can help."

"You guys assume it happened in Canada," I said. "You guys got back like three weeks ago?" Matt and Josh nodded yes. "Morning sickness doesn't come on that fast."

"Maybe it happened before," Josh suggested. "Something big is up with those two."

"If you're right, the two of you need to be good friends to Ryan and Brenda," I said. "If Brenda is pregnant, she and Ryan are going to need all the support they can get. Having a kid at your age is difficult. You've seen a little of what my brother has gone through."

"Andy's done pretty good, all things considered," Matt said.

"You're guys are careful with your girlfriends, right?" I asked.

"You're sister is fanatical about birth control," Josh said. "You know that."

"I'm fine too," Matt said. "Annie and I started out using rubbers. I was so happy the day your sister got her driver's license. She drove Annie to the clinic in Lancaster the very next afternoon to get her on the pill. It feels so much better without rubbers."

"You got to be safe if you expect to have a future," I said.

"Do you think I could have a future at a place like this?" Josh asked. "Could I play football at a place like this?"

"You?" I replied. "What are you 5'-9", 150 pounds?"

“5’-9 ½”, 153 pounds,” Josh replied.

“You still growing?” I asked.

“Not in the past year,” he answered.

“What’s your best time in the 40?” I asked.

“4.58 seconds,” Josh answered.

“So, you’re small, light and slow,” I explained. “How’d you do covering receivers while you were at scout camp in July?”

“I couldn’t cover you,” Josh replied. He chuckled and added, “Of course most college DBs can’t cover you.”

“How’d you do against Josh Hunsecker?” I asked.

“I sucked,” Josh replied. “He’s too fast for me to cover. Anyway, Coach Caffrey never puts me on Hunsecker.”

“And there is a reason for that,” I said. “I’m afraid you’ll have to enjoy football while you’re in high school. I just don’t see you playing college ball unless you try to walk-on at a Division III program.”

“How about me Kyle?” Matt asked.

“You do realize that I’m a representative of Penn State and you’re a potential recruit?” I said.

“I asked you. You didn’t contact me. I’m allowed to do that, aren’t I?” Matt said.
“That’s allowed by the NCAA.”

“You’re right Matt,” I agreed. “Understand that I may be a university representative but I don’t speak for them about recruiting.” Matt nodded his understanding. “We are looking for quarterbacks to have strong arms, are 6’-2” to 6’-4” tall, weigh 210-220 pounds and are able to move around in the pocket and roll out.”

“I’m 6’-2”, 190 pounds and still growing,” Matt said hopefully.

“What’s your 40 time?”

“4.51 seconds,” Matt replied.

“You’re the right size, have some speed and have a rifle arm,” I said. “You remember when I talked to you about signing up for football camp?” Matt nodded yes. “That wasn’t entirely by chance. Coach Burton asked me to make sure you heard about the camp. I probably would have remembered to tell you about on my own, but who knows?”

“I knew he knew who I was when I sat down to talk with him at the end of camp,” Matt said. “Is that why?”

“Partly,” I agreed. “Remember our high school team has placed four quarterbacks in Division I football this decade. The Wolverines’ quarterback is going to get a look if you guys have a decent record.”

“Coach Burton suggested that I might want to make an unofficial visit this fall,” Matt said. “Do you think that would be a good idea?”

“Why not?” I replied. “You’re interested in Penn State. We’re curious about you. What do any of us have to lose? If you make an unofficial visit, make it later in the season. That way you have the strength of your junior year record behind you too. I visited too early as a junior. They didn’t feel I had proved myself as a receiver yet.”

“What’s your late season schedule look like Coach?” Matt asked. I showed him the schedule. After reviewing it a couple minutes Matt said, “Iowa on October 29th or Wisconsin on November 12th. They look good to me. I’ll have to talk to Dad and see if we can come one of those weekends.”

“I’ll look forward to seeing you here,” I said. I had finished the eggs and served them up with sausage and toast. I gave plates to both boys, keeping the third for myself.

“Who would have thought we’d be here like this five years ago when you became our troop guide?” Josh said.

“A dozen newbie scouts with you and Ed,” Matt agreed. “We’ve all come a long way since then.”

I didn’t disagree. I had a half formed idea that I might be able to play college ball back then. Never in my wildest dreams could I have imagined these little kids doing that in the future. Hell, last September I didn’t see Matt drawing the attention of my coach the way he did. Life can be strange.

Trevor and Steph got up while we were eating. Steph went upstairs for a shower while Trevor hung out with us. When Matt and Josh finished eating they folded up their bedding. I wished them a safe trip home. Before they headed back to Lancaster County I told them to beat the crap out of Eastern Friday night at their first game.

Kelly woke up about fifteen minutes after the boys headed for home. I gave her aspirin and water to help her rehydrate herself. She headed upstairs for a long, hot shower after Trevor finished in the bathroom. She remembered virtually nothing from the previous evening including our argument about going over to the party at Mark's apartment building.

I didn't discuss Kelly cutting down on her drinking. She was doing a fine job of beating herself up for being too stupid and drunk the previous evening. I made coffee and toast for her for lunch. We settled down to read the Sunday paper the way we've done for the past two years.

I turned to the sports section first. I was curious how my friends' teams had done yesterday. Ed's Gators played Wyoming down in Gainesville yesterday. They won 52-14. The paper said Ed went in near the end of the third quarter. The paper said he completed 4 of 7 pass attempts for 62 yards. The stats from the game said Ed's roommate Eric Peters had a huge day. He caught 8 passes for 119 yards and two touchdowns.

The next article I looked at shocked Kelly and me. The headline announced, "No. 6 Irish upset by No. 13 Yellowjackets, 27-24." Georgia Tech rallied with a fourth quarter come from behind touchdown to beat Notre Dame. The stats listed Jeremy as having nine tackles and a sack in the game. I continued scanning my friends' teams. Hal and Rutgers pulled off an upset over North Carolina with a last second field goal to break a 24-24 tie. Hal had a good inaugural day. He made two field goals and two extra points.

Drew McCormicks' West Virginia Mountaineers beat up on little Western Michigan 38-13. Drew carried fifteen times for 78 yards. It was a good effort for the #2 tailback. Unranked Syracuse, Jake Kring's school, barely beat little Miami of Ohio 17-14. Jake was QB #2, behind the red shirt senior. Jake didn't play.

Kelly and I sent off e-mails to our friends congratulating or sympathizing with them, as appropriate. We called Andy down at the beach to congratulate him on his successful start in college football. We talked with Mom, Dad, Liz, Will, Abby and the twins. I assured Liz that her boyfriend survived an overnight at Penn State. The twins didn't have much to say but we could hear their squeals of delight at hearing Unka Ky and Aun' Keh-EE.

I drove Kelly back to her apartment around 3:30 pm. She needed to work on her Statistics 100 course. We made plans for me to pick up Kelly around 9:00 pm, once I had everything done over at the Lasch Building and she had her homework finished. We planned to take advantage of our Labor Day holiday by spending the night together. I went over to the Lasch Building to train before the team dinner. I stopped in the video room when I finished training. I was pleased to see Chip huddled with Jon Stafford going over video on USC from last season. The video from their 55-17 demolition of San Jose State yesterday wasn't available yet. I joined them.

Coach Burton called an unusual Sunday evening team meeting. He showed some of the low lights from our game against Cincinnati first. Then he showed us video from USC game against San Jose State yesterday. They looked absolutely dominating, more so than the 55-17 score would indicate. They were starting a true sophomore at quarterback, Daniel Moore. Moore had a strong arm, could deliver a deep ball accurately, he was big and fast and had carried the ball half a dozen times for 68 yards. The kid was phenomenal. Of course USC had fast wide outs and runners to exploit the kid's strong arm and elusiveness. Coach Burton let us know we would have to put in extra time in meetings and studying video to be prepared for next Saturday's game.

I put an hour into the video room that evening before I drove over to pick up Kelly for her night with me. Kelly and I went through my e-mails when we got back to my apartment. Most of my friends sent replies thanking me for my e-mails and congratulating me for my game the previous day. Steph was staying overnight with Trevor that evening too. Trevor, Steph, Kelly, me, Jay and Damian grabbed beers from the fridge and hung out together until midnight enjoying a new HD movie Jay picked up last week.

We caught some news before we headed to bed. All of us were curious about how Zack Hayes had fared in his first NFL start. The Packers played the Patriots in Foxboro that afternoon. The game wasn't televised locally. The Patriots pounded the Packers 45-10.

I checked the box score on-line. Zack completed 13 passes on 25 attempts, gaining 102 yards. He was sacked five times and threw two interceptions against his one touchdown. It was not a promising start for my mentor.

Kelly and I headed to bed after that. Kelly was mostly over her hangover and was ready for fun. We made love twice before we went to sleep. That was how things were meant to be.

Chapter 45

I woke up around eleven o'clock Labor Day morning with Kelly's arm draped over my chest and her snuggled against my side. The smell of eggs and sausage wafted into my bedroom. I would have loved to snuggle and lay in bed like this all day but Damian, who was on a cooking kick right now, was making a breakfast casserole for all of us. I woke Kelly up with a kiss.

Trevor and Steph had showered and were relaxing in the living room when Kelly and I emerged. I knocked at Jay's door before my shower to make sure he was awake. None of us wanted to miss Damian's breakfast.

I consider myself a good amateur cook. Damian's skill far surpassed mine. He has watched and worked with the chefs at his father restaurants for years. My roomie has a gift in the culinary arts.

Damian started brunch off with a nice fresh fruit salad with melon, berries, pineapple pieces and orange sections. He served each of us a big glass of fresh squeezed orange juice. The breakfast casserole that had smelled so good when I woke up came out after we finished our fruit salad.

It was big, puffy and covered with browned cheddar cheese. I knew Damian used milk, eggs and bread for the base of the casserole. It was the other things that he included that made it special. He incorporated sausage, apples, onions, herbs and spices into the dish.

Damian wouldn't reveal the exact recipe to us even when we begged after our second portions. The apples paired well with the pork sausage. I recognized sage in it. It had a hint of licorice in it. I couldn't decide if it was anise or fennel. It was a savory casserole but the apples pieces added a hint of sweetness to the dish.

Damian finished the meal off by serving us fresh baked banana nut muffins. The meal was fabulous. Our resident gastronome had outdone himself. All of us complimented Damian for his excellent work.

Our group sat and talked as we relaxed and digested our meal. Trevor suggested that the group ought to go over to the golf course like we did a year ago for Labor Day. Unfortunately for me Kelly had taken up golf since last year. Despite my strong protests I got sucked into playing with the rest of my friends. Trevor called Chip and his roommate Matt Frye to round out our second foursome.

Trevor and Steph played with Kelly and me. Jay, Damian, Chip and Matt played in the foursome after us. We ended up playing the Blue Course. Kelly gave me tips to help my pitiful game. I was tolerably decent by the end of the first nine. I actually made par on

two of the holes on the back nine. I lost badly in the end but I wasn't twenty some strokes behind like the last time I golfed when I was in high school.

Kelly and Steph took buses back to their apartments. We football players had to hurry to get over to the Lasch Building in time for our three o'clock position meetings.

Coach Adams met with the ten receivers on the team to review game tape from the Trojans game last week along with tape from last year. USC used exclusively man coverage against San Jose State last week.

In particular I noticed #37, Patrick Adams, their right cornerback. I had played against Patrick a year and a half ago in the Rose Bowl. He was their dime back then as a freshman. He covered me deep while the linebackers and strong safety beat me up as I crossed the line of scrimmage.

Patrick was tall and willowy. The biography said he was 6'3" tall and weighed 185 pounds. He made starter last year in game three of the season. I thought he played well in the Rose Bowl but he wasn't my primary worry during that game. I was more concerned about not getting knocked out by one of the big guys that were hitting me. I remember thinking that Patrick was going to be a good player based on what I saw there.

He played his man perfectly last week, never out of position and breaking up any pass attempt that went to his man. Coach Carroll shifted Patrick around to cover the best receiver on the field when San Jose State sent receivers into motion.

The game tape from the Orange Bowl told me more. San Jose State was overmatched. LSU was a much truer test for the Trojans last winter at the national championship game. I found out Patrick had speed to go with his cover skills. He matched the fastest Tigers last winter step for step. USC varied coverage on speed receivers. Sometimes Patrick dropped deep with short help. Other times he stayed man on man with safety help deep. He shut down Austin Thibedeau, LSU's best receiver last season.

Coach Adams and I both expected Patrick to handle me similarly on Saturday. Stay close to me with deep help. We had some ideas that we thought would allow us to beat him that way. If USC put too many people on me, Christian and Tanner would have big days instead. Either way would be good for us.

The team hit the practice fields at four o'clock, working through our game plan for USC. Tyler Madden called the captains and key senior players together before we started. He included both Chip and Jay in the meeting this time. Tyler emphasized how important it was for each of us to get our guys focused and working hard to prepare for USC. They might be our most difficult opponent of the year.

The polls released last night had USC at #4 in the country. We moved up a couple notches to #13. USC was favored by 7 ½ points. None of us were hanging our heads. We felt we had a good shot at upsetting the Trojans.

During the special teams portion of the practice Coach Ferguson informed me that I would be handling all the punt and kick returns for the game against USC. The coaches cut down my workload in early games to keep me fresh for the big games. No game would be bigger than this one until late October when we played Michigan and Ohio State on consecutive weekends.

The team paid attention to the captains' and coaches' entreaties to concentrate. Monday's practice was the best practice so far this season. Everyone worked hard to improve their game so they were ready for Saturday.

The coaches used all twenty hours of their allotted preparation time with us that week. The captains convinced us that we needed to put in extra time on our own studying video and the playbook.

Kelly and I had very little time together aside from history class between my time spent on football and on my studies. We made the best of what time we did have. I spent an hour and a half with Kelly studying on Wednesday evening after I finished with football. The two of us agreed to meet for breakfast on Friday morning before the team left for California.

Football practices ran well during the week. Everyone took the captains' encouragement to heart. We understood how difficult our game was going to be. I felt confident we would surprise the Trojans on Saturday afternoon.

It was no surprise that ABC picked our game as the feature game for prime time on Saturday night. Kickoff was scheduled for 5:15 pm, Pacific time.

Kelly caught the bus over to my apartment Friday morning around eight o'clock. I made French toast for the two of us. Damian smelled them after he got up. I made some extra for him when he came downstairs.

Kelly gave me a hug when we finished breakfast. "You have a good game honey," Kelly said after she gave me a kiss. "I'll be rooting for you back here."

"Thanks sweetie," I replied.

"I'll see you Sunday morning when you get back," Kelly added. "You'll be back at the Lasch Building at 6:30, right?"

"Yes, that's right," I agreed.

“I’ll take good notes for you in history,” Kelly added. “Knock’em dead out there.” She waved goodbye as she headed for the library. Kelly had a big term paper due next week in her News Media Ethics class.

Trevor, Jay, Damian and I headed over to the Lasch Building about fifteen minutes later. We gathered up our things from our locker and headed outside for the buses. They dropped us off at the airport outside State College around 10:00 in the morning. We boarded our plane and headed for the west coast. Our plane got into LA around 1:30 in the afternoon, West Coast Time.

The athletic department put us up in the Radisson Hotel in downtown Los Angeles. It was the same hotel I stayed at three years earlier when I was being recruited by USC. After dinner we had a general team meeting and then broke out into position meetings to prepare for our biggest test so far in the season.

The coaches were merciful on Saturday morning. The team’s breakfast was scheduled for 9:00 am. We reviewed the game plan and studied to prepare for our afternoon contest. We had lunch at the hotel before the buses took us over to the Coliseum.

The weather was gorgeous when we came out to the field Saturday afternoon. The temperature was around 75 degrees. There was a gentle breeze blowing in from the sea to our west. The sky was a brilliant blue. It was perfect weather for a football game.

The Coliseum was filling to its 100,000 capacity as we warmed up. Coach Carroll said hello as he jogged by me while I was warming up. I returned the friendly greeting. I had a lot of respect for Coach Carroll. It had been a hard to choose between Penn State and USC three years ago.

We headed back inside after we finished warming up. Our athletic department had a little meal for us to eat as we finished our preparations. Coach Burton gave a rousing speech to fire us up. We waited in the tunnel while the 93,000 plus crowd cheered wildly as their Trojans stormed onto the field. The small contingent of 4,000 Penn State fans cheered us as we ran out of the tunnel, across the field and took our position on the visitor’s sideline.

Tyler Madden called heads at the coin flip. The coin came up tails. The Trojans took the kickoff. I huddled with Andrew Perkins and the kick cover team.

“Fight off your blocks guys,” I demanded. “Kaapane is fast and slippery. Keep to your lanes and take this sucker down!”

Malo Kaapana, USC’s kick and punt returner, was red shirt sophomore. He was very dangerous. I remembered watching what he did to LSU at the Orange Bowl last January.

We huddled together and gave a cheer before they took the field. "Boot it deep Andrew," I added as they headed out. "Best place to keep a dangerous returner is stuck in the end zone."

"I'll do my best Coach," Andrew replied. "I'll kick the hell out of it."

I watched as our guys and USC lined up for the kick. I was surprised when USC lined up two guys deep in the end zone. Andrew smartly kicked the ball away from Kaapana, putting it four yards deep in the end zone.

Things looked good to start. The other returner decided to run the ball out. Our cover guys were in their lanes. The returner ran forward diagonally across the back field heading across the middle for the opposite side line. Kaapana ran along with the returner.

Matt Frye, the gunner on the left side of the line, drew a bead on the returner to tackle him. When Matt was ready to hit him, the returner flipped the ball outside to Malo Kaapana. Matt desperately tried to turn and go for Kaapana but collided with the empty handed ex-return man.

Malo Kaapana sprinted past them down the sideline. Our cover team desperately tried to disengage and shift over to the sideline to stop Kaapana. No one was able to get a shot at him until mid-field. Andrew tried his best to take the returner down but couldn't. Malo Kaapana sprinted into the end zone to thunderous cheers of the Coliseum crowd. USC's kicker made the PAT, giving them a 7-0 lead.

The Trojans used our own strategy on me. Their kicker booted the kickoff seven yards into the end zone so I couldn't have a return. I kneeled down so we could get the ball at our 20 yard line.

Damian picked up three yards going up the middle on the first play. We picked up five more yards when Chip hit Jibril with a quick pass on a curl across the middle on the second play. I was sent deep on the play as a decoy. I was surprised when Patrick Adams was the only person to cover me. I knew our coaches would exploit that if USC continued to single cover me.

Coach sent Damian up the middle again on third down and two. My roomie made three yards to get us our first down. Coach Burton called for me to go deep on the next play.

I sprinted down the field at the snap. I smiled as I saw the free safety roll towards Christian's side of the field. Chip's pump fake combined with my stutter step at fifteen yards downfield separated me from Adams. I looked back for the ball at twenty-five yards. Way too many celebrating guys in cardinal colored jerseys were standing in our backfield. Chip had been sacked.

Chip was chewing out both Elijah Berk and Joe Cleveland, our tackles, when I got back to the huddle.

“Keep those God damned ends off me,” Chip insisted.

“Sorry boss,” Joe, the 320 pound tackle, replied meekly. “I’ve got your back.”

“We’ll get the job done Chip,” Elijah agreed.

Coach Burton tried to surprise USC and get us out of our second and 17 yards to go hole with a delay draw by Damian up the middle. The USC linebackers weren’t fooled. They met Damian in the hole and stopped him with a two yard gain.

It was third and fifteen now, so Coach Burton kept Damian in to help protect Chip. Christian and I ran seventeen yard out routes on opposite sides of the field. Tanner and Jibril ran underneath routes as outlets incase Christian and I both drew double coverage.

At the snap I sprinted downfield like I was going deep. Adams stayed with me for the first dozen yards and then fell behind. No one was covering me deep. I knew I was going to be the primary receiver. I cut sharply towards the sideline, expecting to see Adams fly by me trying keep up with my supposed deep route.

The ball came flying out of Chip’s hand half a second too soon as he tried to throw before a big defensive end smashed into him. The ball fluttered as it flew our way, coming up well short of me. I desperately tried to backpedal to have a play on the ball. Adams was too quick. He leaped, snatched the ball from in front of us, landed and started downfield for our end zone.

Tanner Riggs alertly sprinted for the sideline to cut him off. Adams lost a step avoiding Tanner. It was just enough time for me to hit him from behind. I tried to strip the ball out as the two of us fell. Adams maintained possession as he landed and I fall on top of him. The referees marked the ball at our 6 yard line.

Damian was helping Chip off the turf after a defensive end climbed off him. Our offense jogged off the field as our defense scrambled to get into position for their goal line stand.

“What the hell happened?” I demanded as we got to the sideline.

“The Sam [strong side linebacker] blitzed,” Chip explained. “Damian blocked him. I rolled away from the pressure right into the end’s stunt. He hit me as I threw the ball.”

“You were early with the throw,” I countered. “You should have thrown the ball away if you didn’t have enough time.”

“That’s what I was trying to do,” Chip responded. “He hit me as I let the ball go. I couldn’t get the ball out of bounds.”

Chip and I looked up in time to see USC's tailback crash into the big pile up in the middle of the line. Mike Pollard and Memed Marsic held firm. The big USC line managed to gain a single yard on the play. On second and goal at our 5, USC tried running wide to the strong side. Brendan Hayden and Bill Daugherty sealed off the outside, forcing the runner straight back into Josh Bruno's tackle. It was third and goal at the 3 yard line.

USC threw a play action pass at us. The fake to the tailback up the middle froze our linebackers momentarily. It was just enough time for USC's tight end to slip behind them and catch the ball by the goal post. USC's kicker drilled the PAT to give them a 14-0 lead.

The Trojans' kicker booted the ball deep. I drifted back a couple yards into the end zone to field the kick. Dave McCall screamed to return it, so I dashed behind the line of blockers. The Trojans covered the ball well. I broke through the initial line of tacklers but was taken down by the next group. Our offense started with possession of the ball at our 30 yard line.

Coach Burton tried to slow USC's ferocious pass rush on our first play with a tailback screen. Damian picked up eight yards on the play and gave the defensive ends something extra to think about.

Coach Burton called plays more conservatively on this drive, not trying for any deep passes. Damian and Jibril both stayed in the backfield for extra QB protection if we passed. Damian's four yard run got us a first down. Chip hit me with a 3 yard quick out when Patrick Adams gave me a cushion. Tanner coughed up a five yard pass on a crossing route after the free safety hammered him.

Tanner and I swapped spots on the next play. I went in motion from the strong side slot to the weak side. Our timing was good. I paused for my one second set and took off as soon as the ball was snapped. I ran a slant across the middle. Patrick Adams still covered me but he got tangled up with the middle linebacker momentarily. It was all the opening Chip needed.

He drilled the ball to me and I took off downfield. I made a dozen yards before the defensive backs converged on me and took me down. We had first down on USC's 43 yard line.

Coach Burton decided it was time to unveil another variation on our wildcat formation. I lined up in the backfield beside Chip. Jared Cantrell took my split end spot. This time Greg snapped the ball to Chip, who tucked it away and started to our right. I ran across the backfield the opposite direction from Chip. When the linebackers and d-backs committed to Chip's run, he pitched the ball back to me.

My first read was the d-back on Jared. The guy continued covering him so I tucked the ball in my left arm and headed downfield. Jared blocked his man away from the sideline.

I sprinted between Jared and the sideline. The free safety was the only USC player with a chance to catch me.

I kicked it into high gear and sprinted as hard as I could for the end zone. The free safety caught me about the 3 yard line. I stretched out my 6'-4 1/2" frame, trying to get the ball in the end zone while the safety tried to push me out of bounds. The nose of the ball squeaked across the goal line inside the pylon as the safety as I fell out of bounds. The referee whistled and signaled touchdown.

I couldn't believe it when the Coliseum crowd roared its approval. When I turned back and looked back up field I saw why. Laundry! God damned yellow laundry laying on the field.

"Holding against Penn State on #40," the head referee announced to further cheers of the crowd. I jogged back to our huddle. I saw the penalty on the big screen as I headed for the huddle. Jibril Sloan had let his hands drift too far around the linebacker as he blocked him and knocked him down for Chip's fake run to the left. My 43 yard touchdown run was wasted and the hold didn't even affect the play! I wasn't in a charitable frame of mind when I rejoined the huddle.

"Sorry Coach," Jibril said. "I couldn't help it."

"Good run Coach," "Nice work coach," a couple other guys added.

"Focus guys!" Chip demanded. "It's second and eighteen. Here's the play..."

Coach Burton expected USC to turn up the heat. He called for a tight end screen. The linebacker Jibril flattened on the previous down smelled the play out. He hit Jibril the second he had the ball, dropping him for a two yard loss.

USC dropped all their cover people deep on third and twenty yards to go. I cut my route short at sixteen yards so I had a chance to catch the ball. Chip hit me. I tried a spin move but three Trojans converged on me, bringing me down two yards shy of the down marker.

Coach Burton briefly considered trying to kick a field goal from our position on USC's 37 yard line. Andrew Perkins is extremely accurate but fifty-four yards is probably a couple yards or so too far for him. Coach Burton opted to do a coffin corner punt instead.

Mitch Jackson kicked almost perfect. The ball bounced on the two yard line, a couple yards from the sideline. Unfortunately, the way the ball hit, it bounced into the field of play instead of out of bounds. It crossed the goal line before Matt Frye and Dave McCall could touch it.

Coach Adams and Coach Burton called the first team together to review what we needed to do on the next drive to overcome our mistakes. Coach Burton preached that we had proved we could move the ball on USC and that big plays were possible. We needed to

play smart, disciplined football. We could win if we did. Coach Valdez pulled the offensive line apart and reviewed blocking based on what USC showed us so far.

Unfortunately we had way too much time to prepare for our next offensive series. USC patiently worked the ball down the field against our defense, stringing together a thirteen play drive to push down the field eighty yards. We offensive players realized what happened when the big USC crowd rose and cheered. We looked and found a Trojan holding the ball aloft in our end zone.

The hole we were in just got a little deeper. USC's kicker booted the point after to give them a 21-0 lead over us. We had three quarters to make up that deficit.

I jogged onto the field and took my position at our 5 yard line. The Trojan kicker didn't get as strong a kick as usual. I drifted back three yards and fielded the ball. Their coverage was good. I managed to advance the ball to our 29 yard line before the gang of tacklers converged on me.

We took what our coaches were preaching to heart. Focus on our assignments to avoid blunders, be patient and work the ball down the field. We didn't need to score a touchdown on every play.

USC continued to double cover Christian and Tanner. Patrick Adams was the only guy covering me on most plays. He was the best corner I'd played against since I went up against Aaron Morano back in high school.

Coach Burton mixed the runs and short passes up to keep USC guessing. We found that the center of their line was solid. Damian barely gained yards if we went up the middle. He could get outside and do some damage.

We managed to string together eight consecutive plays, gaining forty-two yards before our first gaffe. It was first down. Chip had to toss the ball away when the end nearly sacked him and Christian was double covered. We tried a shovel pass on second down to Damian. It lost two yards. That put us at third and twelve.

I managed to fool Adams with a fake deep and then come back towards Chip to gain fifteen yards and make first down. My catch put us on USC's 16 yard line. We tried flooding the end zone with receivers on the next play. The Trojans left us no space to work. Chip fired a flare pass out to Damian in the flat. Damian eluded the first tackler and rumbled for the end zone. A defensive end and a pair of linebackers converged on him and took him down at the 3 yard line.

We tried a pass to the corner of the end zone, but too many Trojans were crowded around me for me to catch the ball. We tried a quick out to Christian. He was tackled for no gain. We tried a play action pass on third and goal. It didn't fool the linebackers. Chip threw the ball out of the end zone when all receivers were covered. Coach Burton sent

Andrew Perkins in on fourth down. He kicked the field goal to give us points. Score: 21-3 USC's favor.

Coach C studied and made adjustments as he got a better understanding of USC's game plan. Our defense stopped them after allowing one first down. I fielded their punt at our 20 yard line. I picked up twelve yards before the cover team took me down.

About three minutes was left in the half. Coach Burton stayed patient in his play calling. Damian picked up a couple good runs. Brian Henson spelled Tanner Riggs on a play and caught a twelve yard pass to put us on the USC's 46 yard line.

Coach Burton called another wildcat play. Or at least we lined up that way. Chip ended up with the snap. I pretended to help block before drifting out into the short zone. I was supposed to run a five yard route.

To my delight I found myself covered by one of USC's linebackers. My standing orders from Coach Adams were to go deep regardless of the play whenever I got a mismatch like this. Hopefully Chip would remember that too.

USC was playing zone deep. I sprinted down the middle on the split between their two deep zones. The linebacker trailed me by quite a few yards. I looked back and saw Chip had spotted the mismatch too. He heaved a deep ball to me as I ran under it. USC's defensive backs were all covering Jared, Tanner and Christian. They reacted to me much too late. I sprinted into the end zone untouched. I tossed the ball to the referee and scanned back up the field. No penalty flags were on the ground this time. Andrew Perkins booted the PAT to give us a more respectable score: 21-10 USC's favor.

We left 1:43 on the clock. USC took the field and ran their two minute no huddle offense brilliantly. Despite Coach C's best planning and our defense's most strenuous efforts, the Trojans pushed down the field. We managed to stop them when they got down to our red zone. Their kicker nailed a twenty-one yard field goal right down the middle of the uprights. Score: 24-10 USC's favor.

We headed inside for half time. The coaches huddled with their player groups while we waited through the halftime show. Coach Adams talked with us receivers about what we needed to do to beat USC's coverage in the second half.

Coach Burton preached patience when the whole team assembled again. We beat USC 10-3 in the second quarter. We would be even with USC at the end of the game if we would play as well as that for the third and fourth quarters.

Coach Adams pulled me aside just before we headed back out onto the field. "They're single covering you Kyle," Coach Adams asked. "What are you going to do?" He paused for a half a second. Before I could answer he added, "Top receivers play best in big games."

“I’ll do my best Coach,” I answered. I hoped I could live up to my coach’s expectations as I jogged out to the field with the rest of our team.

I took my position at our five yard line to accept the second half kickoff. USC kicked the ball away from me. Dave McCall drifted back a yard into the end zone and fielded the ball. Coach Ferguson had anticipated this and we had the proper play called. Dave started towards the middle of the field. I cut behind him heading for the left side line.

Dave flipped the ball back to me as I passed behind him. Our blockers set up a wall for me. I sprinted for the sideline, turned and headed up field. Our wall didn’t completely block me off from would-be tacklers. The kicker slowed me as I approached mid-field and two other tacklers pushed me out of bounds at USC’s 47 yard line.

Chip and our offense were energized when they took the field. This was our best opportunity yet today. Damian picked up six yards on a cut back run over the middle on our first play. Chip hit me on a quick out for another five yards and a first down on the next play.

Coach Burton called what we expected to be a big play next. I lined up in the slot between our left guard and Tanner Riggs, who took my normal split end spot. Patrick Adams lined up across from me. At the snap Tanner ran diagonally across the field. I angled for the sideline, passing behind Tanner as I went. Tanner and the cornerback covering him neatly picked Adams off of me. I kicked into high gear. USC was going to pay for single covering me!

Fifteen yards downfield I turned back for the ball. It fluttered out of the crowd of bodies in the middle of the field. It was badly behind me by at least ten yards, uncatchable by any player on either team. I turned and jogged back to our huddle.

Greg Nowicki was helping Chip onto his feet when I got back. Joe told me that an end got free and hit Chip in the back when he wasn’t expecting it.

“You OK man?” I asked as we huddled.

“I’m fine,” Chip replied. “Slot Shift 20 Left.”

“Huh?” “What is that?” a couple guys asked. The rest of us waited for Chip to call the play properly.

“Slot Shift 20 Left,” Chip said louder. He got blank looks from everyone. None of us had any clue what play Chip wanted.

“What are you talking about?” Jibril demanded. Chip repeated the play call again.

“Are you all right?” I asked again.

“I’m fine!” Chip insisted. “Run the damn play!”

“We don’t know what you are talking about man,” Damian said. “What is the play?”

“LOOK AT ME!” I insisted. I grabbed the bar of Chip’s face mask and steadied his head. I stared into my friend’s eyes. They were wide and unfocused. I turned around and signaled time out immediately. Jibril and I both yelled for the trainers.

They spent a minute examining Chip, asking him questions to determine his level of coherence. They escorted Chip off the field when they satisfied themselves that he had taken too big a hit to continue playing.

Jay finished warming up and trotted onto the field to join our huddle. “OK people,” Jay commanded. “Let’s do this right and get this damn ball in the end zone.” Jay called the play and lined us up. He was keyed up to be in the game when it counted. Thankfully Coach Burton realized Jay would be excited. Damian carried the ball wide left for four yards on the play.

Coach called a tailback screen on second down. USC had sniffed the play out. Damian was tackled after he caught the ball two yards behind the line of scrimmage. On third and eight, Jay drilled the ball at me when I ran a twelve yard hitch route. Unfortunately Adams figured out what was coming too. He cut in front of me. I was lucky to knock the ball away before he could intercept it.

Jay was pissed as we came off the field. The right defensive end and a linebacker had been in his face as he threw the ball. Jay went straight for big Mahmoud Greene, our left guard, and started haranguing him about missing the blitzing linebacker. Mahmoud overshadowed Jay by six inches and close to a hundred pounds. Mahmoud passively accepted Jay’s rebuke.

Jay lit into Joe Cleveland next. Their heights weren’t quite as mismatched. Joe was about two inches taller than Jay though he outweighed Jay by at least a hundred and twenty pounds. Joe accepted Jay’s criticism for about a minute before he reacted.

Joe straightened and glared down at Jay. “Look, Brown [USC’s right defensive end] has made twenty-nine starts in his career,” Joe growled. “He’s making moves out there that I’ve never seen. I’ll do my best to protect your back but don’t expect me to give you five seconds to get rid of the ball. If you want to live through the second half, you better get the ball out quick or get me some help with this animal.”

I pulled Jay away. “Let Coach Valdez work with the line on protection,” I suggested. “We need to see Coach Adams to talk about what routes are going to work.”

“I made the right call on the last play,” Jay replied defensively. “You were in single coverage. You should have gotten the ball.”

“If you put it up higher I could have made a play for it,” I agreed. “Where you put it.... Well, be happy it wasn’t intercepted.”

“I didn’t have enough time and threw off my back foot,” Jay countered. “If the line had done its job....”

“It isn’t as easy as it looks from the sideline when you’re out there,” I said. “I overheard you grousing to some guys before the half. ‘Chip’s blowing it. The guy doesn’t know what he’s doing. I could fix it.’ It looks a whole lot faster when you’re on the field, doesn’t it?”

“Yeah,” Jay agreed.

“Six of the seven USC linemen and linebackers are second or third year starters,” I continued. “These are the guys we barely beat two years ago and the ones that took the national championship last year. They have a lot more experience than our linemen. Let’s go find Coach Adams and figure out what plays we have that will work against them.”

“Yeah, you’re right,” Jay agreed. The two of us headed for Coach Adams and Anders to discuss what we needed to accomplish next time we had the ball.

Mitch Jackson had made an excellent punt, giving USC the ball on their 22 yard line. USC attacked our defense patiently. They mixed their runs and passes to keep us off balance. Their big offensive line kept Trevor and Bill Daugherty away from their quarterback. They ground their way downfield. We couldn’t stop them until they got into our red zone. Our defense forced them to settle for a field goal to bring the score to 27-10 USC’s favor.

I fielded the Trojans’ kickoff at our 1 yard line. I went straight up the middle. It seemed most promising. My wedge opened a small seam and I shot through it. One of USC’s second string linebackers was in my way. I faked left and went right. He missed the tackle but managed to catch my foot as I flew by. I sprawled down at the 41 yard line, getting swamped by USC tacklers from behind as I went down.

Coach Burton called for a wildcat play immediately. This time it was our base play. Greg snapped the ball to me and I followed Jay’s lead block to our right side. The corner covering Christian stayed with him as he headed deep. I tucked the ball securely away in my right arm and followed Jay’s block. I made the corner and sprinted about twelve yards downfield before the Trojans pushed me out of bounds.

Damian picked up five yards on a sweep to the right on the next play. Coach Burton called what we hoped would be a home run play for us next. We would repeat the brush off play where I had a touchdown called back on a penalty. The wrinkle was that Tanner and I would reverse roles.

I lined up at split end and Tanner was in the slot between me and Joe Cleveland. At the snap I ran a post route. Tanner ran an out, barely missing me as our paths crossed. Patrick Adams stayed with me. The nickel back got tangled up with Patrick and me, leaving Tanner alone as he sprinted for the sideline. Jay hit him in stride ten yards down field. Tanner raced down the sideline while I kept my two defensive backs occupied and out of the play. The free safety had started to help cover me originally. He managed to head back over and push Tanner out of bounds at the 22 yard line.

On the next play I ran a ten yard route. Jay pump faked at that point. Patrick bit on the fake as I broke to the inside. Jay drilled the ball to me before Patrick could recover. I spun free of his desperation tackle and sprinted for the end zone. The free safety and another defensive back couldn't catch me before I scored a touchdown. Andrew Perkins drilled the PAT. Score: 27-17 USC.

Our defense strived to hold back the Trojan juggernaut on the next drive. We did force them into a couple incompletions and a holding penalty but it didn't change the result. They forced their way down the field using fourteen plays to get into our red zone. We held them to another field goal. Score: 30-17 USC

There was a little more than ten minutes left in the game. The Trojan kicker boomed the ball deep into the end zone. I accepted the touchback. Jay tried valiantly to duplicate USC's drive. Damian got in a couple good runs. I caught two short passes. In the end the pressure was too much. Jay threw an interception when he tried to force the ball in to Christian against double coverage.

Coach Carroll and the USC team knew what to do now. They steamrollered over our tired defense with run after run. My offensive teammates and I could only watch helplessly from the sideline as any chance of victory vanished like smoke on a windy day. USC stuffed the ball into our end zone after fourteen plays that used eight and a half minutes. Score: 37-17 USC.

The Trojans left 1:37 on the clock. They sent three down linemen onto the field with eight pass defenders. USC blanketed deep routes and sideline routes to ensure that we got no quick scores. Jay finally had time to go deep. Unfortunately no one was open on deep routes. We had to take what we could get short and then try to make tacklers miss. I picked up two more completions on the final drive, an eighteen yarder and a 26 yarder.

Our drive ended with 0:53 left when USC did a delay blitz with a safety. He came off the left side after our blockers were all engaged. Jay didn't see him before he was hit in the back. The ball rolled free as my roommate crumpled to the ground. USC recovered the fumble. A couple kneel downs killed the remaining time on the clock.

The Trojan players and their 93,000 fans celebrated. My teammates and I wandered around the sidelines disconsolate. We simply weren't used to losing. This was the fourth loss I had lived through in twenty-nine games. It was worse for the seniors. This was

their fourth loss in forty-two games. They had been part of the undefeated national championship team their first year at Penn State.

ABC's sideline reporter caught up to me and asked to talk for a couple minutes. I was shocked when he reported that I had a career day that day. I knew I had handled the ball a lot but I didn't think it was that much. He told me the unofficial stats had me catching 13 passes for 183 yards and a touchdown; returning four kicks for 156 yards; one punt return for 12 yards and one carry for 12 yards. My total yardage for the day was 363 yards.

I told the reporter I would have happily traded all my yards for twenty-one more points for my team. I had nothing to celebrate since we had lost the game. I repeated that for two more reporters who caught me before I left the field.

I was heading inside to change when I felt someone tap me on the shoulder. I turned to find Patrick Adams behind me.

"Kyle? May I call you Kyle?" he asked politely.

"Sure, if I can call you Patrick," I replied.

"Pat will be fine," he said. "You played a hell of a game today Kyle. No one ever pushed me as much as you did. I felt like I was walking a tight rope all day."

"You walked the line well," I said. "I've never had such a frustrating day. I caught all kinds of balls but couldn't do anything with them. The only other person who managed to frustrate me so much was Aaron Morano."

"The 49ers pro-bowl cornerback?" Pat asked. "I'm from Frisco and love my Niners. I think you're giving me too much credit. He's an amazing player."

"I played against Aaron in high school and practiced against him every day in college," I replied. "You're definitely in the same class as Aaron when it comes to covering receivers."

Pat thanked me for the comparison. The two of us talked strategy for a couple minutes. Pat was one of the nicest guys I had met across the football field. We talked about Coach Carroll's strategy of doubling the other receivers and letting me in single coverage. It was counter intuitive but it worked since Pat managed to hold all my gains to short yardage. The two of us shook hands and exchanged e-mail addresses before we headed inside to change.

Inside I found out about Chip Brinton's condition. The doctor decided he had a minor concussion from the last hit that afternoon. He would be fine in a few days. He was fortunate that we had a bye week the following week. Jay was pretty banged and bruised from the beating he got from USC's linemen.

The coaches had us dress and hurry out to our buses for the trip to the airport. Our plane was doing a red eye – departing at 10:00 pm for the long flight back to State College. The flight attendants handed out sandwiches and drinks to everyone right after we took off. We ate and then went to sleep – as best we could on the cramped plane.

Our plane landed in State College a few minutes after six o'clock on Sunday morning. We loaded up in our blue buses and headed back to campus. I was touched by the turn out of people to greet us outside the Lasch Building when we pulled into the parking lot. There were nearly five hundred die-hard fans outside when we stepped off the buses.

I expected to see Kelly there. She had promised to meet me when we got back from LA. About a dozen girlfriends did make it but not Kelly. I spotted Bev greeting Christian as the crowd dispersed.

“Hey Bev, have you seen Kelly?” I asked. Bev chuckled.

“You won’t be seeing her this morning,” Bev explained. “She and Jen came back to the apartment about 3:30 this morning from some party. She’s back there sleeping it off.”

“Thanks Bev,” I replied. She went back to consoling her boyfriend. I had a hard day but at least my statistics looked good. Poor Christian was double teamed the entire game. He had two catches for 27 yards. It had been a very tough game for him.

Damian, Jay and I headed back to our apartment. Trevor and Steph headed for her apartment where she would have privacy to console her warrior. The other three of us went back to our apartment and went straight to our bedrooms. We tried to sleep on the plane but couldn’t. I stripped and hopped in bed. I needed a few minutes to get to sleep.

I reflected on what had happened in the game yesterday. There was an important lesson in the result. I had the biggest day of my career and still our team had lost and was outscored by more than a 2-1 margin. Everything had revolved around our lines. USC’s experienced offensive and defensive lines had dominated our talented but inexperienced lines.

Our team couldn’t go deep because our offensive line couldn’t protect our quarterback long enough. Because we couldn’t go deep, they could bottle up our attack and force us to take a slow methodical approach to scoring. Nearly every drive was sabotaged by penalties or other mistakes.

USC had moved the ball easily because they could get time for their QB to find open receivers. Their big experienced line made fewer mistakes than ours. They provided time Chip and Jay did not have yesterday.

I had the best day of my career. Damian had carried the ball 22 times for 102 yards. Wyatt Smith added another 52 yards. We could move the ball. None of it mattered in the end. The game was determined on the line, not anywhere else. I finally fell asleep reflecting on that fact.

I woke up sometime after one o'clock that afternoon. I headed down to the Mix to grab a sandwich for lunch and a newspaper. I ate my sandwich and perused the sports section.

Florida beat Louisiana Tech 41-3 on Saturday. The box score said Ed went five for eight for 68 yards and a touchdown in the rout. Notre Dame beat Brigham Young in a wild shootout 35-30. Jeremy was listed as having two sacks and eleven tackles in the game. Drew McCormick's West Virginia Mountaineers beat East Carolina 31-13. Drew had twelve carries for 51 yards.

Hal Long made all four PATs when Rutgers beat Howard 28-17. Jake Kring's Syracuse Orangemen beat Akron 21-17 with a last minute touchdown. The services of the backup quarterback were not required in the game.

I found a larger article on Delaware's game against Albany on the next page of college football coverage. Andy's team won a tough contest 17-10 against Albany. The box score said Andy had two catches in the game including a 27 yard one for a touchdown.

I sent off e-mails to my brother and friends congratulating them on their teams' victories. I found condolence e-mails from Andy and Ed when I logged on. I gave Kelly a call after that. Cindy reported that Kelly was still 'indisposed'. She would have Kelly call me when she was feeling better.

I went on line to find out how Matt Sauder, Dave Mitchell, Cody Stevens, Josh Strickler and the rest of my friends on my old high school team had fared on Friday night. The Wolverines opened their season by demolishing poor little Eastern 66-0.

The score surprised me. Coach Caffrey usually showed mercy to overmatched teams by pulling the first string before the score got too out of hand. I checked the box score and found out that Matt only played in two and a half quarters of the game, going 18 for 22 for 407 yards and five touchdowns passing. Dave Mitchell was the top receiver, catching seven passes for 171 yards and three touchdowns. Gary Harrison caught six passes for 102 yards and two touchdowns. Cody Stevens went over a hundred yards rushing and scored another of the first half touchdowns.

Coach Caffrey sent the second string in under Logan Mitchell in the third quarter. Eastern was either so demoralized or overmatched that our second string dumped another twenty-four points on them. It was a dominating and extremely encouraging start for my high school friends.

Kelly finally called around 4:30 in the afternoon. She was feeling horrible from her hangover. She went out with Mark and Jen last night to a party of a friend of Mark's was

throwing. She apologized for not welcoming me home from LA in the morning. We would catch up to each other on Monday at history.

I went out to the living room. Jay and Trevor were watching the afternoon Fox NFC game. Green Bay was playing in Minneapolis that afternoon. The game was almost a replay of last Sunday's game for my mentor. The Vikings ran the ball hard using Adrian Peterson. Zack Hayes' second start didn't go any better than the disaster last weekend against the Patriots. The Packer's running game was weak. Their offensive line was porous. Zack had to scramble on nearly every play to save his life. My mentor was getting a harsh introduction to the NFL.

We had to go over to the Training Table around half time. Zack had completed less than 50% of his passes, been sacked four times and thrown an interception. The Vikings were leading 24-6. I felt bad for my friend. We certainly could have used him behind center yesterday. Maybe we would have been able to beat USC.

I dismissed that thought. Those of us here at Penn State were responsible for righting our team. It didn't do us any good to think about what-might-have-beens. Zack was being paid millions of dollars to resurrect the Packers.

As I walked down to Pollock Commons I reflected on the various ways NFL coaches were using their young quarterbacks. Coach Bauder threw Zack in as starter immediately hoping he would be able to become the next Matt Ryan or Joe Flacco. Coach Baldwin in Denver put Brady Rasmussen in as his #2 quarterback. He brought in a thirty-seven year old journeyman quarterback to run the team this year until he felt Brady was ready to play.

Pete Cochran from Michigan was buried at #3 QB for his team. He was expected to spend most of his time inactive this season. Elijah Carter from Florida was on the same career path as Brady. Play backup and learn from the starter until he was ready to play. Time would determine which of the four coaches had the right idea about how to develop an NFL quarterback.

Coach Burton called a team meeting at the Lasch Building after dinner. He reviewed and graded our team's performance yesterday. Not surprisingly the grades were generally unsatisfactory. The defensive backs, Damian and I were the only ones to get passing grades. Coach Burton complimented me on tying Freddie Scott's school record for most receptions in a game. Freddie set the record against Wisconsin in 1995.

Coach Burton challenged that the rest of the team follow 'Coach' Martin's example. I could have done without that reference. Thankfully most of the guys on the team knew I was taking the loss just as hard as anyone. I told everyone around me that Coach Burton's praise was undeserved. We lost so I didn't play well enough. Every one of us needed to dig deep and do better next game.

Coach Burton announced that we would concentrate on our fundamentals for the next week – hitting, blocking, tackling and ball handling. We needed to improve in all those areas if we expected to have a top 25 team. Coach Burton let us know that the polls dropped us from #13 to #18 after our loss. USC climbed up to #4 in the nation.

I went over and spent an hour with Kelly after I was done with football for the evening. Kelly had mostly recovered from her hangover. She swore that she would never drink so much again for the rest of her life. I didn't comment when she said it. I just prayed that she would follow her vow.

I met Kelly outside room 215 in the Thomas Building before our history class. We talked for a couple minutes before we headed inside. Both of us were surprised to find a grad student up front.

“Dr. Brennan is leading an Army tour of Antietam this weekend,” she explained. “She arranged for a guest lecturer for today’s class. Unfortunately he is sick in bed. Today’s class will be cancelled. Dr. Brennan sends her apologies and says she will see all of you on Wednesday.”

“Well, now what do we do?” Kelly asked.

“I have an empty bedroom back at my apartment,” I said. “We could go back for some afternoon delight.”

“Ahh... tempting,” Kelly responded. “...but I have a ton of work to do on my paper for News Media Ethics. I think I’ll go over to Pattee to do more research.”

“I understand,” I replied. “I love you,” I added as I gave her a kiss.

“I love you too,” Kelly said before she returned the kiss. “I’ll catch you for lunch tomorrow.”

“It’s a date,” I said as Kelly headed down the hall for the library.

I walked back Pollock Road to my apartment. I decided to chill out and listen to a little music for awhile before going over to the Lasch Building to study video of our next opponent, Illinois.

I opened the door to my apartment. Surprisingly, the hallway and living room were dark. I heard a groan come from the living room. Another groan drew my attention to the couch. The curtains were drawn, but enough light filtered around them to allow me to see. I stopped, stunned at the sight that confronted me.

Two pale white ass cheeks were a few feet in front of my face, pumping the biggest cock I had ever seen into a black ass. I stared, taking in more details. My roommate Damian as folded in two with Billy Robinson on top of him. Damian had a pillow propping his ass up to provide better access. Damian's knees were pressed up against his shoulders. Billy's arms straddled Damian's shoulders, helping hold his upper body up. Damian's calves and feet were pushed out to their sides. They kissed while Billy.... uh... Billy fucked Damian. I stared at them for seconds.

They were too wrapped up in their coupling to notice me. I retreated, quietly shutting and locking the door as I left. I wandered around campus, trying to process what I had seen.

My roommate, and one of my closest friends at school was taking it up the ass! How had he hidden this fact from me for two years? The guy's a queer - a fucking faggot! I'd showered at the Lasch building with him. I'd been naked a million times in front of him. What the fuck did that mean?

The walking helped me calm down a little. Who was I to judge him? I'd taken a cock up the ass myself last spring. I had questioned whether I might be gay or bi back then. Maybe this wasn't what it looked like. I needed to sit with Damian and talk.

I walked more. My brain was fixated on the sight of Billy's pink cock driving into my roomies' gut. It looked huge, maybe 10 inches long and at least 2 1/2 inches across - far thicker than Mark's cock. I remembered ruefully, the cock I had taken up my ass.

I went over to the Lasch Building in a daze. I set myself up for video study and started working. I only half saw what was playing on the video. My mind was mostly occupied with my dilemma. What in God's name was I going to do?

The first thing I decided I needed to do was clean up my language. My parents would be horrified if they heard me say the words I had been thinking this afternoon. Queer, faggot, homo - Those words were not supposed to be in my vocabulary. Mom had grounded me for a week in seventh grade when I called a playmate a faggot in anger one afternoon.

My counselor Tom had made an impression on me too last spring. It just wasn't proper to use such crude terms. I remembered all the times Damian had helped me when I had too much to drink. In the past two years he had become as close a friend as I had in the world. What did it matter if Damian was gay? He was still the same guy that had been my friend for two years. I said nothing to Damian during practice.

Coach Burton was as good as his word at Monday's practice. We worked exclusively with drills on tackling, ball handling and blocking. The team went to work enthusiastically. I think all of us understood what Coach Burton was talking about last night. We HAD to eliminate the small mistakes and play fundamentally sound football if we were going to stop the penalties, sacks and turnovers so we could win games.

During practice Coach Adams called all the receivers over for one-on-one conferences. When I was beside him Coach Adams said, “I’d like you to evaluate your performance on Saturday ‘Coach’ and tell me what you are going to do to improve.”

“I’m not being conceited Coach, but I’m not sure that there is a lot I can do that would have changed the outcome of the game,” I replied. “I’ve been thinking this through since Saturday night. I think I did a good job getting open on the short and medium routes we ran. I believe I could have gotten open deep too, if we had the time to run those routes. One thing I came up with is that I need to improve my yards after the catch.”

“Do you think that would have changed the game?” Coach Adams asked.

“Not really,” I responded. “This game hinged on the lines. Our defensive line couldn’t generate enough pressure to force USC to make mistakes. Our offensive line couldn’t protect Chip and Jay long enough for us to spread the field.”

“That is an interesting perspective coming from a wide receiver,” Coach Adams said.
“Anything else?”

“I’d like to work with Christian and Tanner a little bit,” I said. “I can show them some of the things I’ve learned to do to beat double coverage. I suspect other teams may try to defend us the same way as USC did.”

Coach Adams chuckled. “We football coaches do like to imitate others who are successful. I would bet you are right that we’ll see you single covered again. Will it work for other teams?”

“I don’t know,” I replied. “USC got so much pressure on the QB that we couldn’t go deep like normal. Adams is fast, an excellent man to man corner and a superb tackler. I don’t know if anyone else can duplicate what he did. He’s the best cornerback I’ve faced in six seasons. The last time someone covered me that well was in the playoffs when I was a freshman in high school.”

Coach Adams laughed. “We both know what happened with the cornerback. He had a stellar career at Penn State, was drafted by the 49ers and made the pro bowl as a rookie. They don’t make many like Aaron Morano.”

“No they don’t,” I agreed.

“Be prepared to talk about your techniques at the next receiver’s meeting,” Coach Adams said. “I think it would benefit everyone to hear how you manage to get free so often when you’re doubled.”

“You got it Coach,” I agreed.

Anders Voight grabbed me as I was leaving the Training Table after dinner.

“You impressed the hell out of Coach Adams this afternoon,” Anders said as we headed outside for the Lasch Building. “He was expecting to need to deflate your ego after your record setting day on Saturday. Instead he said, and this is a direct quote, ‘The kid gave me a cogent analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of his game; pinpointed where our team fell apart; and suggested remedies to improve himself and the other receivers. Damn! This guy makes my job easy.’”

“I’m glad he is happy,” I said. “What do you think of being one of the coaches?”

“I’m having fun,” Anders replied. “I get a different perspective on football as a coach. It’s challenging and I enjoy it.”

“I’m glad you’re here too,” I said. “Do you think you might make it a career?”

“I doubt it,” Anders said. “...but I’ll keep doing this since I can’t play anymore, and while Coach Burton is paying my grad school tuition.”

Coach Schroeder and Coach C led their respective squads through a video review of our game against USC. They dissected the game play by play – warts and good things alike. I was a little surprised at how many positives the coaches identified as we reviewed the video. The review took nearly two hours.

I gave Kelly a call after I finished at the Lasch Building.

“Honey do you have fifteen minutes to spare?” I asked when my lover answered her cell phone.

“Sure, what’s up?” Kelly replied.

“I’ve got a dilemma and need some advice,” I replied.

“Come on over,” Kelly replied. I hopped in my trusty VW Golf and drove over to the Loft Apartments. Kelly met me on the front porch outside her apartment.

“Hey sweetie, what’s up?” Kelly asked sweetly. “Come inside so we can talk.”

“No, let’s go for a walk around the complex,” I suggested. “I think the world of Jen, Cindy and Bev but I can’t talk about this in front of them.”

“What is it?” Kelly asked as she descended the steps to meet me. We followed the sidewalks along the parking lot towards the back of the apartment complex.

“This is something you have to promise me not to reveal to a single person,” I said. “It’s huge and it would be a mess if word ever got out.”

“OK, I can keep a secret,” Kelly agreed. “What is it?”

“After history was cancelled this afternoon I went back to the apartment,” I explained. “When I got back I walked in on Damian having sex in the living room.”

“That’s embarrassing but not a big deal,” Kelly said. She stared into my tense face. “It wasn’t Melanie!”

“No it wasn’t,” I agreed. “It was Billy.” Kelly wrinkled her brow in confusion.

“Billy?” Kelly said. It took a couple seconds for the meaning to become clear. Kelly’s eyes grew wide. “You’re kidding! You don’t mean that Damian’s....”

“Gay,” I said finishing her sentence. “It certainly looked that way this afternoon. I mean... there wasn’t much mistaking it.”

“Damian was on top of Billy... uh... you know... doing it?” Kelly said.

“Other way around,” I explained. Kelly shuddered at the image in her mind. “It certainly wasn’t coerced. Like a 160 pound art student could force a 240 pound running back who runs over Big Ten linebackers into doing anything against his will.”

“What did they say when you caught them?” Kelly asked.

“I was too shocked to say anything,” I explained. “I bolted immediately. Damian doesn’t know that I know.”

“What are you going to do?” Kelly asked.

“I don’t know,” I replied. “That’s why I wanted to talk to you. I wanted to use you as a sounding board for ideas.”

“OK,” Kelly agreed. “How do you feel about Damian being gay?”

“Surprisingly, I’m OK about it,” I responded. “A macho jock who plays football is supposed to be repulsed at the very idea of two guys together... but I’m not.”

“I hope not,” Kelly said. “After all, I’ve done the same thing... with girls.”

“I know,” I agreed. “I think the fact that I’ve accepted you doing that and uh... you know, the incident with Mark last spring, I guess I’m more empathetic than I might have been a year ago.”

“What are you going to do?” Kelly asked. “Damian’s kept this a secret for two years. I don’t think he wants the world to know about this.”

“No, you’re right. I’m sure he doesn’t,” I said. “Should I let him know that I know? Maybe it’s best if I pretend I don’t know and let things go along the way they do now.”

“It has to be hard pretending you’re straight to all your friends when you’re not,” Kelly observed.

“Maybe I should let him know that I’m OK with his being gay,” I said. “It this ever gets out he is going to need all the friends he can get. Anyway, it would be easier for to keep the secret if he has help.”

“You’ll talk to him?” Kelly asked.

“I think I owe him that,” I said. “He is my best friend on the football team and has pulled my ass out of more jams than I can count.”

“I think it would be best if you let Damian know you support him,” Kelly agreed. “Let him decide if anything else happens after that. I suspect he wants to keep this information under wraps.”

“I agree. I’m going to talk with him when I get back to our apartment,” I said. “See you for lunch tomorrow?”

“At the HUB at 12:15?” Kelly asked.

“It’s a date,” I agreed. Kelly and I exchanged good night hugs and kisses before I left. I got back to campus around nine o’clock. Jay and Trevor were watching TV in our living room when I returned.

“Where’s Damian?” I asked as I came in the door.

“Up in his room,” Jay replied. He and Trevor turned their attention back to the TV. I headed upstairs and knocked at his open door.

“Are you busy?” I asked. Damian was sitting at his desk poring through a textbook.

“I’m working on my econ,” he answered. “I can break away from it for a little.”

“Take a walk with me,” I said. “I’m going down to the Mix for ice cream. My treat.”

“I’m not real hungry,” Damian replied.

“Take the walk with me anyway,” I said.

“OK, whatever you say roomie,” Damian agreed. The two of us headed downstairs, outside and down the street towards Pollock Commons.

“What’s up?” Damian asked when we were away from our apartment.

“I uh.... well... my history class was cancelled today,” I stammered. This was harder than I expected it to be. “You know.... my class after lunch. I decided to head back to our apartment since I had some down time.” Damian didn’t follow where I was going yet. “You know, the class that I normally have at 1:35 – I ended up at our apartment instead.”

Damian took about two more steps before it registered with him. He stopped abruptly and stared at me, his eyes filled with fear. “You saw....” He stammered.

“It’s OK. I’m fine with it,” I said soothingly. “What I saw... it is what I thought it is, isn’t it? Are you gay?”

Damian hung his head and nodded agreement. After a few seconds he looked up and asked, “What are you going to do?”

“Whatever you need from me,” I answered. “Keep quiet. Shout it to the world. Anything or nothing. I’ve always got your back.”

“Really?” Damian asked hopefully. “I thought you detested gays. I’ve heard the way you talk in the locker room.”

“I didn’t understand before,” I explained. “You haven’t heard me talk like that in the last six or eight months, have you?”

“No, I guess not,” Damian agreed. He visibly relaxed when he realized I wasn’t upset at the news. “You told as coarse a homo joke as anybody when you started here. What changed?”

“I was young and ignorant,” I explained. “I never knew any openly gay or bi people in high school. I just went with the jock crowd that dissed queers and faggots. I guess I was aiming to fit in with my friends so I said the same things they said. I got to know my first two bisexuals last fall.” Damian nodded his understanding. “This can’t get repeated... to anyone.”

“You have my biggest secret,” Damian replied. “I can keep your secret too.”

“Kelly is a little bit bisexual,” I said. “She had an encounter one Saturday night when we had an away game. She likes that occasionally. She told me when we got back to campus. I forgave her and let her know I understood. Since then she has done things with the other girl half a dozen times – always while I was there.”

“You, Kelly and Jen?” Damian asked.

“You knew it was Jen?” I said.

“Mel told me she thought Jen went both ways,” Damian said. “So you got it on with Kelly AND her roommate. There is more to you than the straight and narrow guy ready to marry his college sweetheart.” Damian chuckled. “You do three ways.”

“...and a four way one time,” I explained. “That is part of why I understand about your... uh, lifestyle. Last spring Kelly and I got really drunk one Saturday night. You and Melanie...” I laughed. “You and Billy...” Damian nodded yes. “... were going at it in our room. Kelly and I ended up together with Jen and her boyfriend. Ummmm... things got pretty wild. Mark and I watched our girlfriends go at it. We each did our girlfriends. Finally we decided a threesome would be fun. Unfortunately I ended up as the filling in a Mark and Kelly sandwich. It wasn’t what I planned on.”

“You are full of surprises Kyle,” Damian said. “I never would have imagined you’d take up the....”

“It wasn’t voluntary,” I added quickly. “It was a misunderstanding.”

“Is this the weekend you disappeared for half of Sunday?” Damian asked.

“Yeah,” I agreed. “I split as soon as I got Mark off me. I came back to our room. You and Mel... heh-heh... You and Billy were going at it. I couldn’t interrupt you so I went to the study room to sleep. You guys lost track of me when Christian offered to let me finish sleeping in his bed that morning when he went to church.”

“So that was what your April funk was all about,” Damian said.

“Now you know why I wouldn’t condemn someone for sleeping with a guy,” I said. “I just wanted you to know that I know your secret and will do anything to help you. It’s got to be hard living in the closet this way.”

“It can be,” Damian agreed. “It’s the only way I know. I can’t come out to the world. I know the other 109 players on our team won’t feel the way you do. I want to be known as a good tailback not a gay tailback.”

“That’s fair enough,” I said. “Wouldn’t it be easier for you if Trevor, Jay and I helped you keep your secret?”

“Trevor knows already,” Damian replied. I was surprised Damian trusted Trevor with his secret but didn’t trust me. I didn’t manage to hide my surprise, “I didn’t tell him. He came to me a year ago, kind of like you are doing now.”

“That only leaves Jay,” I said. “You’d be able to invite Billy to stay over the way Trevor has Steph over, I do with Kelly and Jay does with his girl du jour. Wouldn’t that be easier?”

“I don’t know if I want to take a chance,” Damian said.

“Do you trust me?” I asked. He nodded yes. “I got Trevor and Jay to talk again after Steph dumped Jay for Trevor. Hell, I got them to room together. I can feel Jay out without breaking your confidence. Can I try it?”

“You’re sure you can do this without him finding out it’s me?” Damian asked skeptically.

“Have I ever done anything to hurt you?” I asked. Damian shook his head no. “I will be the soul of discretion, I promise.”

We crossed the street to Pollock Commons in silence. Damian added, “It is kind of a relief not to have to pretend to be straight around you. I’m glad we talked.”

“That’s what friends are for,” I agreed. We went inside, picked up ice cream sandwiches and headed back to our apartment.

“Could I ask one more question,” I asked as we crossed back to our block. Damian nodded yes. “What is between you and Melanie and Billy and Sarah? The four of you seem like such good couples.”

Damian chuckled. “We are good couples. We’re just not together the way everyone expects us to be. Mel and Sarah are lovers too. The four of us together make a good cover to keep my ummm.... gayness from being public knowledge.”

“I see,” I agreed.

“Mel and I have been doing this off and on since high school,” Damian explained. “It keeps the whispering down for her and for me. Mel was lucky. She found her soulmate in high school. I had to wait until the fall of freshmen year to find mine. There he was in our Art History 10 class. It was love at first sight for me.”

“I’m glad you Billy makes you happy,” I said.

The two of us walked back to our apartment enjoying our ice cream. Damian went back to his homework. I decided to work on mine too. My talk with Jay would wait until we had more time.

Things were hectic on Tuesday. I never got the opportunity to talk with Jay that day. I found a note in my locker after practice on Tuesday requesting me to meet Coach Burton at 3:30 pm on Wednesday. I figured it was about recruiting visits. It was.

Shawn Byrd, Brendan Hayden, Jon Stafford, Jay, Trevor and I assembled in Coach Burton's office Wednesday afternoon at the appointed time. We had five recruits visiting – four seniors and a junior.

Troy and Ian Davis were twins from Gettysburg. Troy played cornerback. Ian played wide receiver. Their father Glenn had played wide receiver at Penn State and had been Coach Burton's roommate. I chuckled to myself as Coach Burton continued describing the recruits that our chances of landing the Davis twins were pretty good.

Thomas Kowalchuk was a linebacker from Phillipsburg, Pa. The only junior in the group was Jacob Meyer from Landenberg, Pa. Jacob had torn up the Ches-Mont League last season. He was doing just as well this season. In two games against Kennett and Oxford, Meyer had gained close to 400 yards on the ground. The young man was an outstanding running back.

The last recruit was the prize of the group, if we could land him. Nicholas Holmes was from Frederick, MD and a Parade All-American quarterback last season. The kid was being recruited by us, Maryland, Virginia Tech, Florida and Miami. He led his team to a state championship last season. They were the #1 ranked high school team in Maryland again this season.

Coach Burton reviewed our duties as tour guides for the recruits and made sure we remembered the NCAA rules regarding visits. Coach had Jay and me stay after he dismissed the other guides.

“ ‘Coach’, I’d like you to take charge of the recruit group this weekend,” Coach Burton explained. “See Marie out front for a charge card that you can use for any expenses. Of course Meyer has to pay his own way at dinner.”

“Of course Coach,” I agreed.

“Nicholson, I want you to tutor Stafford on how to do the campus tour,” Coach Burton added. “You had plenty of experience doing that two seasons ago. Stafford is going to be our primary tour guide around campus when recruits visit during game weekends.”

“You got it Coach,” Jay agreed.

Coach Burton dismissed us after that. Jay and headed out of Coach’s office. We had a couple minutes before we needed to get dressed for practice. I motioned for Jay to follow me into one of the study rooms as we passed them.

“What’s up Kyle?” Jay asked after I shut the door.

“I heard a rumor that I thought you should know about,” I explained.

“A rumor?” Jay asked.

“We have a queer on the team,” I said. Jay’s eyes narrowed as he stared into my eyes. “Can you believe we’ve been changing and showering with a fucking faggot?” I purposely spouted that nonsense. I wanted to see if Jay bought into the offensive language.

“Why the fuck are you talking this shit?” he demanded heatedly. “I couldn’t give a God damn if there is a homosexual on the team. As long as he doesn’t make pass at me I couldn’t care less.” Jay glared at me. “Why are you asking this? I didn’t think you were this judgmental and bigoted.”

“You really don’t care if a member of our team is gay?” I asked.

“How many times do I have to say it?” Jay demanded. “IT… DOES… NOT… MATTER!” Jay shook his head. “I don’t want to go through this mess again.”

“Again?” I asked.

“I had a close friend back in high school who came out when we were seniors,” Jay explained. “The poor guy was vilified by half the school. Jocks, bible thumpers and the ‘in’ kids – they all abused the poor guy. I don’t want to go there again.” Jay glared at me and demanded, “Why are you trying to stir something up? What do you have against gays?”

“Absolutely nothing,” I answered. “I have no problem being around gays either. I needed to find out your feelings on the matter.”

“Why?” Jay asked.

“You’ll see soon,” I answered. I didn’t plan to out Damian myself. All I wanted was to explore Jay’s feelings and report back to Damian so he could decide what to do. It didn’t work out like I planned.

“It’s Damian, isn’t it?” Jay asked.

My eyes widened. “Ummmm… why would you say that?” I stuttered.

“I had my suspicions when he never dated when we were freshmen,” Jay explained. “It wasn’t any of my business so I ignored the possibility. When Melanie got to campus and they started dating I assumed I was wrong. She’s acting as his cover to keep suspicions down, isn’t she?”

“Yeah, she is,” I confirmed.

“Good,” Jay said decisively. “Damian’s too important to the team to get distracted by this. You haven’t told anyone else, have you?”

“I didn’t tell you or anyone else,” I insisted. “You guessed it.”

“Don’t have this conversation with anyone else,” Jay replied. “I don’t want anyone else ‘guessing’ when you talked with me the way you did. Who else knows about this?”

“Trevor,” I answered. “He’s known for a year.”

“Trevor?” Jay said before he smiled. “Trevor’s a good man. The secret is safe with him.”

Jay and I headed for the locker room to get ready for practice. We passed by Damian’s locker as we headed for our own. Jay gave Damian a nudge as he passed and quietly said, “No worries buddy. We have got your back.”

Damian got a confused look on his face as Jay breezed past him without saying anything else. “I talked with Jay,” I explained. “He’s cool with everything.” Damian gave me a relieved smile and said nothing. We got dressed for practice.

Damian, Trevor, Jay and I met later Wednesday night to talk about the fact that the three of us were all in on Damian’s secret. We told him Billy was welcome to stay over anytime he wanted, same as our girlfriends did. Damian thanked us for the offer, but he planned to continue staying over at Billy’s apartment on Saturday nights. He knew Stephanie and Kelly could keep his secret but none of us could be sure about the various girls who stayed overnight with Jay.

Stephanie found out the Cellblock was having an under 21 night on Friday night. Trevor, Steph, Kelly and I decided it would be a fun way to spend a rare Friday night together. Jay decided to get himself a date and join us. We invited Damian, Bill, Mel and Sarah. They had other plans.

The club was jammed when we arrived Friday night. Trevor was crowing about how this would be the last time he needed to wait for an under-21 night to go to this club. His birthday was nine days away, on September 27th. The rest of us had some time to wait. Steph’s birthday was November 13th, Jay’s birthday was December 2nd, Kelly’s was January 9th, and finally mine was on July 9th.

We found a couple tables, ordered drinks and waited for the show to start. Things started up a few minutes later. We danced for a couple hours, enjoying the music and each other’s company. It was a fun evening. The six of us decided to head back to our

apartment for nightcaps after we finished dancing. We relaxed in our living room, having a couple beers apiece before we headed for bed.

Trevor and Stephanie headed to bed first. Jay's date, Molly Reed, decided to spend the night too. Jay and Molly headed upstairs. Kelly and I locked up and retired to my bedroom. We took full advantage of our opportunity to make love that evening – twice. It was wonderful to enjoy each other without being drunk. Kelly and I fell asleep cuddled together.

Trevor, Jay and I got up earlier than normal for a quiet Saturday morning, around ten o'clock. The three of us had an appointment with Coach Burton and this weekend's recruits. Steph, Kelly and Molly got up too. I made breakfast for everyone before we split. The girls headed back to their apartments. Jay, Trevor and I headed for the Lasch Building.

Coach Burton was standing in the reception area when we got there talking with the father of one of the recruits. The three of us had seats to wait until Coach summoned us. We realized as soon as we saw identical twins sitting at the other end of the reception area. Coach was talking with his college roommate, Mr. Davis.

That explained why he was out here in the reception area already. Normally Coach let Marie or an assistant handle greeting the recruits and their parents. It made quite an impression when you were ushered into the Coach's office and you saw him sitting behind that big desk. At least it made a big impression on me when I first met Coach Paterno. The feeling of having someone this important focusing his attention on you for the weekend was a huge ego boost for a recruit.

Coach Burton introduced us to Mr. Davis and his sons Troy and Ian. The boys were excited when they were introduced to us. We talked with them while we waited for the other recruits to arrive. Jacob Meyer, the running back from Chester County arrived next with his parents. Nick Holmes and his mom were the last to arrive. I was impressed with Holmes. He was only an inch shorter than me and probably weighed close to my 208 pounds. He was a big guy for a quarterback.

Coach Burton invited the recruits, parents and guides into his office for a brief overview of the weekend. Coach Czarwinski and Coach Schroeder sat in on the meeting. Coach Burton took about twenty minutes to introduce the boys to our program and why they should be a part of the Nittany Lions. Coach summoned the position coaches for the recruits' position and our drivers – Anders Voight and his defensive grad assistant counterpart Kevin Pavlowski.

Coach lined up a private dining room at Damon's Grill on College Avenue north of University Drive. The arrangements allowed us a choice of two meats from the menu. I took half a rack of ribs and some beef brisket. They were delicious.

The restaurant was near Kelly's apartment. Since I had to drive over to pick up Kelly when we went out to dinner, it would make sense to add this restaurant to our list of places to eat. In the past the two of us usually stuck to places in walking distance of our former dorms since we were familiar with them.

Coach Peterson, our quarterbacks coach, focused his attention on Nick Holmes and his parents. It would be quite a coup if we could sell Nick and his family on coming to Penn State. Nick seemed brash, bordering on cocky. I was curious if the kid could back up his attitude on the field.

Anders and Kevin drove the group over to Beaver Stadium after lunch for a workout. I understood what Coach Burton was doing. We easily could have done the workout at our practice fields but that wouldn't be as impressive. Recruiting would be so much easier if we could get the kids thinking about the six undefeated teams, the three national championship teams and all the hall of famers who played there.

Coach Burton talked for a couple minutes with the recruits, telling them about how he felt thirty years ago when he first stepped onto this same field with Coach Paterno as a recruit just like them. I saw Troy and Ian's dad Glenn nodding his head as Coach spoke. It was a good speech. It would have sold me on Penn State if I wasn't already committed to the school.

Coach had the recruits warm up and then do sprints for time. All five were impressive. Troy and Ian were the fastest of the group, coming in a little under 4.4 seconds in the 40. Jacob Meyer came in around 4.5. Tom Kowalchuk and Nick Holmes were a bit over 4.6 seconds on the course. It was a nice performance by the five.

Coach asked three extra guys to attend the workout to help test the kids' abilities. Glenn Korbel and Colin O'Shea came to augment the quarterback ranks. Charlie Taylor, Jared Cantrell and Chris Richardson came to cover or to provide targets for the recruits to cover as we tested them.

Coach Burton assigned Shawn Byrd and me to work out Nick Holmes. Troy Davis got a big smile on his face when Coach Burton announced the assignments.

"Wow! That's good," Troy exclaimed. "I was afraid the coach would make me try to cover you."

"No, Coach Burton wouldn't do that to you," I agreed. "He wants to see your ability. He wouldn't learn anything pitting you against someone as experienced as me."

Coach continued announcing the pairings. Jon and Brendan worked out Jacob Meyer. Troy covered Jared while Jay passed to him. Chris Richardson covered Ian while Glenn passed the ball. Colin threw to Charlie while Tom demonstrated his cover skills.

Coach Peterson had Nick throw me some passes to get comfortable with my style while Shawn stood on the sidelines. Nick's delivery was quick and accurate. I briefed Nick on what to look out for while Shawn covered me.

Nick looked sharp passing to me. His throws were accurate with excellent velocity. Coach Peterson gave me a variety of routes to run for Nick. He completed nearly 70% of the passes which is excellent against a cornerback as talented as Shawn is. Part way through the demonstration he threw one pass a little behind me. Shawn slickly grabbed it for an interception. Nick didn't let it bother him at all. He completed five straight passes after the pick.

Shawn and I were both grinning ear to ear when we jogged back to rejoin Nick and the coaches after I caught the last pass. The coaches were smiling just as much as the two of us. Nick Holmes was the real deal. He deserved the five stars the recruiting services had given him.

I caught the tail end of Ian Davis' workout. He ran clean routes and caught the ball well. I thought the kid had some potential. Ian looked like he would be a good addition to our team.

Coach Burton thanked the boys for their workout and turned them over to us. Trevor, Shawn, Jay, Jon and I took them and their parents back to the Lasch Building and gave them a tour of the facilities. We made sure the recruits got a good look around the locker room, weight room, auditorium, team meeting rooms and players' lounge while we emphasized the academic counseling area, study rooms and training rooms to the parents.

Our timing was excellent. We "bumped" into Coach Paterno in the academic counseling area as planned. Both parents and recruits seemed to enjoy meeting and talking with the icon of Penn State Football. Glenn Davis and Coach Paterno enjoyed their reunion. Mr. Davis hadn't been back to campus for a few years.

I told the recruits the story about how Coach Paterno helped me as a freshman when I was having trouble adjusting to student life and had academic problems. I credited Coach with getting helping me get my act together and for my making the Dean's List every semester since then. Coach Paterno was more than a figurehead as the head of our academic support staff.

We took the group on a tour of campus after we finished at the Lasch Building. Our first stop was Shawn's apartment so the recruits could see how upper classmen lived. The apartment was immaculate as you would expect for a place where Christian Hunsecker and GJ DeLuca lived. Jon Stafford showed his dorm room after that.

I felt a little funny being back on the fourth floor of Hartranft again but knowing that I no longer lived in room 407. Jon and Marco had done an admirable job cleaning up the normal mess in their room. I knew the two guys well enough to know that the room wasn't always clean and spotless as it was that afternoon.

Mr. Davis got a laugh when he saw the dorm room. He and Coach Burton had shared Jon and Marco's room 412 almost thirty years ago when they were freshmen. Except for the computers on the desks and the refrigerator and microwave, the room looked the same as it did then.

We led the recruits and their parents on a tour of campus, showing them the HUB, the bookstore, a classroom in the Willard Building, the Pattee Library, Rec Hall and finally the Creamery. I used the university charge card to buy ice cream for everyone except Jacob and his family. Since Jacob was a junior they had to pay their own way.

Cell Phones came out as we walked back to the Lasch Building. Trevor called Steph, I called Kelly and Shawn called his girlfriend Jada. The girls planned to meet us downtown for dinner. We met Coach Burton, Coach Schroeder and Coach Czarwinski. The parents went out to dinner with the coaches while the recruits headed downtown to the Diner with us.

The girls drew some longing looks from the recruits. I didn't hold it against them. Trev, Shawn and I had extremely attractive girlfriends. I ordered a couple pounds of cheese fries for us to snack on while we made up our minds about our dinner orders.

Trevor suggested the guys would enjoy the Diner's stuffed macaroni and cheese. I told them the ham was delicious with the mac and cheese. Trevor insisted the sausage and mushroom was better. Ian and Troy were adventurous. Ian tried the ham stuffing while Troy went with Trevor's suggestion. The other guys all stuck to the more conventional half pound burgers.

Dinner was tasty. Conversation centered on our experiences here at Penn State. Trevor, Jay, Brendan, Shawn, Jon and I did our best to sell our university to the five recruits. The guys were interested and seemed receptive to our selling points.

My friends and I insisted the recruits had to try the grilled stickies while we were at the Diner. They enjoyed the sweet treats. We took the guys back to our apartment after dinner.

Damian, Billy, Melanie and Sarah had done most of the setup for the night's party before we returned from dinner. We told the recruits to relax while the rest of us finished preparations. I went over the ground rules with the guys before the party got started. I didn't want to drive any drunk high school kids back to the Penn Stater Hotel later that night. The guys agreed to my rules.

Trevor, Jay and I introduced the recruits to team members at the party. They were soon engrossed in conversation with my teammates. Kelly grabbed a beer as the party got underway. She brought one for me too. I passed. I had to drive the kids back later that evening.

Kelly's brother Mike and his roommate Jim came by our party. Plenty of girls came for our party. Jay organized music for the party, as usual. He had excellent tastes that pleased our guests. Damian, Billy, Melanie and Sarah put out tasty hors d'oeuvres for everyone. Trevor, Steph, Kelly and I played hosts and hostesses, making sure everyone had a good time and things stayed under control.

Ian and Troy Davis told us some great "Uncle" Bob stories about Coach Burton. Coach and Mr. Davis were best men at each other's weddings. The Davis family and the Burton family remained close friends over the years. The twins filled us in more about Coach's daughters, who we barely knew. Ashley, the elder daughter, was the same age as Ian and Troy. Jenna was fourteen and a freshman in high school this year.

We saw Ian and Troy's "Aunt" Beth, Coach's wife, around the Lasch Building or at team functions occasionally. Coach kept his two teenage daughters carefully under wraps. I didn't blame him. If I had daughters I probably wouldn't want them around a bunch of horny college football players either. We enjoyed the twins' tales. It showed us a side of Coach Burton that we rarely saw.

Jay hooked up with Molly Reed early in the evening, which was not unusual. Jay and Molly were together three out of five weekends this fall including the past two nights this weekend along with half a dozen dates or hook ups in the spring. I could see the two of them possibly getting together as a couple. That would be good for Jay.

Kelly and I enjoyed each other's company, mingled as relaxed as the party went on. Kelly grabbed a second beer around 9:30. She was managing to keep her drinking under control.

Mike and Jim both talked up the available babes at the party, hoping to score. Mike seemed well on his way when I noticed him sitting on the end of the couch with a cute freshman on his lap trying to devour his tongue.

Tom Kowalchuk was engrossed in a conversation with Joe Ricci and Jarrell Cook. Ian and Troy Davis, Jacob Meyer and Nick Holmes all were engaging lovely coeds in conversation, intent on getting some action too. Nick was the only recruit having any success. After half an hour of flirting, Beth Naylor evidently decided a five star recruit was nearly as good as a player on our team. Beth led him upstairs for some extracurricular activities in bed.

The party was going well and Kelly was behaving herself. My life seemed copacetic for once. That all changed when Kelly's cell rang. My stomach churned and I hung my head when Kelly said, "Hey Jen, what's up?" Kelly's face lit up as she listened to her roommate. "Cool!" she commented. "Yeah that's great. I'll see you." Kelly added before ending the call. I steeled my nerves for what I knew was coming.

"Kyle, Jen and Mark invited us to a great party over on South Barnard Street," Kelly said sweetly. "We should go."

“Kelly, I can’t,” I protested. “I’m in charge of the recruits tonight. I have to deliver them back to their hotel in an hour.”

“Jay and Trevor will take care of the kids,” Kelly countered. She wrapped her arm around mine and tugged. “C’mon Kyle. It’ll be fun.”

I disengaged my arm from hers. “NO, I can’t!” I insisted. “I have responsibilities to the team. I’m not going across town to another party.”

“FINE!” Kelly snapped. She stalked away, heading for the kitchen. I knew it was going to be a long night. Kelly would stay pissed at me, drinking too much again because she was mad at me for not taking her to the other party. I was going to spend a lonely night sleeping beside a wasted girlfriend.

I’m a normal college guy and I’d like to get laid whenever I can. My prospects were looking real dim now. Besides my prospects, I truly was worried about Kelly. She was binge drinking regularly this semester. She was going to hurt herself or get in serious trouble if she didn’t cut this out. How in the hell do I get through to her?

I gave Kelly space for awhile, watching things unfold. Maybe she’d finally follow one of her Sunday, post binge resolutions to cut back on her drinking. I mingled with other guests while I waited to see how Kelly behaved.

Mike O’Keefe managed to talk the freshman he was with into spending the night in his room. His roommate Jim talked with Damian and me. We agreed he could spend the night in Damian’s room so Mike could get some privacy.

Beth Naylor dragged a slightly abused and very happy Nick Holmes back downstairs. She rejoined her friends triumphantly. I guess she was happy that she would be able to tell people in the distant future that she had slept with a Nick if he made it big in college or the NFL.

Ian and Troy Davis didn’t seem to mind that they didn’t get to bed a chick. They both had girlfriends back home. Jacob Meyer was put out that he didn’t score too. The girls at our parties now weren’t into kids with peach fuzz on their face the way Johara was four years ago when I first visited campus.

Kelly was socking away the booze as the night wore on. I intercepted her in the kitchen after about four more beers when she went for another.

“Don’t you think you’ve had enough tonight?” I asked.

“Enough? Hell no!” Kelly snapped.

“You told me last Sunday that you were going to cut down on the beers this weekend,” I said. “You’re going to feel horrible tomorrow morning.”

“I don’t need no fuckin’ temperansh’ lectures from you!” she snapped. “You go play the big football hero and let me have my fun.” She grabbed another beer from the cooler and stalked away. I knew enough to let her go. I wasn’t going to be able to reason with her when she was like that.

Trevor and I gathered up the recruits about 11:15 and loaded them on our cars. Ian, Troy and Nick rode with me. Tom and Jacob rode over to Innovation Park with Trevor. We dropped the guys off at the Penn Stater Hotel a couple minutes before the 11:30 time we promised their parents. All the kids were safe, mostly sober and happy after their evening experiencing college night life.

I looked around for Kelly when I returned. She was nowhere to be found. I tried calling her cell phone. Stephanie stopped me as it was ringing. “I put Kelly to bed in your room,” she explained. “I found her passed out on the couch.”

“Thank God!” I said. “That’s a relief. I was afraid she was wandering around State College looking for the party Jen called about.”

“You really need to have a talk with her Kyle,” Steph said. “Her drinking is getting out of control.”

“I have talked to her,” I replied. “I’ve talked and talked and talked. She isn’t listening to me.”

“Would you like me to say something?” Steph asked. “I don’t want to get in the middle between the two of you, but I worry about my friend.”

“Please talk to her,” I said. “Kelly agrees with me Sundays when we discuss her cutting back on her drinking. Come Saturday night, that conversation is completely forgotten. Maybe it will get through to her if it comes from another girl instead of from me.”

“I’ll see what I can do this week Kyle,” Steph promised.

“Please do,” I answered. “Any help will be greatly appreciated.”

The party started to wind down around 12:30 as guests and couples departed for bed or for more privacy. Jay, Molly, Trevor, Steph, Jim and I cleaned up the apartment before turning to bed.

I found Kelly passed out on my bed, still dressed from the party. I stripped her down to her panties and put one of my T-shirts on her. She didn’t rouse at all. I stripped down to boxers and joined my girlfriend in my bed.

Kelly was soft and warm to cuddle with. My boner popped from the intimate cuddle. All I could do was roll away and jerk off to relieve my tensions. I cuddled with Kelly again and fell asleep.

I woke suddenly to the sound of someone retching. Kelly was sitting on the end of the bed throwing up. I helped my semi-comatose girlfriend upstairs to the shower so I could clean her up. I cleaned the mess on my floor and changed the sheets on my bed yet again before putting Kelly back to bed. This was definitely NOT how I expected Saturday nights to go in my junior year. Something had to change!

Chapter 46

I was dead tired when my alarm woke me at seven am Sunday morning. Kelly was sound asleep. I hustled upstairs and got the shower before Trevor or Jay. The three of us were expected to have breakfast with the coaches, parents and recruits this morning.

Trevor and I both left our cars in the parking lot by our apartment instead of returning them to the East Parking Deck. Nobody got ticketed for parking there on a weekend. Trevor volunteered to drive the three of us over to the hotel for breakfast.

The breakfast at the hotel was tasty. Everyone loaded up and caravanned back to the Lasch Building after breakfast. The recruits were going to get their one on one interviews with Coach Burton. The guides were assigned to keep the recruits entertained while they waited their turn.

I took on Nick Holmes in a game of pool while the other relaxed, played foosball or video games. Nick was about the same skill level as me, not too bad but not an expert. The game was friendly with an edge of competition.

“What did you think of Penn State?” I asked.

“I was very impressed,” Nick answered. “You have great facilities here. The stadium is great. I wish I had been able to visit on a weekend when you guys played a game. It must be a real trip to stand in there when it’s full.”

“It is amazing,” I agreed.

“I like Coach Burton,” Nick continued. “The system you run here would suit me.”

“You have a good arm,” I agreed. “I think you would be very successful with the kind of offense we run here. I enjoyed working out with you yesterday.”

“You’re a hell of a receiver Kyle,” Nick answered. “I’d love to play with you if I came here. Of course, that won’t happen given our ages.”

“You met Bruce and Brian last night,” I countered. “Brian is just as fast as me and Bruce is nearly as fast. Our team will still have killer wide receivers after I graduate. Don’t let me stop you from signing up to play here.”

“No, I’m not,” Nick answered. “I know about Henson’s reputation. I saw one of the touchdowns MacCauley made last season when I was watching you guys on TV.”

“Do you think you’d sign here if Coach Burton offers you a scholarship?” I asked.

“Offer?” Nick said chuckling. “He offered me a scholarship last June. I have had about twenty-five scholarship offers from schools since last May. I visited Virginia Tech, Maryland and Florida already.” Nick lowered his voice a little. “The only reason I visited Maryland was to make my mom happy. I’m not going there. I liked VT when I visited but I don’t know if my style fits what they do. Florida and your school fit my strong points best.”

“We’re closer to a pro style offense,” I said. “If you have designs on an NFL career Penn State might be a better choice.”

“That’s just the opposite of what one of the Gator quarterbacks said last weekend,” Nick replied. “Fritz said the NFL game is evolving towards more mobile quarterbacks. Florida is wide open. He says it will give me a leg up being successful in the NFL.” Nick caught the smile on my face when he mentioned Ed Fritz. “That’s right, you know him don’t you? You’re both from Pennsylvania.”

“Ed and I have been best friends since kindergarten,” I explained. “He lives a couple doors down from me back at home. I wouldn’t pay any attention to his prognostications.”

“Don’t worry about Florida,” Nick replied. “They have a log jam at quarterback. Fritz and Walker have the spot for the next two years. They have a red shirt freshman and two true freshmen in the wings. I could wait until my fifth year in their program to be the starter.” I nodded in agreement. “Of course you guys aren’t a lot better. I know I’d have no chance taking the job from Brinton or Nicholson.”

Nick nodded towards Jon Stafford. “I’d have to beat out Stafford as a red-shirt sophomore to start after your current guys. He’d have an extra year of experience. If I don’t beat him out I have to wait until my fifth year.”

“I see your dilemma,” I agreed. “Of course eighteen months ago Chip Brinton never imagined himself starting now. You would probably do well if you picked the school that is the best fit for you and let your talent take it from there.”

“True,” Nick agreed. “You make a good point.”

Nick and I continued talking football philosophy while he waited for his turn with Coach Burton. I found him to be a real student of the game. It made sense when I found out his football heritage. His dad was the long time head coach of Linganore High School, one of the high school powerhouses in Maryland football.

Nick promised me he would give Penn State a fair consideration if he found the same log jam at quarterback when he visited Miami in two weeks. I wished him the best of luck when he and his parents headed inside to meet with Coach Burton.

Ian and Troy Davis were excited when they came out to the player's lounge after their meeting with "Uncle" Bob. Both boys gave their oral commitment to attend Penn State. The twins were on track to graduate from high school early. They promised to see me in January.

Tom Kowalchuk didn't get good news from Coach Burton. He was offered a spot on next year's team as a preferred walk-on. Jay and I counseled him to be patient and to play hard this season. He could raise his stock by playing well now. Trevor and I assured him that Penn State had a long history of walk-ons who became key members of the team – Jordan Norwood, Josh Hull, Graham Zug and of course my roommate Damian.

Jacob Meyer wasn't offered a scholarship since he was only a junior. Coach Burton told the young man to keep in touch and play hard this fall. Coach Burton said he would like Jacob to keep in touch. They could talk about a scholarship after the fall season was over if he keeps playing the way he started out this month.

I stopped by the Mix on the way back and picked up brunch supplies and a Sunday paper. Kelly was in the shower when I returned to my apartment. Trevor and Steph headed downtown for brunch soon after I returned.

Kelly was subdued and suffering from her hangover. I made toast and coffee for her while I made eggs and sausage for myself. We settled in for an afternoon of reading the Sunday paper. I did not bring up anything about Kelly's drinking. My bringing the subject up only brought on an argument. I was hoping Steph could get through to Kelly.

Steph called me Tuesday evening to let me know she invited Kelly over for dinner Wednesday evening. She would talk with Kelly about her excessive drinking. Hopefully a woman's point of view would help the message reach my lover. Steph promised to call me when dinner was over and let me know how the talk went.

That proved unnecessary. My cell phone rang as I was walking to the Lasch Building from the Training Table that evening.

"How dare you send someone to lecture me about drinking!" Kelly shouted through the phone. "Are you too chicken shit to talk to me on your own?"

"I've tried too..." I said before she interrupted me again.

"I'M NOT SPEAKING TO YOU!" Kelly shouted before clicking her phone off.

I was pretty dejected when I arrived at the Lasch Building. I needed Kelly to see reason. Of course it took me over a year of my friends talking, lecturing and badgering me before

I got the message that I can't drink so much at parties. I was going to need to be a very patient boyfriend until Kelly heard the message enough that it would sink in.

I called Steph before my receivers meeting started.

"Hey Kyle, it didn't go too w..." Steph started to say.

"I know," I said, cutting her off. "I just got chewed out by Kelly for involving you. I'm so sorry I got you I middle of this. It wasn't fair to you."

"Don't apologize Kyle," Steph said. "I wanted to help. Kelly's my friend and she is going over the top with her drink. Someone needed to say something to her. That's what friends do."

"Thank you for trying," I replied. "Where's Kelly at?"

"She out front of my apartment building waiting for a bus," Steph said. "Maybe you could help patch things up if you gave her a ride back to her place."

"I would if I could," I said. "I have a wide receivers meeting in two minutes."

"I guess I should have expected that," Steph said. "Trevor is meeting with Coach Atkins and the rest of defensive line now. I guess I'll see you later Kyle."

"See you Steph," I replied. "Thanks for trying."

Coach Adams had us reviewing the Illini secondary to make sure we all understood the opportunities we expected to see on Saturday in Champaign. The Illini defense was strong against the run but the secondary was suspect. Even Rutgers had lit them up passing before eventually fumbling away the potential winning touchdown at the end of the game. Our high powered passing offense should rack up a lot of yards and points against these guys – assuming we managed to cut down our own mistakes.

I left Kelly three messages on Thursday. She didn't return any of them. In the final one I asked her to forgive me and met me Sunday for brunch. I would treat her to a nice meal downtown.

We flew out to Illinois Friday morning, arriving after lunch. It was a gray, dreary day with a steady drizzle. The buses hauled us to the same hotel we stayed at two years ago. I was assigned Trevor as my roommate again. That was OK. I got along as well with him as did Damian and Jay.

We had time to relax and swim at the pool before dinner. The drizzle picked up after dinner, turning into a full blown rain storm. The local weather predicted that it would continue all night and Saturday as a big storm pushed in from the northwest. The high temperature was expected to be in the low fifties, with gusting winds and as much as two inches of rainfall on Saturday.

The coaching staff huddled immediately after dinner. They called a team meeting for eight o'clock. Our planned aerial offensive for tomorrow was put on hold. Coach Burton challenged the offensive line, the running backs and the tight ends that the game would probably rest in their hands. We would try some short passing too to keep the defense honest but Coach didn't expect we'd be able to complete the medium or deep passes in tomorrow's deluge.

My friends and I gathered in Jay and Damian's room for our traditional poker game before bedtime. All of us felt confident we could beat the Illini even if the weather was bad. Coach Burton set lights out at 10:30 that evening. The Illini's 2-2 record and our #13 ranking didn't excite the TV networks. Our game would be played at 11:00 am local time.

Trevor and I left a 6:30 am wake up call for Saturday morning. I flipped on the Weather Channel while Trevor showered. The forecast hadn't changed since last night. We could expect heavy rain throughout the day with gusting winds. The current temperature was 33, just four degrees above the record low temperature for September 24th. The temp would be around 48 degrees at game time and might creep up to 55 by the end of the game. The weatherman warned of extensive flooding was expected in low lying areas.

The team had breakfast at 7:30, checked out of the hotel and headed over to Memorial Stadium. The training staff had us wear Under Armour under our uniforms to help keep us warm. The seats were filling quickly when we came outside to try to warm up. Illini fans were under orange and white umbrellas or dressed in orange slickers as they awaited the start of our contest. We loosened up and prepared for the game but never really got "warm." It was freezing in that damn rain.

Our team won the coin toss to begin the game. With the way the wind was gusting we couldn't see that defending either end zone would be an advantage. We elected to receive the kickoff. I lined up down on our five yard line and waited to receive the cold, wet rock.

The kicker boomed the ball downfield to me. The wind pushed it to my left. I continued drifting that way, trying to follow the flight of the ball as it fluttered. Thank God a gust pushed it across the sideline before it got to me. The referees gave us possession at our 40 yard line.

The conditions were just as bad as we expected. Tanner Riggs sat on the bench most of the game. Wes Kennedy, our seldom used fullback played nearly every down. Coach

Burton rotated in Damian, Wyatt Smith, Charlie Taylor and ET LeBlanc to pound out yards.

Illinois' defensive line was big and physical. This was football at its most elemental. Push and knock on the other team to gouge out yards. The contest was too evenly matched in the first half to suit me. Illinois scored the first touchdown. We replied with one of our own. We took the lead when we pushed down the length of the field and allowed Andrew Perkins to try a short field goal in these impossible conditions. I don't know how but Andrew managed to split the uprights. The Illini answered right back with a long drive that ended in another touchdown for the men in orange.

I felt mostly useless on the field. I blocked the cornerback covering me. I ran a few deep routes to draw off the defensive backs so they couldn't support against the run. Chip even threw to me on one of the deep routes when I was wide open. The ball fluttered and blew away from me across the field as I, the cornerback and free safety chased after it. It fell dead on the field.

I did manage to catch three short passes, two of which kept drives going. I caught a six yarder on third and five. I also caught a ten yard pass on third down and eight. The only punt I tried to handle was blown into the end zone by the wind.

Our coaches continued sending in fresh bodies to keep up the pressure on Illinois. Our team managed to push down and score a second field goal before the half came to an end. We were down 14-13 when we went inside to dry off and warm up.

Andrew Perkins kicked a low line drive for the second half kickoff. It skittered and bounced across the field, virtually uncatchable. The ball stopped down around the Illini 10 yard line. Their returner picked it up and was swarmed over by our cover team immediately.

Our warmed up defense was brilliant on the Illini's first drive. We stopped them for two yards each on the first two plays. They tried a sweep to our left on third down and six yards to go. Trevor knifed through the blocking and caught the tailback four yards behind the line of scrimmage, making a huge splash as he dropped the tailback to the soggy ground.

I went out for my second punt return of the game and waited at the mid field line. Their punter got the ball away cleanly just as the wind gusted. The wind blew the ball back towards the Illini goal. It landed at their 40 yard line and rolled in our favor. Joe Ricci downed the ball at their 35 yard line.

Damian and our offense drove the ball forward thirty yards on six hard running plays. We stalled at the Illini 5 yard line. Andrew Perkins came in and booted the ball through in spite of a gust the almost blew the ball wide right. Score: 16-14 Penn State.

Our fired up defense stopped Illinois after eight plays on their next drive. Christian couldn't field the punt when the wind blew it out of bounds at our five yard line. Our team wasn't able to drive the ninety-five yards for a score in these miserable conditions. We managed to pick up fifty-two before we punted the ball back. Mitch Jackson pinned the Illini down at their 7 yard line.

Miraculously Illinois managed to push out from their goal line out to mid-field. Illinois ran a play action pass at us. Tyler Madden bit on the fake, rushing up for unneeded run support. Denzel Hunt slipped when as he tried to tackle the receiver ten yards downfield. No one caught him before he ran into our end zone. Score: 21-16 Illinois.

Tanner Riggs managed to field the kickoff. He made a great return, slipping and skittering through the tacklers. He was dropped at our 38 yard line. Damian banged ahead for five yards on first down.

Coach Burton called for our wildcat offense. On this play the ball was snapped to Chip instead of me. I led Chip left, appearing to block for him. As the Illini linebacker knifed in to tackle Chip, he flipped the ball outside to me. I sprinted for the corner, ducked past Jared Cantrell's block and headed for the Illini end zone. Their free safety had a shot at me but I jumped over him when he dove for the tackle. He landed in a spray of water as I danced the last five yards into the end zone. Score: 23-21 Penn State.

Our defense rose up and stopped Illinois on their next possession, not allowing them a first down. We played keep away, smashing Damian, Wes, Wyatt and Charlie at the tiring Illini defense. We drove the ball seventy-eight yards but were unable to push in for the touchdown. Andrew's kick sailed wide right. It didn't matter. We had taken ten minutes off the clock, leaving the Illini five minutes.

Our defense yielded one first down before stopping our opponents. Their punt sailed out of bounds at our 41 yard line. We were satisfied to continue pounding the ball at the now demoralized Illini. We didn't score but we did run the clock out on the game.

Everyone was relieved to get inside to dry off, warm up and get the hell out of Champaign with a win. We did the necessary interviews, grabbed our box dinners and boarded the buses for the airport.

My contributions to our victory were modest: one touchdown run for 57 yards and six receptions for 58 yards. Damian was our work horse. The final stats credited my roomie with twenty-seven carries for 165 yards. Wyatt had another 95, Charlie had 83, ET had 36 and Wes had 32 yards.

Our late afternoon flight had us back in State College at the Lasch Center by midnight. A couple hundred hearty fans welcomed us home after our close brush with defeat. Jay and I helped Damian and Trevor limp back to our apartment. The two poor, beat up guys were going to spend a lot of time in the whirlpool on Sunday. We went to bed as soon as we got to our apartment.

I woke up around 9:30 am needing to go to the bathroom. I couldn't get back to sleep when I was done. I decided to chill and catch up on e-mails.

The first e-mail was from Kelly. She apologized for not speaking to me last week and agreed to meet me for brunch. I was to call her around 11:30 to see if she was ready.

I found an e-mail from my brother Andy. He told me about Delaware's 24-17 victory over Rhodes. Andy ran back a punt 89 yards to score a touchdown yesterday. He also caught two passes for 27 yards. Andy's punt return average was good. I checked the NCAA stat site to see how much yesterday's effort moved him up the leader's list. The site reported Andy was the ranked as the top punt returner in the nation with a 26.50 yard/punt average. I scanned down the list and found my 16.25 yards/punt return average tied me for tenth.

I flipped over to check kick returns. My 48.3 yards/kick return average was second in the nation behind a freshman from Texas. I did a double take when I looked closer at the name: Michael Johanson. Tex's 50.3 yard average beat me. Andy was down at #13 with a 30.1 yard average.

I clicked over to receiving yards. Even with my sub-par effort yesterday, I had 119.5 yards/game average which placed me fifth in the nation. Andy did not make the top one hundred.

That was a great showing for the Martin brothers and for our high school. The Wolverines took four spots in the top ten in three categories with three players. No wonder our team had two state championships.

I showered then headed down to the Mix for a breakfast sandwich and a newspaper. I settled down on the couch and pulled out the sports section. Ed's Gators won a wild contest at Alabama yesterday afternoon 35-34. Ed did not get to play.

Notre Dame beat Syracuse 34-10. Jeremy had an even dozen tackles and two sacks in the game. Hal's Rutgers Scarlet Knights beat Louisville 27-20. Hal made two of three field goal attempts in the game. Drew McCormick and West Virginia beat Connecticut 17-16. Drew had eight carries for 41 yards.

There weren't any surprises among the undefeated teams at the top of the polls: Florida, USC, LSU, Texas, Oklahoma, Ohio State, and Michigan – The usual suspects. Georgia Tech was still undefeated too. They beat Maryland 38-23 yesterday in College Park.

Boise State was undefeated. They won a lot of games out in the WAC but still didn't get much respect. Their 1-5 record in bowl games over the last six years didn't help at all.

Four one loss teams separated them from the undefeated big teams in the polls. They were ranked #12, one step up from us.

I sent off e-mails congratulating all my friends except for Jake Kring. Poor Jake was going to get a lot of condolence e-mails as his Orangemen played out their season. Jake was going to have his hands full if he won the starting QB job next season.

Trevor hobbled out of his room around eleven o'clock. The poor guy looked like he was an old man the way he limped and groaned as he moved. Damian wasn't in much better shape. I had a few aches from yesterday but wasn't too bad. Jay was stuck on the bench all day so he was in perfect health. Damian and Trevor had been two of the grunts who pounded out our win against tough opponents. Both of my friends took long hot showers to loosen up. They planned to spend most of the afternoon in the training room in the whirlpool trying to work out the aches.

I gave Kelly a call at 11:30 the way she asked. She was subdued when she answered.

"Can you forgive me forgive me for being such a pain in the ass last week Kyle?" Kelly asked meekly.

"You weren't sweetie," I replied. "I just worry about you and want the best for you."

"I know," Kelly agreed. "I wish I had taken your advice last night. I went out with Cindy, Jen and Mark. I had way too much to drink."

"I'm sorry dear," I said consolingly. "Do you still want to go out for brunch?"

"I don't think so," Kelly answered. "I'd rather have something at your place and then cuddle. We don't get enough time together."

"No we don't," I agreed. "How about soup and crackers?"

"That sounds good Kyle," Kelly agreed.

"I'll be over to pick you up in a few minutes honey," I said before I clicked off my phone.

Kelly and I stopped off at the Mix before returning to my apartment. I grabbed a sandwich and chips for myself and soup and crackers for my lover. I also picked up a half gallon of orange juice. I figured it would be good for Kelly and I knew it would be good for me. We enjoyed a relaxed lunch before we cuddled on the couch and spent half the afternoon reading the newspaper.

The second pair of aspirin and the light lunch helped my lover's hangover and attitude. By three o'clock she was feeling pretty good and more than a little frisky. The two of us took advantage of one of the few good points about our fights – the make-up sex. The

make-up sex that afternoon was amazing. The two of us were totally relaxed and felt closer than ever by dinner time.

Kelly and I watched the start of the Fox late afternoon football game. The Giants were out in Green Bay playing Zack's Packers. Eli Manning and the New York offense took Green Bay apart. Osi Umenyiora and Justin Tuck manhandled the Green Bay's o-line and beat the snot out of Zack. Mercifully we turned the slaughter off at five. I drove Kelly back to her apartment before I came back for my team dinner at the Training Table.

Most of our team caught the end of the Packers/Giants game in the player's lounge just before our team meeting. Zack's team lost 34-10. My mentor was having a brutal introduction to the NFL.

Coach Burton praised our team's flexibility in changing our game plan on short notice and praised our toughness for beating Illinois on the road in terrible conditions. Damian, Wes Kennedy, Greg Nowicki and Jibril Sloan drew special praise for the contributions towards victory – Damian for his hard running and Wes, Greg and Jibril for superb run blocking to get Damian and the other tailbacks room to run.

Coach reviewed our next opponent, Purdue. The Boilermakers had a perfect 4-0 record so far. They hadn't faced us, Ohio State, Michigan or Michigan State yet. They were not favored to beat any of those four teams. Their quarterback was a pocket passer with an excellent rating of 133.5. He had thrown eight touchdowns and five picks so far this year. The Boilermakers had a decent running game, averaging 4.6 yards a carry. Their play calling was evenly balanced between run and pass.

Purdue's defense was suspect. Little Eastern Michigan had thrown for five touchdowns in their loss to Purdue. The defensive line was strong against the run and got good pressure against the QB. The linebackers and secondary were not as good. Hopefully we could exploit that weakness this week. The long range forecast did not predict monsoons on Saturday.

Practices were excellent during the week. Everyone, especially Chip, Damian and the offensive line drew confidence from performing so well under adverse conditions the previous Saturday. Dominating Illinois' big offensive line was a major accomplishment. Our three penalties, no interceptions and one fumble were improvements over our past performances too.

Tyler Madden, Salim Rogers, Jibril Sloan, Memed Marsic and Glenn Korbel took Trevor downtown to the Rathskeller Tuesday night after our football meetings to celebrate his twenty-first birthday. He wasn't too drunk when they brought him home at midnight. Now it was legal for us to have booze in our apartment. If anyone asked, the booze belonged to Trevor, at least until Damian's birthday in November.

Will and Abby were coming up to State College for the game on Saturday. Mom and Dad were attending Andy's game down in Newark while Liz and Josh babysat for the day. I planned to offer to pay for dinner for my brother and sister-in-law but Will beat me to the punch. Kelly and I would be his guests for the evening.

Kelly and I spent more time than usual studying together that week. We had a term paper due in history. I did mine on the fighting on Culp's Hill on the evening of July 2nd and into the morning of July 3rd. Kelly did hers on the collapse of the XI Corps north of Gettysburg on July 1st. We helped each other with the final drafts and the proof reading.

I received one of my periodic e-mails from Matt Sauder. Matt kept me updated on my Wolverines. My high school team was 3-0 and had blown out all three opponents. They were matched up against Central on Friday night. Central was also 3-0. The two teams were far and away the class of the Lancaster-Lebanon League's AAA.

Over dinner on Tuesday night Christian Hunsecker asked, "Are you interested in another bet on the Central/Wolverines game this Friday? Loser does the other guy's laundry for a week."

"You bet!" I replied enthusiastically. Christian was taken aback by my enthusiasm momentarily. He shook it off.

"It's a bet then," he said, extending his hand to shake on the deal.

I figured this was a nearly sure thing that my team would beat Christian's team this year. Central lost their experienced starting quarterback to graduation last spring. They had an excellent sophomore playing for them but he didn't have Matt's savvy yet. The Wolverines would take them apart when they met.

Kelly and I got together Friday for an early lunch at my apartment. We wouldn't have more time together until after Saturday's game. It was a nice interlude for the two of us. Kelly headed for her Statistics class after lunch. We meet again for a few minutes after history. She gave me a kiss and wished me luck for the game tomorrow.

We had our normal pre-game meetings after dinner Friday night. Buses hauled us over to Toftrees when they were done. My friends and I gathered in Jay and Damian's room for our weekly poker game.

I headed back to my room a few minutes before our curfew. I wanted to check on-line to see the results of the Central/Wolverines game earlier in the evening. I was delighted by the news I found at LancasterOnline. My Wolverines had beaten Central 34-27. It must have been an exciting game to watch. The lead changed multiple times. Matt led the Wolverines on a game winning drive two and a half minutes before the end of the game to break the 27-27 tie.

I popped over to Christian and GJ's room to gloat before bed time. I told Christian I would deliver my laundry to him after lunch on Sunday. Christian grumbled that this was the last time he was betting with me on this stupid game.

Coach Burton had us up early on Saturday morning, at seven am. Our game started at noon. After breakfast he headed over to the Lasch Building to prepare. We lucked out with the weather. It was a beautiful early fall day. Game time temperature was expected to be in the low seventies.

The stadium was buzzing with excitement when we came out for warm-ups. My teammates and I were psyched up. We carried a new confidence that we could dominate our opponent if we needed that. No offensive line was bigger than the behemoths on the Illinois line.

Our confidence during warm-ups turned out not to be misplaced. Purdue's mistakes didn't help their cause either. They won the coin toss and took the opening kickoff. The returner caught the ball just inside the goal line and ran it out. Tony King stopped him at our 25 yard line and stood him up. Joe Ricci popped the ball loose before he went down and Matt Frye alertly jumped on the fumble. Penn State's ball at Purdue's 19 yard line.

We flooded the end zone with receivers on the first play. I out jumped a cornerback and a safety to snag the ball in the corner of the end zone. Penn State 7, Purdue 0. Things didn't improve for the Boilermakers.

They went three downs and punted back to us. We made a nice seven play drive down the field capped by a touchdown pass to Christian. Purdue took the kickoff, ran five plays and threw an interception straight into Shawn Byrd's gut. Three plays later Chip found me one on one with the cornerback and hit me in stride. I sprinted in for a 33 yard TD.

Purdue couldn't get anything going offensively. Our run defense stopped them cold. Trevor and Bill Daugherty kept the pressure on the QB. They went three and out a couple times, had drives stopped by inopportune penalties, and fumbled the ball to us.

Our offense was confident we could drive 70-80 yards to score on these guys. They gave us the ball 20-40 yards from their goal line. Of course we scored. Tanner and Damian scored easy TDs. By halftime we were up 35-0.

Coach Burton let the first string play one more series after halftime. Purdue finally got a stop on us, forcing us to settle for a field goal instead of a TD. Jay and the second string took over from there. Jay's crew scored more points in the third quarter. Purdue managed to sneak a long field goal in on us before the end of the third quarter. Charlie Taylor finished our next drive with a 22 yard touchdown run.

Coach Burton made a totally classy move when the score was 52-3 midway through the fourth quarter. Colin O’Shea had dressed for the game, for his first time in his four years at Penn State. Colin’s normal role on our team was to run our scout team during the week and help the younger guys learn our offense. He never dressed for any games.

Colin didn’t have the talent to play Division IA football. He loved Penn State enough to pay his own way here so he could be a part of the team. He did all the ugly, dirty jobs no one else really wanted. He worked out, studied and practiced as hard as anyone without the prospect of playing on Saturdays. Today was his reward for four years of hard work and dedication.

It was our “Rudy” moment. That’s OK. Every team needs its Rudys and Colins to get ready to play. Today was Coach Burton’s opportunity to say thank you for his contribution. The Daily Collegian ran an article on Colin earlier in the week, so the student section let out loud cheers when the PA system announced that #5 Colin O’Shea was coming in at quarterback.

Colin led the team down the field against the exhausted Purdue defense. He turned and hand the ball off to Charlie and ET as the third string players pushed downfield. He drove the ball down far enough for Andrew Perkins to make a chip shot field goal. Score: 55-3 Penn State

Purdue finally managed to score a touchdown against our third string freshmen playing prevent defense. The final score of the game was 55-10 our favor.

It felt good to dominate an opponent again the way we did last year. We made five penalties, allowed only two sacks and did not fumble the ball during the game. Chip threw four touchdowns to balance against his one interception. We had improved dramatically since our horrible performance against USC two weeks earlier.

My personal stats were excellent. I had seven catches for 152 yards and two touchdowns, two punt returns for 31 yards, one kick return for 37 yards and one run out of the wildcat for 11 yards. That was good work for two and half quarters. Chip and Jay had spread the wealth of touchdowns around our team. Christian, Tanner and Jared Cantrell caught touchdown passes in addition to my two. Damian and Charlie each scored one on the ground.

Colin O’Shea’s story caught on with the regional and national media. The poor guy did a dozen interviews in a half hour’s time. I understood why. An everyday guy quarterbacks the Nittany Lions in a scoring drive after toiling for four years in obscurity – it was a good human interest story.

I did my usual group of interviews after the game. I got the usual questions and I gave them my standard answers. They asked if I thought we could beat Minnesota next weekend. I did. Did I think we could win the Big Ten championship again? I thought we still had a shot if we could beat Michigan, Ohio State and Michigan State.

Mr. Montgomery, from the Lancaster morning paper, was on the only reporter to surprise me with a question.

“Coach, any thoughts on the Wolverines vs. Central contest last night?” Mr. Montgomery asked.

“I want to congratulate all the Wolverines for the win last night,” I replied. “I’m proud of them and happy their continuing our traditions of excellence. I also want to thank them for getting my laundry done for the next week.” I chuckled and added, “Christian Hunsecker and I had a little bet. I’ll be delivering my dirty clothes to him tomorrow after lunch so he can take care of them.”

“Is there a little bit of rivalry between you and Christian?” Mr. Montgomery asked.

“Just a touch,” I agreed. “We’ve been friends for six years. We’ve been rivals about fifteen hours, just the time it took to play the five games against each other.”

“Tell Matt and my other friends back home to keep up the good work,” I said. “You’ll probably see them before I do.”

“I’ll do that ‘Coach’,” Mr. Montgomery agreed. He asked me if I knew where Christian or Charlie was. He had to finish his local interest interviews for tomorrow’s paper. I pointed down the field where I had seen Christian talking with ESPN a couple minutes earlier.

I headed inside and then on to the bus that would take me back to the Lasch Building. I gave Kelly a call after I showered while I was getting dressed. She had met up with Will and Abby already. They would meet me outside the building in ten minutes.

I spotted the Abby’s bulge as soon as I came outside. At five and a half months, she wasn’t huge yet, though there was no question my sister-in-law was carrying a baby. I gave her a hug and kiss, gave Kelly a kiss and gave my dad-to-be older brother a hearty handshake. I suggested that we should try Damon’s Grill. The others agreed. I drove to make things easier for us. Otherwise we all would have to make the long walk out to Will’s car parked in a far out game parking lot somewhere near Timbuktu.

Damon’s was packed when we got there. The four of us waited in the overflow area with the other diners. One courteous gentleman gave Abby his seat while we waited. It didn’t take long for the crowd to recognize me. I spent the fifteen minute wait doing autographs and talking with the other diners. Kelly took it in stride. Will seemed bemused by all the attention his little brother drew.

Will ordered a sampler of appetizers after we were seated. We enjoyed chicken wings, onion straws, mozzarella sticks and potato skins while we perused the menu. Abby

decided on the Thai salmon. Kelly went with the BBQ bacon chicken sandwich. Will and I both went with full racks of ribs with baked beans and coleslaw.

The four of us enjoyed our dinners as we caught up on each other's lives. Will and Abby revealed that I could expect a niece in the beginning of February. They chose to know the sex of their first child before delivery. They hadn't decided on a name for my niece yet.

A few more patrons interrupted our dinner for autographs. Will and Abby got used to it. Kelly ignored the interruptions as I did my duty for the team. The conversation continued in spite of the pauses for my fans.

Abby was holding up well at home and in classes despite her pregnancy. She hoped that would continue through finals this semester. The beginning of next semester could be interesting. She was going to be three weeks into the spring semester when she hit her due date.

Abby and Kelly were feeling frisky that evening. Their discussion of their respective men got a bit risqué. Their comments got Will and me thinking that way too. Will copped a feel at the table, to Abby's delight. Kelly pulled my hand to her lap and encouraged me to give her a quick rub too.

"I don't have a pregnant wife," I teased, "I know I get to do something about this tonight." I gave Will an evil grin. "You're going to have to wait until after the kid is born."

"Oh, little brother," Will countered. "How little you know about pregnant women. My pumpkin has been hot for my body for the last two months. I definitely am getting laid tonight. The only question is if Abby will let us get home or if I'll have to pull off the road somewhere to satisfy her needs."

"Really?" Kelly cooed. "I didn't know that." From the look on her face I knew exactly what fantasy we'd be doing when we went to bed that night.

We decided to have dessert. Will went for the Apple Cobber, Abby and I had the Chocolate Malt Cake while Kelly had the Double Chocolate Mousse Pie. Kelly and I thanked Will for his generous offer to pay for dinner for us.

I drove Will and Abby over the football parking lot where he parked his old Honda. I gave Abby a hug and a kiss as they departed. "Take good care of yourself," I said as I waved good bye. "... and that little niece of mine."

Will gave Kelly a hug and a kiss. I offered my hand to my brother to shake. Will brushed it away and gave me a hug. "You take care of yourself little brother."

“You too Will,” I replied. Kelly and I waved good bye as my brother and sister-in-law drove off for the long trip to their apartment in Philadelphia. The two of us climbed back into my VW and headed back to my apartment.

My roommates and their girlfriends or boyfriend helped prepare for the night’s party. Things were ready by the time guests started to arrive. We had a good turnout for the party. Food was ready. Drinks were ready. Every one enjoyed our hospitality.

Kelly and I each grabbed a beer as the party started. Kelly pulled me aside. “Don’t have too much to drink tonight sweetie. I’ve got some ideas for later when we have your room to ourselves.”

“I can’t wait to see what you have in mind,” I agreed. I was overjoyed that my lover’s lust seemed to be overcoming her need for alcohol.

Kelly’s brother Mike showed up at the party with the freshman he took to bed last week on his arm. Mike introduced us to Amanda Long, a meteorology major from Bucks County, Pa. She seemed bright, outgoing and cute. A little later when Amanda went to the bathroom Mike told us that he really liked Amanda and hoped that she’d agree to date him when they got to know each other better.

Mike’s roommate Jim Hill arrived a little later escorting a cute girl, Christina Armstrong. Mike, Amanda, Jim and Christina spent a lot of time talking together. The four seemed well matched.

Kelly danced with me a little but was more interested in spending time on the couch or one of our chairs seated on my lap, making out with me. I certainly didn’t object.

The parade of couples using the bedrooms started. Mike and Amanda were one of the first couples to go upstairs. They were upstairs for around forty minutes. Amanda was draped all over Mike when the two of them came downstairs. After a brief conference with Jim and Christina, Mike and Amanda sought out Damian. Jim and Christina took off.

The two kids had big grins when they finished talking with Damian. Mike told us what was up a few minutes later. Jim and Christina had headed back to Jim and Mike’s dorm room for the night. Damian agreed to let Mike and Amanda spend the night in his bed.

Kelly and I were on our third beers and making out pretty intensely. When my bedroom opened up after Chip and his girl du-jour exited, Kelly dragged me off for some fun. She promised me that it would just be a warm-up for later in the evening.

We headed for the kitchen for refreshments after our exercise. I took a Coke. To my delight, so did Kelly. We hung out with our friends, talked and danced a little. Oh yeah... and made out some more. My sweetie was hot tonight.

Kelly hustled to clean up when the party was over. Mike and Amanda helped Jay, Molly, Trevor, Steph and I clean up the apartment. The four couples headed to bed around 12:15 in the morning.

Kelly and I changed the sheets on our bed and then settled down. I stopped by the bathroom quickly. Kelly was naked on my bed when I returned.

“Come here, man of mine,” she purred. “It’s time that we start that family that both of us want so much.”

The light popped on in my head. Kelly was frisky because she was fantasizing about being pregnant the way Abby was. Cool! I could go along with this role playing.

I started strip immediately but Kelly motioned me over to the bed. She slowly disrobed me, kissing various body parts as she exposed them. I didn’t think it possible, but I got harder as she licked and kissed me and suckled at my nipples. I was throbbing as she unzipped and lowered my pants.

Kelly fondled my cock and balls through my boxers. She engulfed my hard member as soon as the boxers fell to the floor. I panted and moaned for about ten seconds before I exploded and poured a huge load of cum into her mouth.

“It’s your turn lover,” I gasped as I flipped Kelly back on the bed. I kissed her and played with her titties but it wasn’t long before I had my head buried between her knees. My lover was juicy as all get out. That was fine. I lapped up the moisture and teased my hot little girl to ecstasy.

Kelly continued moaning, “I want to make our first child tonight.”

I worked two fingers into her as I sucked up the nectar from her sweet pussy. I felt around inside my lover, searching for her G-spot. I didn’t feel any birth control ring as I felt around. I concentrated on bringing my lover off, that bit of information would be discussed post orgasm. After a couple minutes of stimulation, Kelly came to an ear shattering climax. I let her recover for a minute.

“Honey, let’s drop the play acting for a moment,” I said seriously.

“What?” Kelly asked between deep breaths.

“Do you have your birth control in?” I asked. “We aren’t really trying to start a family, are we?”

“No, of course not silly,” Kelly replied. “I only have the ring in three of every four weeks. My period starts in a couple days. I took it out last night and don’t put the new one in until next Friday. Now stop procrastinating and get me knocked up lover!”

“I didn’t want us taking a chance like we did last spring,” I said. I gave my lover a wink. “You want it? You got it!” I flipped Kelly on her back, hoisted her legs over my shoulders and drove my hard cock into her hot pussy. I leaned down and kissed Kelly when I was fully inside her.

“I’m going to put so much sperm in you that you’re going to have triplets,” I growled as I started pumping in and out.

Kelly’s fantasy of me getting her pregnant was a powerful one. She came repeatedly as I pumped my cock in and out of her.

The prospect of spending a life with this Kelly was appealing. Tonight she was the girl I fell in love with back in freshman year. The party girl who got drunk all the time was nowhere to be found. That suited me fine.

Kelly wasn’t quite ready to come when I stiffened, grunted and blew my load of semen into her womb. Her eyes widened and she cooed, “Oh yeah. I feel it Kyle... Oooohh... knock me up.... Ooooohhh....” Kelly talked herself into another orgasm as my cock spat the last of my cum into her. I rode her orgasm out as her pussy coaxed me to fertilize her more. We collapsed in a heap.

Kelly and I continued the fantasy and made love another time that night before we cuddled together and fell asleep. We enjoyed a well earned and sound night of sleep.

I woke Sunday morning to the feel someone mashing my hand against a warm and soft orb. My semi-rigid cock was trapped between two warm, soft thighs. It grew hard as I took over feeling Kelly’s wondrous tit as Kelly continued caressing that hand.

“You up for another time lover?” Kelly cooed as she rolled to face me. I gave her a kiss on the cheek.

“As you wish,” I replied. “Do you want to do this on our sides?”

“That would be wonderful,” Kelly replied. She gave me a kiss on the cheek, a couple more down my neck and one on my collarbone before she turned her back to me. I positioned myself between her opened legs and dabbed my cock against her pussy. A couple strokes told me all I needed to know. Kelly had used my hand for awhile this morning to get herself worked up. She was nice and moist, perfectly ready to couple. I notched my cock at her hole and thrust smoothly inside my lover.

It was slow, gentle and loving. Showing the person you love your feelings this way in the morning is exquisite. I want to start every day this way. Kelly and I made love for about fifteen minutes. We cuddled for awhile afterward.

Around a quarter after ten Kelly headed upstairs for a shower. I threw on sweats and a T-shirt and made some coffee while I waited for my turn. It gave me time to think. Last night and this morning were nearly perfect – just what I wanted from life. Somehow I had to get Kelly to share my vision of our future together. This weekend had been much better since we moderated our drinking and enjoyed other fun pursuits instead.

Kelly settled down to watch TV while I went for my shower. Mike and Amanda were with her when I came downstairs again. Both freshmen asked us to thank Damian for his generous offer to use his bedroom last night.

Kelly and I headed down to Pollock Commons and the Mix to get breakfast supplies and our newspaper. I made up a recipe that Damian gave me – peanut butter banana pancakes. Kelly and I loved them. They were fantastic.

We settled down to read the newspaper after we finished our lunch. I went straight to the sports section to see how my friends had fared. I skipped the big front page article on the Phillies thrashing of the hapless Mets to conclude their season yesterday afternoon. They finished at 97-65 with the best record in the National League. They would face the St. Louis Cardinals in a few days to start the playoffs.

The first headline that caught my eye on the second page was ‘USC upset by Stanford 28-20’. The Trojans seemed to have a brain fart at least once a season where they played way below a lightly regarded opponent. Stanford was unranked, 14 point underdogs and 2-2 going into the game. Jim Harbaugh’s guys had played an exceptional game. Why couldn’t the Trojans have overlooked us two weeks ago and given us an easy victory?

Ed’s Gators handled South Carolina 28-20. Ed did not play. Jeremy and Notre Dame beat Air Force 31-23. Jeremy was in double digits in tackles again but didn’t get any sacks. Rutgers lost to Cincinnati 24-12. Hal went four of five on field goals, scoring all the Scarlet Knights’ points.

Syracuse lost to Connecticut 31-13. The only interesting thing from my perspective was that the Orangeman’s starting QB went down late in the game with a rib injury. Jake Kring went into the game. Jake managed only three completions in eight attempts as he tried to rally his team from their nearly hopeless deficit.

I flipped the page to see how the smaller local colleges had done. My brother’s Blue Hens played New Hampshire in Newark, Delaware yesterday. They lost 52-49. Andy played well in the loss. He scored a touchdown on a punt return and caught a second. It was pretty good for a freshman who was only a spot performer on the team.

Kelly and I composed e-mails to my friends and brother congratulating them or expressing our sympathy, depending on the outcome of their game. Jake Kring replied almost immediately after we sent his e-mail. He was resting up in his room after yesterday afternoon’s beating.

Jake said he was knocked down after every one of his eight pass attempts. The Philadelphia paper hadn't said, but Jake was sacked twice in the eight pass attempts and a half minutes he played at the end of the game. Jake expected that he wouldn't see more playing time next week. The team expected Joe to get his ribs taped up, put on a flak jacket and go out to face South Florida next Saturday.

My girl and I relaxed, devouring the remainder of the Sunday paper. When we finished it I asked, "Would you like a beer honey?" I knew we had two Troegs Amber Ales left from last night. "It would be refreshing this afternoon."

"Sure, that sounds good Kyle," Kelly agreed. I retrieved the beers from the refrigerator.

I waited until Kelly had a few sips of her beer. I said, "You know I love you totally and completely, don't you?"

"Of course, "Kelly agreed. "I love you too."

"Did you have fun last night?" I asked. "Hasn't today been a great day?"

"Last night was wonderful," Kelly answered. "I'm enjoying my quiet Sunday with you."

"Good," I replied. "I love you and don't want anything to hurt you." Kelly's eyes narrowed and she sat up straighter. I knew I was setting off alarm bells in her head. I continued anyway. "You know I like a good beer or two," I said as I waved the bottle of Troegs in front of her. "I enjoy a good party too. Hell, let's talk to Cameron in history tomorrow and see if Omega Chi is planning anything next Saturday night. We'll go."

"What exactly are you driving at?" Kelly asked warily.

"It kills me to see you so hung over every Sunday afternoon," I explained. "We had a few beers, had fun with our friends and made love last night. We're having a great day today. Every Sunday could be like this if we moderate our drinking a little bit." Kelly stared at me without saying anything. I pressed on.

"I worry about you... about us," I said correcting myself. "Getting so drunk that you pass out, throwing up, barely able to function the next day – all those things are symptoms of binge drinking. It is not good for us. I'm not laying down rules for you. You're a big girl and can make your own. All I am saying is that this weekend has been wonderful. Last weekend frankly sucked. I'd like to have more weekends like this one and less like last weekend. Does that make sense?"

"I guess," Kelly answered. I could see her start to relax. "Is this what you've been trying to tell me for the past month?"

“Yes! Exactly what I’ve been trying to say,” I replied. “We don’t need to stop going to parties. We can have three or four beers and enjoy ourselves instead of having seven or eight and passing out. Can you consider that?”

“I can do that Kyle,” Kelly said.

“Good,” I said as I gave her a hug. “That is all I have been trying to say for months. I haven’t done a good job of explaining myself.”

“It’s no big deal,” Kelly said nonchalantly. She flipped on the TV since we had finished the paper. Whoever was watching last had left the channel tuned to the Fox Network. I perked up as soon as I recognized the midnight green uniforms on the football players. Kelly flipped the channel, looking for something else.

“Flip back to the Eagles and Bucs,” I said. “Maybe we’ll see Cuch or Pete playing.” Kelly flipped back.

Cuch’s younger brother Marco kept us informed on our friend’s status with the Eagles. He had started on the practice squad but got moved up three weeks ago to the regular squad when one of the safeties got hurt. He was playing regularly on special teams. Marco reported that the special teams coach said he was doing well.

Pete Klein made starter at middle linebacker this season for the Buccaneers. We spotted the #53 Klein jersey in the middle immediately. Pete helped the middle of the Bucs’ defense stuff the Eagles’ LeSean McCoy twice as he carried the ball.

It took a couple minutes for us to see Cuch. Donovan McNabb overthrew Jeremy Maclin on a deep pass on third and long. Sav Rocca punted the ball back to the Buccaneers. Kelly and I spotted our friend. He changed his jersey number from the 45 he had at Penn State to 26 but the “Cuchiella” name on the back was unmistakable. Cuch almost needed extensions on the sides of his jersey so the name could fit.

Rocca put all his leg into the ball when he punted it. Cuch flew down the field on the left side one lane inside of the edge. He blew past the blocker on the way and knifed in to plaster the punt returner a split second after he caught the ball. It was an excellent play. Andy Reid and the other coaches in Philadelphia had to be pleased with Cuch’s work so far. Hopefully it would be enough for him to get increased responsibilities.

I gave Kelly a ride back to her apartment around 4:30 pm. I wanted to get a few things done at the Lasch Building before the team dinner at the Training Table.

I was pleased with the way my conversation went with Kelly that afternoon. She finally seemed to “get” what I was trying to tell her for the past five months. Now Kelly and I could settle into a more relaxed weekend night life and enjoy our Sundays together. During football season Sundays were about the only time we got together for more than a few hours. We needed to get as much out of the shared time as we could.

Kelly and I talked with Cameron Miller Monday afternoon at History 163. Omega Chi was having a party Saturday night and Cameron was overjoyed when we asked if we could drop by. He insisted that the two of us hadn't visited nearly enough this fall.

I found an e-mail from the Thon organizing committee announcing the first meeting of the fall for next Monday night. The chairman wanted to know if the football team planned to participate again this year. That wasn't my call. I wasn't a captain on the team. I grabbed Tyler Madden Tuesday after practice while we were changing.

"Hey Tyler, the Thon committee wants to know if the team plans to participate this year," I explained.

"Of course," Tyler replied. "The Thon is great PR for the team and it's for a great cause. Are you going to chair it again for us?"

"I'll pass if that's OK Tyler," I replied. "I have chaired it two years in a row. I don't want the Thon to become 'Kyle's charity'. I want it to be something that belongs to the whole team."

"I see what you're saying," Tyler agreed. "Maybe I could get Shawn or Christian to take over from you."

"They would be good but I have a different idea," I said. "I think it would be better if we used the Thon to give some of the younger guys leadership experience. Why don't we have one of the sophomores run it?"

"Hmmm... that's a good idea Kyle," Tyler replied. "I'll see if I can scare up a new chairman before the meeting next week. Are you willing advise the new chairman?"

"Of course," I agreed. "I'm not going to abandon the Thon. I plan to help raise funds again. I have no problem helping him get things set up."

"Cool! Thanks for the good idea Kyle," Tyler said as he headed back to his locker.

Thursday at dinner Tyler introduced me to the new Thon chairman, Dave McCall. Dave was excited to get the opportunity to do more for the team. Dave didn't have anyone to attend the first Thon meeting in his place the next Monday so I volunteered Kelly to take care of it until he got better organized.

Mom and Dad were coming up on Saturday for the game against Minnesota. Dad let me know he was taking Kelly and me out to dinner with Mom after the game. The game was slated to be one of the regional broadcast games. It would be on ESPN at 3:30 pm.

Our team practiced well during the week preparing for the Golden Gophers. We didn't have anything unusual planned against them. They had a decent, though not great pass defense. A number of teams had lit them up. Their run defense was average. Coach Burton thought our superior talent would tell over the course of the game. We would save some of our special plays for the two games after Minnesota when we played out in Michigan and hosted Ohio State.

Dr. Brennan returned our term papers during class on Friday. Cameron and I both received A's for our work. Kelly had a B+ on her paper. She expressed a little frustration after class. Dr. Brennan did compliment Kelly's writing. I promised Kelly we would talk about how to improve her work on Sunday afternoon. I gave her a good bye kiss and wished her luck at her Broadcast Journalism course. She wished me luck at the game.

The team seemed loose and relaxed at dinner Friday night. The rain that was threatening for half the afternoon finally arrived while we were at the Training Table. Me and my teammates were soaked by Happy Valley's cold early fall rain when we got over to the Lasch Building. The coaches postponed our position meetings for fifteen minutes so everyone could stop by the locker room and put on some dry workout clothes.

The blue buses delivered us to Toftrees around nine o'clock. My friends and I convened our traditional poker game before bedtime. The game broke up around a quarter to eleven. I checked on-line to see how my high school team, the Wolverines, had faired that evening. They blew out Drumore 38-13 tonight.

It was still raining when we got up in the morning though we could see patches of blue sky over the Bald Eagle Mountain to the west. The rain stopped while we were at breakfast. We packed our overnight bags and loaded on the buses for the trip to the Lasch Building. The temperature was in the mid-forties with the high expected to reach 55 degrees just before game time. The rain clouds from the storm were nearly dispersed by the time we arrived at the Lasch Building.

We went through our normal pre-game preparations in the morning. We had a light lunch and then took buses over to the stadium. Our fans were out in force at our entrance. Tyler, Trevor, Josh, Chip, Damian and I shook a few hands as we went in. It had only been the last couple games that the crowd had been calling out Damian's name as he entered the stadium. Our fans were beginning to appreciate my roommate's importance to our team. I was pleased he was getting recognition.

We went through our final preparations for the game. The guys on the team were loose and joking around. I thought that was a good thing. Tyler was getting on everyone's case to focus on the game. It wasn't time to fool around. A lot of guys teased him for being too serious. We should have listened.

Minnesota took the opening kickoff and had a great return. Our coverage was off a little and only Jarrell Cook's rundown of the return man prevented a touchdown. They started their first drive at our 44 yard line. The Golden Gophers didn't have a great offense, but they were good enough to gain 44 yards on us to score a TD.

The Gophers used two or even three defensive backs to cover me. They weren't interested in covering me the way USC did a few weeks ago. Chip correctly looked towards Christian and Tanner to get open instead of me. Our offense was out of sync by half a tick.

We only managed to score ten points in the first half against a so-so Minnesota defense. Three false start penalties on the offensive line, three sacks, and way too many dropped passes – our mistakes killed us. Christian dropped one, Tanner dropped two and I stretched out for one that I got in my hands but I couldn't control.

Chip threw an absolutely horrendous interception in the second quarter to set Minnesota up for a short touchdown drive. They added a field goal before halftime too.

We had been favored over Minnesota by two touchdowns going into the game. Being down 17-10 wasn't in our plans. Coach Burton huddled with Tyler Madden, Jibril Sloan and Andrew Perkins. I assume Coach challenged the captains to get our team's frame of mind right.

Our captains were fired up when they called together the other key leaders together. I passed the message on to the other receivers – play smart, look the ball into your hands and run precise routes. Minnesota wasn't beating us. We were beating ourselves.

Andrew and I met with the kick return team. I let Andrew do the talking. He had my blockers fired up by the time he was finished. We were going to do the second half kickoff right!

I took the kickoff at our 1 yard line and advanced it 29 yards. It was a solid effort but wasn't the jump start for our team that I wanted. Minnesota's coverage was too good.

Coach Burton decided to go with the same strategy that helped us beat Illinois – run Damian at them. My friend carried our team on his sturdy back for two third quarter touchdowns. Both drives featured mostly Damian carrying the ball with a few short passes thrown in. All the Golden Gophers could manage was a field goal.

Minnesota became so conscious of the run that they bit hard on a play action pass as we started the fourth quarter. I ran a slant behind the linebackers rushing to stop Damian's

“blast” up the middle. Chip hit me in stride. I out ran the strong safety and strong armed the free safety to carry the ball into the end zone. Andrew’s successful PAT put the score to 31-20 our favor.

Each team scored another field goal as the fourth quarter continued. Wyatt Smith and Charlie Taylor spelled Damian occasionally so he could get a little breather. The final score stayed 34-23 as our running backs made first downs and kept the clock ticking towards 0:00.

Damian played fantastically that afternoon and the big crowd cheered him wildly as time ran out. Damian carried the ball 32 times for 207 yards and two touchdowns. He also caught four passes out of the backfield for 34 yards. My numbers were pedestrian compared to his. I had one punt return for 14 yards, one kick return for 29 yards, five catches for 94 yards and a touchdown and two runs from the wildcat formation that gained 13 yards.

What happened? I think too many guys didn’t take Minnesota seriously. Maybe they were looking ahead to the next two games instead. Next Saturday we went out to the Big House to play Michigan. The following week we hosted Ohio State here at Beaver Stadium.

I was determined that we wouldn’t get caught in this trap again. I knew Tyler and the other captains felt the same way. I was going to be more vocal about guys goofing around during practices, warm-ups and just before the game. Every opponent in the Big Ten was capable of beating us if we didn’t take our jobs seriously.

Kelly met Mom and Dad while I was back at the Lasch Building showering and changing. I met them out in front of the building when I was done. Dad made reservations for the four of us at the Boalsburg Steak House, one of his favorite restaurants in the area. I drove Kelly over to meet Mom and Dad at the restaurant. There wasn’t any reason after the meal for Dad to have to drive us the half dozen miles back to campus when home was the opposite way from Boalsburg.

Dad treated us to an excellent steak dinner. During the dinner conversation I found out how Mom and Dad both managed to get babysitting for so many of my and Andy’s games – bribery. The deal with Liz and Josh was the kids would babysit the young ones four weekends this fall. Josh was allowed to sleep over. As a further sweetener, they were giving the Ohio State tickets to the teens. As long as my roommates and I agreed, Mom and Dad would allow the teens to camp out on the floor at my apartment after the game. I said I would check with my roommates but I was sure they wouldn’t mind Josh and Liz camping out in our living room on Saturday night.

Dad sprang for dessert for all of us. Mom had the Tiramisu. Kelly went for the Molten Chocolate Cake. Dad had Pecan Pie. I was intrigued by the Gingerbread Cake with Cinnamon Poached Pears. Everyone declared their dessert the best around.

Mom, Dad, Kelly and I exchanged hugs and kisses before they departed for home. Dad promised to see us again in three weeks when they came up for our game against Iowa.

I teased as my parents climbed in the car, "I'll pick up the dinner tab next time you visit."

"Oh, big spender," Dad replied. "You'll pick up the tab, put it on your credit card and then I'll pay the bill for you."

"I will pay you back everything I've borrowed while I'm in college once I get a job," I countered.

"I'll hold you to that son," Dad said as he climbed into the car. Kelly and I waved good bye as my parents as they drove off.

We hopped in my car and headed back to State College on Business 322. I turned off at University Drive.

"Why are you going this way?" Kelly questioned.

"I need to drop off my car back at the apartment," I explained.

"It would be fine if you drive straight to Omega Chi," Kelly replied. "You don't drink much anymore. You'll be fine to drive us back."

"I don't drink and drive at all," I countered. "I plan to have a few beers tonight. We'll just have to walk down to the frat like we usually do." Kelly let out a sigh. "What?"

"It's fine," she answered curtly.

"We'll have a few beers," I said. "...spend some time with our friends and then go back to my apartment for a night of cuddling and fun. We aren't going to get crazy drunk tonight, right?"

"I'll drink in moderation," Kelly promised.

"We'll have fun tonight," I promised. I certainly intended to keep that promise. Hopefully Kelly would remember our discussion the previous Sunday and would want to have a hang-over free Sunday again.

I parked my car in the nearest parking lot to my apartment. Kelly and I hiked across campus and downtown to the Omega Chi frat house. It was a pleasant fifteen minute walk to the frat. The night was chilly but our Penn State sweatshirts provided enough warmth.

The guys at the frat greeted us warmly when we arrived. I was surprised to meet Damian, Billy, Melanie and Sarah at the party. Damian had run into Joel earlier in the

week and had been invited to the party. Trevor, Jay and Tyler Madden were handling the party at our apartment.

Damian was a big hit among the brothers at the frat. He must have spent an hour answering questions about the game. He seemed to enjoy the acclaim.

Kelly and I headed to the kitchen for drinks. Omega Chi always had excellent beer at their parties. They had found a new import this week. Kelly and I decided to try it. It was a strong stout beer and quite tasty.

We visited with friends, danced some and had some more of that tasty stout. Damn, that beer was good! The details after the first few beers are hazy. I just know we danced a lot and quenched our thirst with the stout – A LOT of the stout.

I woke Sunday morning with a throbbing head. ‘Damn!’ I thought to myself. ‘How had I let myself get carried away drinking last night?’ I kept my eyes closed because I would be blinded by the morning sunlight. I could feel Kelly lying beside me. My fuzzy brain managed to realize something was not right. The mattress we were on was much too soft. What was going on? Where were we?

I stirred and that woke up Kelly. She let out a long low moan from the pain I’m sure she was feeling.

“You guys are awake,” a voice said near us. I cracked my eyes open. It was Cameron Miller.

“What are we doing here?” I asked quietly. The sound of my voice echoed through my head, setting off more waves of pain.

“Boy, you guys know how to party,” Cameron replied. “You insisted you needed to place to screw last night. You said you couldn’t wait long enough to walk back to your apartment. Don’t you remember?”

“No,” I replied. “How did we end up spending the night? Where are we?”

“You’re in my room,” Cameron answered. “Specifically, Joel’s bed. We let you use our room last night when you needed privacy. An hour later Joel and I came back and found the two of you passed out in his bed.”

“Sorry about that,” I said. “Where did Joel sleep?”

“He went off to Beth’s apartment,” Cameron replied. “They were planning to do that anyway. I was unsuccessful waking you after the party was over. I figured it wouldn’t hurt if the two of you crashed in Joel’s bed.”

“Thanks,” I said. Kelly sat up and worked her eyes open as we talked. It took her a few seconds to realize she was naked and her breasts were exposed. She quickly pulled the sheet up to cover herself.

“Ummm.... Umm...” Kelly groaned as she blushed.

“Don’t be embarrassed,” Cameron said. “A little tit is no big deal.” He gave us a wink. “No, if I were you, I would be embarrassed about the sex show at 3 am.”

“Sex show?” Kelly and I asked together.

“I couldn’t help waking up,” Cameron allowed. “What with the moaning and screaming. I guess you guys got horny again. Now I understand all the noise I heard through the wall back in the dorms last year.”

“Cam, could you give us some privacy for a minute?” Kelly asked.

“Ohh... yeah, of course,” he agreed. He got up to leave his room.

“Um, Cameron? Do you have any aspirin?” I asked. “... and some water?”

“We buy aspirin by the case here,” Cameron answered. “I’ll get it and two bottles of water.”

“Thanks,” Kelly said. “Thanks man,” I added.

Kelly and I needed a few minutes to find all our clothing. I was pissed off at myself for being so stupid. Would I ever grow up and act like a mature, responsible adult? Kelly and I dressed in silence. We thanked Cameron for the aspirin and water when he returned. We downed the remedies and thanked Cameron for his patience with us last night and headed back to my apartment.

We walked back in silence until we stopped at the light on the corner of College and Shortlidge.

“I can’t believe we were so stupid last night,” I declared.

“What you mean is you can’t believe you let me talk you into going to that party,” Kelly snapped back, her eyes glaring at mine. “You think this is my fault!”

“No, I don’t...” I answered.

“The hell you don’t!” Kelly insisted. “I KNOW exactly what you are thinking. I dragged you off to another stupid party you didn’t want to go to and got you drunk. You think

you wouldn't have gotten wasted if you had stayed back at your precious team party at your apartment.”

“We probably wouldn't have gotten wasted if we had stayed at my apartment,” I agreed.

Kelly's eyes flared. “All I want is to be a normal college student,” she growled. The argument continued as we hiked up the hill along Shortlidge to Pollock. I desperately tried to explain how I thought we could have fun and drink a little less. Kelly belittled my concerns and assured me that SHE DID NOT HAVE A DRINKING PROBLEM. The whole thing was tiring. We had covered this same ground numerous times before.

Kelly was stilling boiling when we reached my apartment. She coldly said, “I need a ride back to my apartment Kyle. I think I need some ‘me’ time.”

I gestured towards the parking lot beside the East Locker Room where I had left my car yesterday evening. We walked over there in an uncomfortable silence. Kelly and I didn't say two words to each other as I drove her back to her apartment. She gave me a curt “See you,” when she got out of the car.

“See you tomorrow,” I replied. My head still hurt from my massive hangover. I stank of stale beer, sweat and sex. I felt totally down. I DID love Kelly but how could this continue? I didn't have any answers.

Chapter 47

I took a long hot shower when I got back to my apartment. The heat and steam helped my head and cleaned my body but it didn't help settle my mind. For the first time I questioned if Kelly and I were going to be able to work things out. Did we have a future? It just killed me to think of us breaking up but I couldn't go on like this.

Ruefully I remembered the hell I put Zack, Anders, Evan, JT and my other friends had gone through last year with my drinking. It had taken me a long time to understand that I had to place limits on myself. Hell, intellectually I knew that but still I drank too much last night.

I loved Kelly so much and we were perfect together in so many ways. That had to be a way to reach her and make her understand. There had to be!

I headed down to the Mix, picked up soup and a sandwich for lunch and the Sunday newspaper. Jay and Molly came downstairs about the time I came back. They told me Trevor and Steph headed over to her apartment for brunch a little earlier. Jay and Molly were going downtown to the Penn State Diner for brunch.

I sat down and had my soup and sandwich as I began reading the paper. I started with the sports section so I could find out how my friends' teams had fared yesterday. Ed Fritz's Gators beat Mississippi State 35-9 yesterday. Ed played mop-up in the second half. Jeremy and Notre Dame took care of the upset minded Stanford Cardinals 21-17. That score was a lot closer than the Irish would have liked but they won. Jeremy was credited with nine tackles in the game.

West Virginia took care of Louisville 27-24. Drew went over a hundred yards rushing in the win. Jake's Syracuse Orangemen won their third game, beating up South Florida 17-16. South Florida was probably too cocky, given their upset of West Virginia last weekend. Jake didn't play in the game.

Two undefeated teams at the top of the BCS poll lost yesterday – Texas Tech beat Texas with a last second field goal and surprising Georgia Tech upset #7 ranked Virginia Tech 37-23. People were going to have to give the Yellowjackets some respect.

I flipped the page over to see the results for the teams local to Philadelphia. Delaware had gone up to Boston this weekend and beaten Northeastern 27-24. Andy had two catches in the game. I continued reading the article about the game. I laughed when I read the decisive play in the game. The score was tied 24-24 with a minute and a half to go. Northeastern was driving down the field for the go-ahead score.

Christian's cousin and my friend Trent Wilson intercepted a pass and ran it back to set up the winning field goal for the Blue Hens. I needed to send an e-mail off to Trent. The two of us hadn't kept in touch too well this year.

Rutgers upset the heavily favored Pitt Panthers in their home stadium yesterday. Hal Long booted a last second field goal to win the game 27-24. Hal was getting to show the rest of the world what we knew back in high school. He was a fine kicker.

I sent off congratulations to my brother and all my friends. It felt great sending victory congrats every one of my friends. It was rare that I sent that kind of e-mail to Jake Kring.

I flipped on the TV, figuring to catch a little NFL action while I finished the paper. Fox was showing Dallas against Kansas City – the insufferable versus the incompetent. No thank you. I flipped over to CBS. They were showing the Steelers against the Browns. At least I enjoyed watching the Steelers even if the Browns weren't going to provide much competition to them.

The half time report caught my attention. James Brown announced that the Green Bay Packers were leading the St. Louis Rams 14-3 at halftime. Zack had thrown for 192 yards in the first half. Maybe my mentor would finally get his first NFL win today. Phil Simms complemented Zack's play and observed that he was a very talented young man that needed a better supporting cast if he ever wanted to be a success in the NFL. I couldn't agree more. Hopefully Coach Baldwin would be able to get Zack help.

Damian and Billy came back soon after halftime ended. They were delighted to see me watching Pittsburgh. Both guys were die-hard Steelers fans. They settled in on the couch to watch the second half. I continued perusing my paper at the dining room table.

Damian and Billy were in a good mood. They cuddled for awhile as they watched the game. They paid less attention to the game and more attention to each other as the game wore on. Surprisingly, I wasn't put off by the sight of two guys making out ten feet from me.

Billy yanked off Damian's shirt and was trying to thrust his tongue half way down his throat when I reached my limit. I teased, "Why don't you two get a room?"

"Capital idea!" Billy responded. "C'mon big boy, let's test the springs on that bed of yours."

"Excellent suggestion," Damian agreed. The two lovers pranced up the stairs, hand in hand. It only took a couple minutes for the sounds of orgasmic moans and groans to filter down the steps. I didn't need to listen to that. I headed over to the Lasch Building.

I caught the rest of the Steelers game in the player's lounge. They beat the dreadful Browns 34-10. Ben Roethlisberger played brilliantly, hitting 23 of 30 passes for three touchdowns and no interceptions.

The post game show reported the final score for Green Bay/St. Louis. Zack's team beat the Rams 27-13. Phil Simms praised the improvement my mentor had shown over his first four starts. Green Bay had a brutal opening to their season: the Vikings followed by the Patriots, Giants and then the Bills. I hoped Zack's team could recover from their 1-4 start. They would play Detroit next Sunday so maybe the Packers could climb out of the hole they were in.

Dave McCall came in around a quarter to five. The two of us huddled and reviewed the plans for the Thon. I told him how I recruited the guys to solicit donations, how I ran the meetings and the system of prizes I set up to help motivate the crew.

"Does the Thon committee provide the prize money?" Dave asked.

I chuckled. "No, they don't," I explained. "You have to raise that money too."

"What?" Dave asked. "How much money did you need last year?"

"About five thousand dollars," I replied.

"Where am I supposed to get five thousand dollars?" Dave asked. My young friend was fighting rising panic.

"You're the chairman this year so I guess I can reveal where the money comes from," I said. "I'll get you Aaron Morano's phone number. Aaron contributed all the prize money last year to help us be successful. Give him a call."

"You want me to call HIM?" Dave squeaked. "He barely knows who I am. I spoke to him maybe twice that spring semester before he graduated. He's a pro-bowl cornerback. I can't just call him up and ask for five grand."

"Sure you can," I replied. "Tell Aaron I sent you to him and that you're the Thon chairman this year. He'll come up with the support you need. I guarantee it."

"I'll give it a shot if you say so Coach," Dave agreed.

"Aaron's a soft touch," I explained. "He helped get the team started with the Thon. He'll do anything he can to support it."

"I'll give him a call," Dave agreed. "Thanks for all your advice on how to organize this. I don't think I could do this without you."

"No problem Dave," I replied.

The player's lounge cleared out a few minutes later. All of us had to head over to the Training Table for dinner. After dinner the team headed back to the Lasch Building for our review of our performance in yesterday's game.

Needless to say it wasn't a pleasant meeting for most of the team. Coach Burton praised Damian's running as "superb" and said Chip did a brilliant job on the play action pass early in the fourth quarter. He also praised my YAC (yards after the catch) on that play. Otherwise the coaches characterized our play as sloppy and careless.

We were going to have to do much better this week in practice and next Saturday in Michigan. Coach Burton called Michigan's junior QB Nick Wilson the best we would probably see all year. Michigan was ranked #8 in this week's poll. We moved up two slots to #10 thanks to Texas and Virginia Tech's defeats. Coach Burton warned us we were going to have to play "a damn sight better if we were going to have a prayer of winning."

Tyler Madden, Jibril Sloan and Andrew Perkins called the key leaders on the team together after the coaches dismissed us. Tyler read us the riot act for not passing on his exhortations last Friday afternoon and Saturday morning to the rest of the team. We weren't a talented enough team to coast to victory against anyone. We had to work our butts off every week to be successful. We leaders needed to support our captains and get that message to the other players.

The message was well received by the rest of team. Everyone realized that the next two weeks would make or break our season. If we beat both Michigan and #6 ranked Ohio State we had a chance for a top ten finish to the season and a BCS bowl game. If we lost to both we would drop down to third or fourth in the Big Ten and would go to a minor bowl game.

The guys focused at practice during the week. Everyone worked hard to be prepared for the Wolverines. Chip, Jibril, Tanner, Christian, Damian and I spent extra time after practice drilling ourselves on the passing routes. Jay did the same thing with the second string receiving corps.

I would like to say things were better between Kelly and me but they weren't. Kelly's immediate anger with me from Sunday was gone by history class on Monday. A little tenseness remained throughout the week. My intense focus on Michigan and the amount of time each of needed to spend studying for midterms didn't help matters.

Both Kelly and I were confident we aced our history midterm on Wednesday. Kelly wasn't as sure about her Statistics 100 midterm earlier in the morning. I had two midterms on Thursday – Anthropology 45 and Teaching Secondary Social Studies I. My mind was fried after finishing those two midterms, doing practice, spending extra time on

passing with Chip and the other receivers and then my receivers' meeting Thursday night. I headed over to Kelly's apartment for a visit before bedtime.

Kelly and I walked down Bellaire Avenue to the Burger King for burgers and ice cream. The tension from earlier in the week was mostly gone. We had a pleasant forty-five minutes together. We even managed a little necking before I had to go home. Kelly promised to take good notes on Friday in history and meet me Sunday morning when our plane came in. I wished Kelly luck with her Broadcast Journalism midterm Friday morning.

This was my sixteenth away game in the last two and a half years. I'd been to every Big Ten campus except Minnesota. The travel was routine by now. The freshmen still looked at the whole thing as an adventure. I tried to make sure my charges, John Crosby and Brian Henson understood we were on a business trip not an adventure. Jared Cantrell and Squirrel MacCauley already understood.

We flew into Detroit and took the long bus ride to Ann Arbor. The athletic department put us up in the same hotel as two years ago. The coaches gave us more free time than normal on Friday. ABC picked our game as their Saturday night feature so start time was scheduled for 7:05 pm, local time. We would have most of the day to prepare for Michigan.

The weather in Ann Arbor was beautiful when we arrived. It was sunny with the temperature in the mid-sixties. The weather forecast called for similar weather tomorrow. It would be nice weather when we warmed up and would cool as the sun set and the game wore on. That suited us. Our passing game would have room to operate.

Coach Burton had a briefer than normal team meeting after dinner and then dismissed us. Chip asked Christian, Tanner, Damian, Jibril and me if we could study the game plan some more with him. We agreed.

I was pleased Chip was taking the initiative to prepare better for the game tomorrow. My friend was beginning to understand the responsibility he bore for our team. Word got around about informal study session. Before we knew it, most of the receivers, half the running backs, Jay and all the tight ends were crowded in Chip's room reviewing tomorrow's game plan.

We worked together for about an hour and half before scattering. My usual poker buddies met in my room for our Friday evening game. No one ever won much or lost much. We just had fun together.

I went on-line before bedtime. I wanted to see how my friends at my old high school had fared tonight. Their game against Cornwall was probably their second toughest game after the one their game with Central. LancasterOnline said my high school's Wolverines

had won 59-13. There was no doubt my friends back home would make the playoffs. I expected they would go deep in the playoffs, maybe even to the championship game this season. I fired off congratulatory e-mails to Matt, Dave and Cody before I went to bed.

The coaches didn't schedule Saturday's breakfast until 9:30 am, allowing us to get some extra sleep. We spent the rest of the morning in meetings preparing for the evening's game. After lunch at the hotel, our buses took us over to Michigan Stadium. Crowds of Wolverine fans were flocking there already, five and a half hours ahead of kickoff.

I assumed all the roads leading into Ann Arbor were packed the same way the roads into State College got to be on game days. It is amazing the devotion the fans show to their college teams. Every person playing the game that day was truly blessed. These fans were the ones paying for our scholarships, room and board, books, coaches, stadiums – everything associated with this game I loved.

We moved our things into the visitor's locker room and then had a chance to check out the field conditions. The field was in excellent shape, just the way I remembered from two years ago. The temperature was in the mid-sixties. It was sunny with a few clouds – all in all, a beautiful day to play football.

We went back inside and prepared. The athletic department arranged for a light snack for us around five o'clock. We headed outside for warm-ups when we were done.

As we were finishing up our warm-ups one of the Michigan players headed over to our side of the field. I recognized him immediately. I trotted towards midfield to meet him.

"Hey Terrell, how's it going?" I asked, greeting the friend I made when I visited Michigan three years ago.

"I'm good Kyle, how about you?" Terrell Ross replied. Terrell was Michigan's top cornerback and would be covering me all day.

Fine," I allowed.

"Hey Brad, come on over!" Terrell shouted. Big #89 trotted over to join us.

"Good to see you Garrett," I said. Garrett Bradford was another of the recruits from my visit to Michigan. The three of us caught up with each other's lives for a few minutes. Terrell inquired about Ed Fritz. I let him know my friend was QB2 down at Florida. I asked about the fifth member of our recruit group from the weekend – William Johnson.

William was stretching at the far end of the field near the goal line. William had earned nearly as much acclaim as a starter last season as I had. He was one of the premier defensive tackles in the country. He was going to make our offensive line work hard today.

I wished each of my friends a good game, but not too good. We parted with handshakes and promises to touch base again after the game was over. I headed inside to complete preparations.

Michigan completed the renovations on their stadium last year, once again making it the largest college football stadium in the country, besting Beaver Stadium by a few hundred seats. This big showdown was sold out, all 108,000 seats filled. The highly charged, partisan crowd cheered their Wolverines as they took the field.

Andrew Perkins guessed correctly on the coin toss, earning us first possession of the game. Coach Burton and Coach Ferguson considered Michigan one of our “big” opponents, so I would be primary return man for the team. Christian and Tanner would spell me if needed.

Michigan’s kicker booted the ball well, dropping it just inside the goal line. Dave McCall yelled for me to return the ball so I dashed out of the end zone following my blocking wedge. Michigan had the outside lanes covered well. I advanced up into the wedge, hoping for an opening. Tony King, at the apex, and Jeff Knox, to Tony’s right, managed to pry apart the two cover guys in front of them.

I sprinted through the crack, cut hard to the right to make the next tackler miss and sprinted for the right side of the end zone. I stiff armed the kicker out of the way when he went for the tackle and sprinted down the field. The crowd quieted as I raced into the end zone, accompanied by my escorts, Dave McCall and Matt Frye. Andrew Perkins booted the PAT through the uprights. Score: 7-0 Penn State

The Wolverines weren’t bothered in the least by my quick score. They methodically worked the ball down the field, mixing up the passes and runs to keep our defense off balance. Nicholas Wilson, their red-shirt sophomore quarterback, managed the drive well.

I had read a little bit about him and seen some video when we prepared for Michigan. Wilson was proving to be a good QB. Garrett Bradford had told me how much he enjoyed working with Nick and what a nice guy he was. All of us would have been classmates if I had chosen Michigan over Penn State.

As things stood, Wilson was the enemy now. Coach C and our defense worked their asses off trying to slow down their drive. Trevor, Bill Daugherty and our d-line got good pressure on the QB but couldn’t get to him fast enough. They moved the ball down the field in four, five or six yard gulps.

That changed after the QB hit a sweetly run out route to put them down on our 25 yard line. Coach C blitzed Salim Rogers, our hero (strong safety). Salim stunted inside of

Trevor, tying up the defensive end. Trevor stunted outside, drawing Garrett Bradford's desperation block.

Garrett's a good tight end but he had no chance against a top notch defensive end. Trevor was by Garrett in a flash and on top of Nick Wilson. Wilson tried to sprint left to get free but stopped short when he saw Bill Daugherty breaking free on that side. He dropped back and tried to sprint around Trevor. Trevor engulfed him and put him to the turf hard. Wilson managed not lose the ball, just the twelve yards on the sack.

Our defense had an easy time on second and 22 yards to go. Shawn Byrd batted the ball away from the receiver. Bradford threw the ball away on third and 22 to avoid another sack. Coach Rodriguez thought briefly about trying a 54 yard field goal but decided to try a coffin corner punt instead. Coach Ferguson elected to try to block the punt rather than go for a return.

We didn't get the block but they didn't get the corner either. The ball rolled into the end zone before it crossed the sideline. We took possession of the ball at our 20 yard line.

The first play we ran was intended to test Michigan's defensive plan. I was faking a deep route. Damian actually would get the ball on a delay draw. I lined up at split end. Terrell Ross lined up opposite me, giving me a five yard cushion. No one lined up deeper than Terrell.

"Trying the Trojans defense?" I teased across the line to Terrell.

"We'll see," Terrell replied, chuckling.

At the snap I sprinted downfield on a flag route. Terrell stayed with me for the first twenty yards before I started to pull ahead. The free safety rotated over to help cover Christian. Now we knew that Michigan was going to try to use the defense the Trojans beat us with earlier this fall.

Coach Burton acted immediately. The next play would test exactly how good Terrell Ross was at covering me one on one.

I sprinted downfield fifteen yards and faked like the route was a hitch. Chip pump faked as I made my move. Terrell bit on the fake. I sprinted down field ten yards deeper, Terrell desperately backpedalled to keep with me. Chip flung the ball my way, a split second before William Johnson, their big defensive tackle hit him.

The ball was thrown short, so I had to come back for the catch. It gave Terrell a play on the ball. I got position on Terrell and blocked him away from the ball with my body. I caught it. Terrell took me down immediately. We gained 45 yards on the play to put us on Michigan's 35 yard line.

We tried an off-tackle run away from William's side of the line. William ran it down from the back and dropped Damian for a loss. We tried a tailback screen on next play but Michigan had a linebacker in position to tackle Damian. Damian dropped the ball on purpose to avoid another loss in yards.

We didn't try to go deep on third and twelve. I ran an in route on the play. Michigan switched to a 5 short, 2 deep zone coverage. I ran in behind the short coverage and in front of the deep men, aiming to find a seam. Chip saw me and drilled the ball into me when I came open.

I secured the ball, turned and tried to get more yards. I knew I was a little short of the down marker. The two safeties covering deep flew up and nailed me before I could get past the down marker. The play was officially scored as a nine yard catch. We were too far away to try a field goal, so Coach Burton sent Mitch Jackson out to try a coffin corner punt. Mitch pooched the ball perfectly, sending it out of bounds at Michigan's 7 yard line.

Nick Wilson and the Wolverine offense came at us hard again. They moved the ball well down the field on our defense. Coach C adjusted and blitzed to try to bring the drive to a stop, finally turning them away when they approached our red zone. Our defense stopped them with a sack, a batted down pass and a near interception. Michigan tried a 49 yard field goal but missed slightly wide to the right.

The offense took the field again. Michigan continued to single cover me with Terrell while doubling Christian and Tanner. We moved the ball smartly with a mix of Damian's running and short passing. I caught a couple more short passes underneath of Terrell. Our momentum slowed as we approached Michigan's red zone again.

The Wolverines intensity picked up as they fought more aggressively to stop us. They changed pass coverage to double cover me instead of Tanner. Greg Nowicki and Mahmoud Greene had their hands full trying to contain William Johnson and keep him off Chip. William was nearly certain to be named all-American at defensive tackle.

It was obvious to me what Michigan's defensive game plan was. They would play bend but don't break on most of the field and then get aggressive when we got closer to scoring. They would patiently wait for our offense to make the kind of mistakes we had made game after game this season. It wasn't a bad plan.

The ball was on Michigan's 30 yard line with our most recent first down. The Wolverines stopped Damian's off tackle run (away from William) with a two yard gain. Chip hit Tanner Riggs going across the middle for another five yard gain. The middle linebacker and strong safety sandwiched Tanner when they tackled him. He came up slow and wobbly. The training staff helped him off the field.

Max Rosen took Tanner's slot receiver spot. We tried a play action pass on third down and three to go. Max and I would work ourselves between the linebackers and the deep

coverage. It didn't work. William Johnson blew through the gap between Greg Nowicki and Mahmoud Greene, leaped over Damian's desperation block and chased down Chip. William dropped Chip for a twelve yard loss.

We were back at Michigan's 37 yard line. I was surprised when Coach Burton sent out our field goal team instead of our punt team. That was a gutsy call. Andrew Perkins delivered on Coach's faith. He booted the 52 yard kick with all his leg had. Still it looked like it would be short. Our sideline let out a loud cheer when the sinking ball barely cleared the cross bars before dropping to the ground. That was the longest field goal of Andrew's career. Score: 10-0 Penn State.

Each team was able to move the ball well to start with as the first half continued. Each drive sputtered out when the field shortened, the defenders bunched closer together and the defensive turned up the heat. The scoring stalemate remained until late in the second quarter.

Michigan had the ball down to our 17 yard line. We successfully defended first and ten and second and ten passes. Michigan flooded the end zone on third and ten. Our coverage looked excellent to me as I watched.

Nick Wilson shocked us when he rifled the ball between Tyler Madden and Denzel Hunt's double coverage on a receiver. I have no idea how Nick got the ball through in that tight space but the receiver held the ball aloft anyway as the refs signaled touchdown. The big partisan crowd cheered wildly at the incredible play. Score: 10-7 Penn State.

We found out how Tanner Riggs was doing when we got inside at half time. The doctor suspected broken ribs. He was going for x-rays and would be out for the second half. Max Rosen and Brian Henson would take his spot in the second half.

The coaches counseled us to be patient. We had done well so far. We had two penalties and no turnovers so far. If we stuck to our game plan we would leave the Big House a winners.

Michigan took the second half kickoff and drove down field on us, similar to the first half. Things went wrong as they crossed midfield. Nick Wilson threw a medium pass to one of his receivers about fifteen yards down field. The ball got batted up in the air as Denzel Hunt struggled with the receiver for the ball. Tyler Madden alertly dove for the ball, catching it before it touched the ground. He hopped up and tried to thread his way through Michigan's pursuit. He gained six yards before he was tackled at our 43 yard line.

Coach Burton decided it was time to unveil one of the wildcat plays we had been saving all year. We ran three more conventional wildcat plays in the first half where I took the snap and had the option run or pass. I gained twenty-seven yards on the three wildcat plays. This time the formation looked exactly the same as the previous three plays but our intent was totally different.

Brian Henson was playing slot on the play, Jared Cantrell was split out in my normal spot. Christian lined up as our flanker. I signaled for the snap but the ball went back to Chip instead. Our other three receivers took off on deep routes down the field. I made a chip block at William Johnson as he pushed up the field after Chip and the ball. My chip block was ineffectual and I fell down. Chip rolled away from William's pressure. I hopped back up and paralleled Chip on the Michigan side of the line.

All the defensive backs had followed Jared, Brian and Christian down field. Michigan's middle linebacker tried to cover me, to little effect. Chip zipped the ball to me as I cleared the MLB and just before big William crunched Chip to the ground.

I sprinted down the field, trying to work off Jared's, Brian's and Christian's blocks. I wasn't touched until the free safety made a lunge for me at their 5 yard line. I dragged him with me as I fell into the end zone. Touchdown Penn State! The few thousand Penn Staters in that end of the stadium let out cheers as I tossed the ball to the referee. Jared, Brian, Christian and Chip mobbed me to celebrate our score. Andrew Perkins made the PAT as always. Score: 17-7 Penn State.

The stunned Wolverine crowd was nearly silent as Michigan took Andrew's kickoff and started their next drive. This was not how they had planned their homecoming weekend. Nick Wilson drove his team down the field smartly, as happened in the first half. Coach C turned up the heat on the QB as they approached our red zone. On second and short our coach decided to blitz what we were sure would be a pass.

We blitzed our strong side linebacker Brendan Hayden on the play. It was a pass – unfortunately for us a tight end screen pass. Nick tossed the screen pass over the Trevor and Brendan's heads to Garrett Bradford. With our linebacker on that side gone, and Garrett having three linemen as blockers, we were in big trouble. The linemen engaged Denzel, Salim and GJ DeLuca as they tried to reach Garrett. Garrett sprinted down the field, breaking Tyler Madden's tackle attempt and driving into the end zone.

Michigan made the PAT to narrow our lead to 17-14. We maintained our precarious lead through the rest of the third quarter. Each team had two more possessions that did not yield points. On Michigan's second drive we stopped Michigan with yet another sack, this time Bill and Trevor shared credit as they took down Nick Wilson.

We were a minute into the fourth quarter when Michigan punted the ball back to me. I managed a 17 yard return before Michigan's cover team tackled me. We started at our 22 yard line. Damian ran right off tackle for four yards on the first play. Coach Burton called for medium depth routes on the next play. Christian and I ran out routes while Brian went over the middle. Michigan double covered me and Christian, leaving Brian with single coverage. He couldn't get clear of the DB. Chip checked down to Christian who wasn't open and then to me. Terrell and the free safety had me covered inside and out. The pass rush was closing in so Chip retreated a couple steps and heaved the ball.

I think he was aiming to throw the ball out of bounds. Unfortunately the defensive end hit Chip as he threw the ball, knocking his aim off. Terrell and I both dove for the ball as it came down near us and short of the sideline. Terrell had position on me and got the ball. I tried to strip it but couldn't. Terrell sprinted for the end zone. Damian slowed him and I tackled Terrell from the back. It was Michigan's ball at our 27 yard line.

Our defense worked like hell but Michigan's offense was too good to deny this close to our end zone. We delayed the inevitable for seven plays but in the end Nick Wilson sneaked an impossible pass between two of our defenders in to his receiver. By any normal standard the guy was well covered. It didn't matter. Touchdown Michigan. They now led 21-17. 9:22 remained in the fourth quarter.

I took the kickoff and managed to return it 32 yards against excellent coverage. We started our drive at our 35 yard line. I was proud of how our team reacted. Chip was confident calling the plays. All of us knew we could move the ball and score on the Wolverines.

We were efficient and businesslike as we moved the ball crisply down the field with a mix of runs and passes. I added two more receptions to my growing total for the game. We moved the ball across midfield with growing confidence. We could do this! We **WOULD** do this!

Our offensive line pushed hard against the Wolverine defense, gouging out room for Damian to move the ball forward – to their 40 yard line. On to their 35 yard line.

On the next play Chip threw the ball to Max on a slant over the middle. Big William Johnson got both hands up in Chip's face as he let the ball fly. I don't know if William tipped the ball or if it was the bad vision. Chip's pass flew behind Max who couldn't field the ball. Unfortunately Michigan's middle linebacker could. He grabbed the miss thrown ball and weaved and dodged forward for our end zone. Our offensive line swarmed him, trying to knock the ball loose as they gang tackled him. We didn't have that much luck.

Michigan's offense coolly took care of their business. They pushed the ball down the field against our blitzes and increasingly desperate tackles. We couldn't stop them and couldn't stop the clock from running out on the game. The Wolverines ran the final four and half minutes off the clock without letting us touch the ball again. Final score: Michigan 21, Penn State 17.

Our team was stunned and disconsolate from the result of this contest. We had led in fifty of the sixty minutes of the game. We had played well. We moved the ball on one of the FBS's best defenses. We should have won, but we didn't.

Terrell Ross and Garrett Bradford sought me out after the game to talk for a couple minutes. They complimented me on my performance. They also called Nick Wilson

over and introduced him to me. He seemed like a really decent guy. I wished the three of them luck in the rest of the season and told them to enjoy the Rose Bowl.

I was exhausted from my work during the game. I had personally handled every punt and kick return on the day. Coach Adams had me play all but half a dozen offensive plays too.

I doubt I was a good interview for the TV and newspaper men who talked with me after the game. I know I complimented Michigan for a great game. All the reporters asked me how I felt after having a career best day. I told every one of them that I didn't care about any stats except the one that said Michigan-21, Penn State-17. Nothing else mattered.

I finally retreated to the locker room to shower and change after a dozen interviews. The mood in the locker room was downcast. All of us expected to win this game. It hurt to lose it in the fourth quarter the way we did. Chip was inconsolable. He blamed the loss totally on his two interceptions. Jay was pissed too. He didn't say much but I knew Jay didn't disagree with Chip about who was responsible for the loss.

Coach Adams stopped by to give me the unofficial stats in an attempt to cheer me up. The stat sheet credited me with five punt returns for 77 yards, three kick returns for 161 yards and a touchdown, eleven pass catches for 237 yards and a touchdown and three wildcat carries for 27 yards. That gave me an astounding 502 yards of offense for the day.

I would have traded it all for seven more points for our team. This loss reminded me of something Zack Hayes always preached. This is a team game. Personal stats don't count in the end. Somehow I needed to find a way to lift up my teammates' play too. Tyler, Andrew, Jibril, me and the other team leaders were going to need to figure this out if we wanted to be a Top 10 team.

We found out from Tanner when we got inside that the x-rays confirmed that he had broken two ribs. He was going to be out for several weeks while they healed.

The buses delivered us back to our hotel after midnight. In spite of our tiredness and the late hour Trevor and I couldn't get to sleep. We sat up analyzing what had gone wrong. There was a knock at our door about ten minutes later. Trevor and I expected it would be one of the coaches telling us to turn out our lights and to get some sleep.

It was Damian and Jay instead. We invited them inside. They joined our discussion about what went wrong and how did we fix it. We talked about how our offensive line played. We discussed the near impossibility of running inside against Michigan. Their linebackers were too fast to get a lot of running room outside either. The discussion went on for a few minutes.

"Guys, you're missing the most important thing," Jay interrupted. "Brinton's fuck-ups just killed us. We would have won that game 24-14 if it weren't for his picks." Trevor,

Damian and I stared at Jay, stunned that he would attack Chip so directly. "If I had been in the game we would have scored another touchdown instead of turning the ball over and letting them take the lead."

"You don't know what you're talking about," Damian countered. "Johnson was on top of him when he tried to throw the ball away. Chip made the right decision to throw the ball away. It was just bad luck that his arm got knocked when he threw."

"I'm faster than some overgrown tackle," Jay insisted. "I could have gotten away from him and made a play."

Trevor snorted. "You never tried to handle Johnson. I remember what he was like on special teams two years ago. The guy is a beast."

"How fast is your best 40 time?" I asked Jay.

"4.72," he answered.

"William Johnson ran a 4.7 second 40 three years ago when he was still in high school," I explained. "I know, I watched him do it when Michigan was recruiting me. I don't think he has gotten any slower since then. There is no way you would be fast enough to get away from him."

"Our season is going down the tubes and the coaches don't see that I'm a better quarterback than Brinton," Jay insisted. "I've been in our system for three years. I know the offense better than him. I have a better arm again. I should be the starter."

"Don't go there Jay," I warned. "The last thing we need after a loss like this is for the team to fall apart squabbling about whose fault it is. Coach Burton will put the person in at quarterback that is best for our team. That's all I need to know."

"I'm going to go in and talk with Coach Burton and Coach Schroeder," Jay replied. "I can't let Brinton throw away our season. If we don't get things corrected, we could lose to Ohio State, Iowa, Wisconsin and Michigan State. I can't let that happen."

"Be careful," Trevor said. "Be very careful. Coach Burton likes to make his own decisions. He doesn't need us telling him how to fix things."

"I'm wiped out," Damian said adding a yawn. "I'm going to bed."

"Yeah," Trevor agreed. "We have to be on the damn bus at 7:30 tomorrow morning."

Jay headed back to his room with Damian. Trevor and I turned out the lights and tried to go to sleep. Trevor succeeded within a few minutes. I could hear his gentle snoring. I tossed and turned for a bit.

I knew Jay thought he should be the starting QB. Still I was shocked that Jay attacked Chip so directly. I know you can't say a quarterback is real successful when he throws one TD and two picks in a game. Chip made good decisions today. He correctly was trying to throw the ball away on the first interception. The pick was as much the fault of our offensive line that couldn't protect Chip as it was Chip's fault.

On the second pick Max had the ball in his hands and batted it up instead of catching it. That wasn't Chip's fault. Jay was treading a very dangerous course. Coaches don't like their players to come in uninvited and tell them what to do. I was going to need to talk sense into Jay. Things could end badly for him if he carried through his threat.

Trevor and I were up at six am, showered, packed and grabbed a continental breakfast before boarding the buses for the trip home. The planeload of passengers were somber on the trip home. All of us felt the sting of losing a game that was right there for us to win yesterday. I studied on the flight home, trying to banish thoughts of yesterday's game.

A couple hundred students and fans greeted us when we got to the Lasch Building a little after noon on Sunday. Most the guys with steady girlfriends were greeted by them when we stepped off the bus. I wasn't. I gave Kelly a call on my cell phone as I walked back to my apartment with Trevor, Steph, Damian, Melanie, Billy, Sarah and Jay.

Cindy reported that my girlfriend was still asleep and was "under the weather" from last night's party. Cindy promised to have Kelly give me a call when she got up and was ready to face the world. I knew what that meant – another Sunday afternoon alone while my girlfriend recovered from her hangover.

I dropped my overnight bag off at my apartment and walked down to Pollock Commons. I grabbed a sandwich, chips and a newspaper at the Mix and headed back to my apartment. I grabbed a spare beer from the fridge and settled in on the couch with my lunch and my paper. I flipped on the TV. State College is considered Steelers territory, so I got to watch the Steelers take on the Ravens.

The Philadelphia Inquirer had a big write-up on our loss to Michigan yesterday. I had talked with their Penn State beat reporter after the game yesterday. He noted my record in the game and accurately quoted me as being willing to trade all that for seven more points on the scoreboard. The reporter noted a few things I didn't have time to learn yesterday.

My eleven receptions and 237 yards vaulted me past Jordan Norwood and Glenn Walker on the career receptions list for our school. I was now tied at third place with Derrick Williams with a 161 receptions. The reporter predicted that Deon Butler and Bobby Engram should prepare themselves. He thought I would pass Deon's 179 receptions

before the year was out. He noted I needed 44 more yards to pass Bobby's career yardage record for our school.

The records were nice but I didn't want to go through my college career the way Deon and Bobby did. The 1994 team was undefeated and never had a shot at the national championship. The 2005 team lost a single game in the last second against Michigan (those damn Wolverines again!) and was never consider for the championship game. I would much rather be a member of a national championship team than hold all the individual records in the world. Football is a team game!

I moved on to the other college football coverage. I had enough of wallowing in self pity. Ed's Gators beat up Vanderbilt 49-31. Ed didn't get in the game. Rutgers beat Navy. Hal made two of three field goal attempts. Drew and the Mountaineers of West Virginia beat Colorado 27-20. Drew carried fifteen times for 71 yards and a TD.

Notre Dame took out Army 42-10. Jeremy had a ten tackles and a sack. Syracuse made a game of it against Cincinnati but ended up losing 28-24. Jake Kring did not get to play. My brother Andy's Blue Hens squeaked out a win over Hofstra 10-6. Andy didn't have any catches as a wide receiver but did a good job returning punts and kicks.

The undefeated in the Top 10 all won their games yesterday. There wouldn't be any shake up above us in the polls. Our team could expect to drop some thanks to our loss to Michigan.

I sent off e-mails to most of my friends congratulating them on their victories. I sent a condolence e-mail to Jake Kring. Most of my friends sent back e-mails congratulating me on my performance yesterday. Apparently the national media made a huge deal about me gaining over five hundred yards.

My brother Andy called instead of e-mailing. "Hey bro, what's up?" I asked when his name popped up on my cell phone.

"Nothing. I'm just hanging with my boys in the family room," Andy answered. "How in the hell...." I heard the twins in the background giggling at their father's language. "...um, how in God's name did you get five football fields of yardage? Did Michigan play with ten guys or did they try to cover you with a nose tackle?"

I chuckled. "You're not far off. They covered me with a middle linebacker on my touchdown catch."

"Well that was bright of them," Andy said. "How'd they manage that? I'm sure they didn't draw the defense up that way." I explained how Coach Burton designed the wildcat play to give me the mismatch.

"Damn, that's...." Andy exclaimed. I heard the twins giggling gain. "Shoot, that's brilliant. I'm going to have to suggest that Coach Keeler."

“Are you having trouble with your language?” I asked. “You’ve always done well watching your tongue around Noah and Connor.”

“I spend all week with the football team,” Andy explained. “You know how locker room language is. I play the game on Saturday and then come home to see my boys. It’s ddda.... VERY hard to keep from cursing around them.”

Andy put Noah, Connor and our little brother Hunter on the phone to say hi to me. The conversations were brief. Andy and I talked for awhile about how things were going for him. Trent Wilson was acting as a mentor, helping him be successful with the team and to handle his class workload.

Andy and I talked for fifteen or twenty minutes. It was good to catch up on things with my brother. I wished Andy luck next week when his team went down to Richmond. The University of Richmond was leading the Colonial Athletic Conference’s Southern Division. The Spiders were 7-0 and Andy’s Blue Hens were 6-1. The winner of the game would take command of the division and have a huge leg up for the playoffs.

Andy wished me luck against Ohio State. Our game had similar import to us. Ohio State was 7-0 and ranked #6 in the nation. We were now 5-2. Beating the Buckeyes would go a long way towards redeeming our season.

I headed over to the Lasch Building after I finished my newspaper. I wanted to work out some of the kinks, bruises and twinges from yesterday’s game in the training room. I had been on the field for 67 of the 73 offensive and special teams plays yesterday. It had been quite a workout.

I went over to the player’s lounge when I was finished in the training room. I scrounged up a foosball game. Josh Bruno and I took on John Crosby and Bob Huber. My cell phone rang in the middle of a point.

I returned Kelly’s call as soon as I was finished the point. She wanted to see if we could get together some time after dinner. I promised to call her after the evening team meeting. We had dinner at the Training Table and then the team went back for Coach Burton’s Sunday night meeting.

The meeting was briefer than expected. Coach praised us for playing hard against Michigan. He announced that we should take a night off from football and relax. Tomorrow afternoon we would go over the game plan and study film for next Saturday’s game. Practice would wait until Tuesday. Coach wanted us feeling fresh on Saturday when Ohio State came to town.

I went over and spent an hour with Kelly at her apartment after the meeting was over. I kept my mouth shut when Kelly told me she forgave me for the fight last Sunday. This week wasn’t the time to confront her about her drinking. I would let things slide for now.

I had midterms in anthropology and geography this week along with our team playing the biggest game of the season.

The coaches were very gentle in their evaluation of our game against Michigan, much to my surprise. They were breathing fire and brimstone after our loss to USC in September. Hell, they were more upset after our win against Minnesota two weeks ago than today. They did review some errors in coverage, pass blocking and reads on Michigan's defense during the game.

I think most of the team appreciated the relaxed atmosphere. I think Jay was disappointed. He was expecting Coach Burton to ream Chip a new asshole for the two interceptions he threw in the fourth quarter.

Kelly and I had very little free time during the week. She had a Comm 283 (audio/video) midterm on Wednesday. I had my Anthropology midterm Tuesday, Geography 30 midterm Wednesday and a field trip for Landforms Geography Friday morning. The two of us had a few minutes together before and after history and she caught lunch with me on campus Tuesday. Other than that, we had to keep in touch by cell phone.

I was named Big Ten offensive player of the week for my performance against Michigan. The Daily Collegian did a big story on me Tuesday after the Big Ten honored me. I was happy they got my 'I'd give up all the honors for seven more points,' quote in the article. Our focus needed to be on the team, not on me.

I exchanged a flurry of e-mails with my sister Liz and her boyfriend Josh. The two of them were looking forward to spending a weekend on campus. This was there payoff for all the Saturdays this fall that they babysat for Mom and Dad while my parents came to my or Andy's football games.

Coach Burton called me into his office on Wednesday before practice. I assumed I would be hosting recruits again.

"Have a seat Coach," Coach Burton offered, pointing towards his couch. He came from behind his desk and had a seat beside me. Surprisingly, no one else was there to help with the recruits I expected.

"What's up Coach?" I asked.

"I want to pick your brain for a couple minutes," Coach Burton replied. "I have four young men from your high school that would like to arrange an unofficial visit to the team next month."

"Matt Sauder..." I said, counting them off on my fingers. "...Dave Mitch, Cody Stevens and Uhh?"

“Yes, that is why you are here,” Coach Burton said. “Who is Joshua Strickler? I have seen film of your high school team this year and that name has never jumped out at me.”

“He plays cornerback with the team,” I offered.

“You workout with these young men over the summer,” Coach said. “Is he any good at pass coverage? Is he fast?”

“I’d rate Josh average at best in coverage,” I said. “...and that is comparing him to other high school players. Josh isn’t fast. I think his best time in the 40 is 4.9 seconds.”

“Has he covered you when you practice?” Coach Burton asked.

“No, that would be a mismatch,” I explained. “He usually goes against Josh Hunsecker.”

“Christian’s younger brother?” Coach asked. I nodded yes. “Can he cover Joshua?”

“No, not really,” I replied.

“So you’re telling the young man is slow and can’t cover top high school receivers?” Coach Burton said. “He isn’t the sort of person we should be evaluating for a scholarship.”

“That’s right Coach,” I agreed. “This won’t be a surprise to Josh. I told him this when I saw him Labor Day Weekend. I suggested if he was determined to play football in college that he try a Division III school. He might have a shot there.”

“I will let young Mr. Strickler know that our team is not interested in having him visit,” Coach Burton said.

“It’s funny you asked me about Josh this week,” I added. “He is coming up to see the game on Saturday with my sister. They’re camping out on my floor Saturday night.” Coach Burton’s eyes narrowed and he stared at me. “Is that a problem?” I asked.

I explained about Josh being Liz’s boyfriend and how my parents were letting them have the Ohio State tickets as a thank you for baby sitting on Saturdays this fall. Coach relaxed after he heard the full circumstances.

“I think I’ll move my call to Mr. Strickler up my priority list a little,” Coach said. He chuckled. “I guess the NCAA can’t accuse us of payments in kind to entice a recruit to join us if we’ve already told the young man we are not interested in having him attend our university.”

I believe all my studying paid off after I finished the second midterm. I was sure I had aced the Anthropology midterm on Tuesday. I was confident I did well on the Geography midterm Wednesday. Now I could concentrate most of my attention to preparing for Ohio State.

Coach Valdez had our offensive line fired up. They vowed that they would take control of the game on Saturday. I believed them. The line had steadily improved over the course of the season after their shaky start. The coaches planned to have Damian and Jibril stay in pick up any blitzes and to keep Chip's uniform clean on Saturday.

Christian, Max and I would have to carry the load in the passing game. Amir Lee, our senior #2 tight end would come in occasionally if we needed a pass catching tight end. Amir had better hands than Jibril. I thought the three of us would be able to handle our task.

The bus taking us on our Landforms Geography was late getting back to campus. I walked into my history class a couple minutes after Dr. Brennan started her lecture. I grabbed a seat beside Kelly. I apologized to Dr. Brennan after class for being late. She understood after I explained about the field trip and the late bus. I walked Kelly to her next class.

"I guess I won't see you until tomorrow night," Kelly said as she gave me a good luck kiss. "Are we still taking Liz and Josh out to dinner?"

"Yep, that's the plan," I agreed. "I love you."

"Kick some Buckeye butt tomorrow," she teased before giving me a final hug. "I love you Kyle," as she went into her classroom.

I headed back to my apartment to grab some lunch. I stayed long enough to make a sandwich. Damian and Billy were upstairs. I had no interest in listening as Billy encouraged his boyfriend to play his best tomorrow by screwing his brains out this afternoon. I took my lunch over to the Lasch Building.

Chip Brinton was studying video with Max Rosen when I arrived. I was shocked to see Max "We have a film room?" Rosen actually studying before a football game. It had taken three years, but Max finally understood what it took to be successful playing at our level.

I joined them when they invited me to study with them. We worked together for about an hour and half studying the pass coverage schemes Ohio State favored and talking about how we would counteract each of them. Christian joined us for the last half hour of study. By the time the four of us headed over to the locker room to change for practice I felt we were better prepared for a game than any time since Zack finished his final game with our team.

Coach Burton had us walk through our assignments during practice without going full speed or hitting. That was a relief. We were getting into the “grind” portion of the schedule where all the abuse your body had taken over the previous seven games had accumulated.

We had dinner then headed for a team meeting at the Lasch Building. Coach Burton talked about our rivalry with Ohio State over almost two decades that we had been members of the Big Ten. He had us fired up by the time we loaded onto the blue buses.

They dropped us off at the Bryce Jordan Center for the night’s pep rally. The Jordan Center was packed to the rafters with students and alumni, every one of them dressed in white T-shirts. The Lion’s Pride pep squad distributed them to all attendees so they would be prepared for tomorrow’s white-out.

The Blue Band played, the cheerleaders and the Lion performed then Coach Burton spoke to the huge crowd. When he had them fired up he turned the microphone over to Coach Paterno.

JoePa wasn’t working full time anymore but our coach emeritus was still an integral part of our team. He had the Center rolling by the time he finished his speech. Cheers for the team were still echoing through the building as we left, boarded our buses and headed for a quiet night over at Toftrees.

My friends and I gathered in Christian and GJ’s room our Friday evening poker game. We got in an hour and half of poker even though we got to Toftrees much later than usual. Tomorrow’s game was a late afternoon game and Coach Burton let us stay up until 11:30 pm.

Even though our game against Ohio State was a huge game, ABC decided to televise the game in Baton Rouge in prime time instead. One loss Alabama was coming into Death Valley to face off against the undefeated LSU Fighting Tigers. The winner of that one was likely to face off against Ed Fritz’s Gators for the SEC championship in December.

Our game broke up around 11:15. Trevor and I went back to our room. I went on-line to check my high school team’s game. They destroyed the Braves 48-0. Normally the Braves are one of the stronger teams in our league. My Wolverines were on a roll.

I checked e-mails too. Kelly had sent me a good night e-mail. I responded before I headed for bed.

The team had breakfast at 8:30, packed up and bused over to the Lasch Building on Saturday morning. The team’s mood was relaxed but focused on the task at hand. I saw it as a good sign. We had this feeling in the locker room frequently last year.

We had a light lunch before we taped up and dressed for the coming game. Jon Stafford, Elijah Berks and Jerry Whitfield introduced three recruits that were visiting this weekend. Omar Jenkins and Jared King were defensive linemen. Darius Moore was an offensive lineman.

We had another visitor to our locker room too. Coach Adams introduced me to one of his ex-players, Deon Butler. Deon's team, the Seahawks, was on bye week this weekend so he decided to come back for this game. Deon played here at Penn State from 2005-2008. He was part of the great threesome of receivers, Jordan Norwood, Derrick Williams and him. Deon held the Nittany Lion record for most career receptions and had been #2 in yards receiving until I passed him two weeks ago after our game with Minnesota.

Deon and I had talked on the phone a couple times last year when I was soliciting contributions for the Thon. He was friendly then. I wasn't sure what kind of reception I would get now that I was breaking his records. I shouldn't have worried.

"Kyle, it's damn good to meet you face to face," Deon said as he shook my hand vigorously.

"Thank you," I replied. "It's a privilege to meet the best receiver that ever played here."

"I don't think so," Deon replied. "You beat my yards receiving already and I expect you will beat my career receptions record before this season is over. I think you've earned the distinction of being called the best receiver in our team's history."

"I think that's premature," I replied. "I'm just a junior."

Deon chuckled. "That proves my point. When Bobby Engram blasted by O. J. McDuffie's career reception record by 42 passes no one expected that record to be broken. But I did it. No one expected Bobby's 3000 yard receiving mark to be broken. What do you need? Something like 60 more yards?"

I nodded my head in agreement. I do have some ego. I knew I needed 42 more yards to beat Bobby's record. Still, it isn't good to brag about yourself.

"Are you going to come back for another year or are you going to turn pro?" Deon asked.

"I can't be a football coach and school teacher without my degree," I explained. "I'll be back next season."

"Good, Penn State needs someone like you on the team as long as you can stay," Deon answered. The two of us talked for a few minutes more until it was time to head over to the stadium. I enjoyed talking with Deon. He seemed like a friendly, down to earth kind of guy.

Buses took us over to Beaver Stadium. The day was crisp and clear. The temperature was hovering around fifty-eight degrees. It was expected to fall into the forties when the sun went down. Our fans cheered us as we debarked and tramped into the locker room.

We completed our preparations and went out to warm up before the game. The stadium was rapidly filling with tens of thousands of our fans, nearly everyone dressed in white. I helped Chip loosen up his arm by catching a few passes with him. I fielded some punts for Mitch Jackson too.

Eldon Burkholder, OSU's top cornerback, stopped by to say hello as we finished up warm-ups. We talked for a minute then wished each other luck during the game. I stopped by and said hello to Kelly, Cindy, Jen and Bev before I went back inside. We completed our preparations inside before returning to the tunnel for our entrance.

The standing room only crowd of 110,000 fans, virtually all clad in white, greeted us with raucous cheers as we ran onto the field. Their enthusiasm pumped us up. Our captains met at midfield for the coin toss. We won. Tyler chose to receive the ball.

I lined up down on our 5 yard line with Dave McCall a dozen yards to my right, also on the 5 yard line. Normally Dave's job was to watch the coverage and make the call for me whether I should advance the ball out of the end zone. After that he would block the first tackler who came after me.

Coach Ferguson decided to take advantage of Ohio State's fear of my return ability. Their focus on tackling me would be their undoing.

I caught the kick off around the 1 yard line. I ran left like I do with a return left up the sideline. Dave McCall fell into formation with me, about ten feet to my left. The Buckeyes had seen video of me running this return play many times. Their tacklers converged on me as I crossed the 20 yard line and continued running. Their gunner, the fast guy on the outside, sliced in towards me to take me down. Instead of dodging him, I turned and pitched the ball backwards to Dave.

Dave was outside of the gunner as he caught the ball. He sprinted down the sideline as the gunner desperately tried to change direction and lunge for Dave. He missed. The other Buckeyes couldn't react fast enough and swamped me under a pile of bodies. Dave is one of the fastest guys on our team. The off balance Buckeye coverage couldn't shift fast enough to get a tackle on Dave. They were reduced to chasing him down the sideline as he sprinted for the end zone.

The huge crowd roared its approval as Dave ran into the end zone. After I got up from the pile of bodies I sprinted after Dave in hopes of helping him somewhere with a block if I could. I was about ten yards behind him when he went in for the TD. I gave my friend a bear hug to celebrate his first touchdown as a Nittany Lion. Andrew booted the PAT to give us a 7-0 lead over Ohio State.

OSU took the kickoff and went to work. Our defensive line was fired up. They managed to scratch out a first down before our defense clamped down. Our defense stuffed running plays on first and second down. Ohio State's primary wide receiver had to play defensive back on third and long to prevent Shawn Byrd from picking off the pass. OSU punted the ball back to us.

I took the punt at our 21 yard line. OSU's tacklers had good lane coverage. I managed to bull my way ahead for a dozen yards before a pile of players collapsed on me. My offensive teammates joined me near the ball at our 33 yard line.

Coach Burton wanted to test Ohio State's defensive line. He ran Damian straight at them on first and second downs, gaining seven hard yards. We stretched Ohio State's defense on third and short. Christian and I both went on deep routes, Max went over the middle on a medium route. Jibril stayed in on pass protection while Damian would go out as a safety valve.

Eldon Burkholder lined up half a dozen yards away, across the line from me. OSU played me more conventionally than Michigan or USC. Eldon had safety help deep on my side. That left Max and Christian in single coverage.

The Buckeyes pass rush didn't give Chip time to hit me or Christian. The middle of their line got a good push and Chip couldn't see Max come open across the middle. Chip checked down to Damian in the left flat. Damian took the ball in stride and barreled forward, knocking over the outside linebacker to gain seven yards.

Coach Burton continued calling conservative plays, letting our offensive line work for dominance over Ohio State's line. Christian caught a fourteen yard pass on the drive. Max had a twelve yarder over the middle. I caught a twelve yard hitch when I cut my route short and shielded Eldon away with my body. Damian and Wyatt took the bulk of the plays, grinding out three or four yards at a time.

We played smart, disciplined football as we marched the ball down the field on a twelve play drive. Things came apart when we got into the red zone. Damian couldn't make a dent in OSU's big goal line defense. Chip was sacked on the next play as he tried to find an open receiver in the end zone. We settled for Andrew Perkin's 27 yard field goal.
Score: 10-0 Penn State

Our two teams sparred through the rest of the first quarter and into the second quarter indecisively. Each team was feeling out their opponent, searching for an opening. Neither offensive line was able to dominate. Coach Burton continued pounding Damian, Wyatt, and Charlie at Ohio State on the ground. I caught a twelve yarder to help out when I faked a go route on Eldon and turned back to Chip. Christian contributed a fifteen yard gain and Max added another ten yarder.

Ohio State broke through first. Coach C blitzed Josh Bruno and Brendan Hayden on a second and short play in the second quarter, gambling that Ohio State would go deep on

that down. They hit us with a tailback screen up the middle, picking up 49 yards before Tyler Madden, Shawn Byrd and Salim Rogers converged to bring the tailback down at our 13 yard line.

Our defense is tough, but that was too much advantage. OSU pushed into our end zone six plays later to score a touchdown. We replied with a ten play, six minute drive. It went well until Chip threw a hurried pass under pressure from an OSU linebacker. Max was the target. He got his fingertips on the ball but it popped up. The Buckeye nickel back alertly grabbed the ball. He was tackled before he gained more than a couple yards.

The clock was down to 1:53 in the second quarter. Ohio State went into their hurry up offense. Our defense couldn't shift personnel fast enough to keep up with their pace. They moved the ball briskly down the field and stuffed it into our end zone.

Suddenly we were down 14-10 with 0:42 left on the clock before half time. I picked up 37 yards on the kick off, nearly breaking loose before an OSU speedster caught me. Chip moved our team quickly down the field against the Buckeyes prevent defense. We stuck to passing. Christian caught a ten yarder first. Chip hit me for twelve yards next. Christian grabbed another twelve on the next play.

Coach Burton swapped Max and me, putting me in the slot this time. Chip hit me perfectly as I came across the middle. I made Eldon miss the tackle and sprinted down field. The Buckeye defenders caught me at their 4 yard line. 0:13 remained on the clock.

We tried sending Damian up the gut of their defense behind Wes Kennedy's block. They stopped Damian at the 2 yard line. Chip called our next to last timeout at 0:07. We took one more shot at the end zone. Ohio State didn't buy Damian's fake into the line. Linebackers and five defensive backs flooded the end zone. Chip tossed the ball to me in the corner but I couldn't hang onto it with three defenders draped all over me.

Coach Burton sent Andrew Perkins in with 0:02 left to try a chip shot 19 yard field goal. He made it. Halftime score: 14 OSU, 13 Penn State.

My teammates and I were a little frustrated to have only thirteen points to show for a half of work. The coaches were calm and confident. They had purposely run at Ohio State on almost two thirds of the plays in the first half. We substituted freely on both offensive and defensive lines as well as at running back. Coach Burton wanted everyone to be fresh when crunch time came later in the third and fourth quarters.

Ohio State took the second half kickoff and confidently moved the ball down the field with a balanced mix of passes and runs. They gained 42 yards on their first eight plays. Our captain came through for us on the ninth play.

Tyler Madden has had a reputation for fierce hitting as long as I've been at Penn State. He made the play of his career, coming in one on one with OSU's tailback. Tyler

smashed into the tailback, his shoulder hitting directly on the arm carrying the ball, stood the guy up, and knocked the ball loose as he took the ball carrier down.

Josh Bruno alertly dove on the loose ball before he was buried under a blizzard of blue and white and red and white jerseys. When the referees unstacked the pile Josh still had possession of the ball. It was our ball on our 36 yard line.

Coach Burton stayed with our smash mouth game plan. Damian carried for five yards and then another six yards. Wyatt came in a picked up five more. Coach Burton called for the wildcat formation on the next play.

Coach Burton called the same play we used to score against Michigan last week – the one where I pretend to block and then go out late for a pass. The Buckeyes choose to blitz on the play. I did my chip block against the defensive end, fell down and then gave myself half a second for the other defenders to lose track of me.

I hopped back up and headed for a expected gap in the middle of the field. I was surprised but not shocked when Eldon Burkholder was there to cover me. I ducked in front of the middle linebacker, turned and looked for the ball. Chip drilled it to me as soon as I cleared the linebacker and before Eldon could reach me.

I spun away from Eldon and ran for daylight down field. The free safety came up and tackled me twelve yards downfield after the catch. Eldon hit my backside as I was going to the ground. I didn't care. I had caught the ball ten yards past the line of scrimmage and then made another twelve yards after the catch. We were on OSU's 26 yard line.

I turned back to our see chaos in our backfield. The linemen were milling around trying not to look guilty. Chip was rolling around on his back on the ground clutching his left ankle. I reached the group about the same time as our trainers.

Greg Nowicki explained what happened. He had pushed his tackle back past Chip just before Chip threw the ball. His guy collided with the defensive end Elijah Berk pushed around behind Chip. Greg's guy fell and rolled up over Chip's ankle when he went down.

The trainers spent a couple minutes examining Chip before deciding he could test his ankle to see if it could bear weight. He managed to stand with Jason Pennington's help. The big crowd cheered him as Jason helped him hobble off the field.

Coach Burton yelled, "Nicholson, you're in." Jay had been warming up tossing balls to Brian Henson. Coach Burton conferred briefly with Jay before Jay trotted onto the field to join our huddle.

"OK guys, this is it," Jay growled. "We've let these fuckers hang around too long. We're going to put this damn ball in the end zone!" Jay called the play.

Eyes went wide around our circle when we heard the play. It was a play action pass and we were going for the end zone. Most coaches let a new QB have a play or two to settle down before they throw a pass. I remembered back three years ago to a game I watched at home on TV. Coach Paterno and Coach Burton had done exactly the same thing when Phil DiStefano got hurt and Zack Hayes came in. It was a touchdown play then.

Jay gave us the snap count and broke the huddle. I lined up in the slot between Christian and Jibril. After the first call I went in motion behind Jay to the opposite side of the formation. Jay called for the snap as soon as I was settled into my new position.

Jay spun around, shoved the ball into Damian's gut, who then barreled into the middle of the line. Eldon Burkholder had stayed with me when I went in motion. I ran downfield ten yards and then broke for the flag in the left side of the end zone. Jay rifled the ball to me just as I made the break, putting it over my left shoulder where Eldon couldn't reach it.

The free safety and the linebackers all bought Damian's fake. I turned on the afterburners, sprinting away from Eldon. I ran into the end zone before any Buckeye could touch me.

The huge crowd roared its approval and stamped their feet, literally shaking Beaver Stadium to its foundation. Max, Christian and Jay sprinted into the end zone to celebrate with me. The four of us jogged back to the sidelines together. The Nittany Lion gave me a bear hug and a fake kiss as I came by.

Andrew Perkins came out for the PAT. Glenn Korbel took Jay's place as the holder. The snap went low and Glenn couldn't get the ball in place in time for Andrew. The PAT skittered away wide to the right. Score: 19-14 our favor. Hopefully that miss wouldn't come back to haunt us later. I felt a little bad for Andrew. This miss ruined his perfect college record for PATs.

I looked for Chip on the sideline when I had a chance. He had gone into the locker room already for x-rays. Coach Adams let me know the trainers didn't think anything was broken but Chip was definitely done for the day. Jay huddled with Coach Adams to prepare for the next drive.

Our defense took inspiration from the offense. They were fired up and cracking people when Ohio State started their next drive. OSU squeezed out one first down before our defense took charge. Trevor broke loose and sacked the QB on the first and ten play. Pressure from Mehmed, Trevor and Bill forced hurried incompletions on the next two plays. Ohio State had to punt the ball back to us.

I started to trot out to take the punt when Coach Ferguson called me back. He sent Bruce MacCauley out in my place. Coach Burton wanted all the starters fresh for the next drive.

Bruce took Ohio State's punt at our 22 yard line. He started forward at three quarter speed watching the blocking develop. When he spotted a crease, he shot through at full speed, dodging tacklers as he went. He cleared everyone but the punter as he hit midfield. Bruce tried to fake out the punter but the he wrapped Bruce up and took him down. Our ball on Ohio State's 48 yard line.

We ran Damian up Ohio State's gut on three consecutive plays, yielding four, three and then four more yards. Coach Burton went for Ohio State's jugular on the next play. It was another play action pass.

I lined up at split end. Max lined up in the slot between me and the offensive line. Max ran an out route while I ran a slant crossing past him. Eldon Burkholder got caught momentarily as he tried to follow me past Max and Max's defender. Jay drilled the ball to me as I cleared the crowd before Eldon could have any play on the ball.

I kicked into high gear, angling away from the sideline and potential tacklers. The free safety did catch me at the 5 yard line. I was able to stiff arm him and drag him into the end zone as I scored. The huge crowd cheered and stamped their feet like they wanted Harrisburg to hear. The Lions are ahead and were going to put away the Buckeyes!

The snap was good, Glenn put the ball down and Andrew drilled this PAT. Score: 26-14 Penn State.

Our two quick scores in five minutes time took most of the wind out of Ohio State's sails. Our defense shut down Ohio State after seven plays. Coach Burton decided I had done enough for the day. Jared Cantell took my split end spot for our offense.

I hung out on the sidelines with Deon Butler. The two of us had a good time chatting as we watched Jay and our offense continue rolling. With a comfortable lead Coach Burton had Damian, Wyatt, Charlie and ET take turns running the ball and killing the clock. Damian added a touchdown when OSU's middle linebacker missed a tackle and the defensive backs couldn't take him down.

Ohio State finally managed a field goal in response. Jay and mostly second string players continued working the clock down. They added a field goal as time wound down to bring the final score to 33-17 our favor.

Eldon Burkholder sought me out when the game was over. We talked for a couple minutes. He complimented me on having a good game. He vowed that it would be closer next season when we met again. We wished each other luck as the season continued.

I liked Eldon. He was a very good cornerback. He let his play speak for him. I like that much better than the guys who ran their mouth off after every play. I felt the same way as he did. I said very little to my opponents.

Nearly a dozen reporters interviewed me after the game. All of them knew I had set the career receiving yards record for Penn State. My nine catches for 167 yards tied me for second place with Bobby Engram for receptions and surpassed Bobby's old record for receiving yardage. I now held the school record of 3149 yards counting today's game. I also had four punt returns for 66 yards and two kick returns for 67 yards. I had two games this season where I gained more yards. This was more satisfying because we won. My yards were icing on the cake to me. Winning was what counted.

Jay was ebullient when I passed him on the way to the locker room. He was still doing interviews and he loved it. I was pleased my friend was able to contribute to our victory.

Chip was outside the locker room in the tunnel when I headed inside. He was dressed in sweats and on crutches doing an interview with a Harrisburg reporter I recognized. I overheard excellent news as I went by. Chip told the reporter he had a sprained ankle. The trainers told him it should heal up within a few days. He planned to play next Saturday.

I called Kelly before the buses hauled us back to the Lasch Building. She had called Liz already. She was meeting the kids in front of the football museum at the stadium and then would take them down to the Lasch Building to meet me. I told Kelly I would probably need half an hour.

Liz, Josh and Kelly were relaxing and talking when I came out of the Lasch Building. We talked for a couple minutes, deciding to have dinner before we moved Josh's mom's car over nearer my apartment.

Liz and Josh weren't interested in anything fancy for dinner. Kelly and I suggested Baby's for burgers, shakes and fries. Liz and Josh agreed.

Baby's was packed when we got there. It took about twenty minutes to get seats and just as long to get our orders. Quite a few fans hit me up for autographs while we waited for our orders. Josh took it in stride. He had seen it before. Liz was nonplussed by it.

I realized she hadn't gone out in public with me much in the last couple years other than around Paradise. Back home I was still "just Kyle", not some big hot shot football player. Everyone knew I was a star on the team but no one made a fuss about it. Frankly, I liked it a little better that way than having all the adulation I had here.

The four of us enjoyed our dinner together. I enjoyed spending relaxed time with Liz. My "little" sister wasn't so little anymore. Liz had matured and filled out to be a very pretty young woman who could easily pass for a college freshman. The way she carried herself and acted spoke of her maturity too.

Josh on the other hand appeared to be exactly what he was, a sixteen year old high school kid. The scraggly sideburns he was trying to grow reminded everyone of his tender age.

He was polite and well spoken but his behavior showed more kid than maturing young man.

The waitress brought the check when we finished eating our meal. Josh and I looked the bill over. I teased, “You know as a potential recruit that you have to pay for your own dinner.”

“Potential recruit?” Josh snorted. “One of your assistant coaches called Thursday to make it clear to me that I wasn’t welcome to visit campus to talk about my chances of playing for your team. He was pretty blunt that ‘I didn’t fit the needs of the Nittany Lions football team.’ Oh well, I guess it was a long shot to try here. I’m sure you put in a good word for me if any of the coaches asked.”

I didn’t do a good job hiding my meeting with Coach Burton. Josh stared at me for a second and said, “You did talk to one of the coaches. Did you have anything good to say about my talents?”

“I didn’t get a chance,” I explained. “Coach Burton asked me some questions and I answered them truthfully.”

“Oh well, at least I gave it a shot,” Josh said. He smiled. “I guess I’ll just enjoy the ride our football team in on this year.”

“7-0 is an excellent record,” I agreed. “Enjoy the playoff run. I think you guys will go a long way.”

I paid for Kelly’s and my dinner. Josh used money Dad gave him to pay for his and Liz’s dinner. Josh and Liz excitedly talked about how our high school football team had done. That was a much nicer topic than Penn State’s lack of interest in a slow, small high school cornerback.

The four of us were the first to make it back to the apartment. I put Liz and Josh to work helping Kelly and me set up for the evening’s party. Damian, Billy, Melanie and Sarah came back a few minutes after we arrived. Damian pulled his already prepared hors d’oeuvres from the refrigerator and popped them in the oven.

I delegated Liz and Josh to set the snack foods out. Kelly and I put the booze and other drinks out. I called the kids together for my behavior lecture.

“I need to go over the ground rules for tonight with you,” I said.

“I know, I know...” Liz replied quickly. “No more than two beers... Josh told me your rules.”

“I was going to say that I would prefer that you not drink at all,” I answered.

“Kyle! This is a college party,” Liz replied. “I’ve had beer before. I’m seventeen. It isn’t a big deal.”

I considered for a second. I was drinking when I was younger than Liz. What the hell?

“OK, two beers,” I agreed. “Make damn sure Mom doesn’t hear anything about this.”

“Well, duh!” Liz countered. “Like I would go home and announce ‘Kyle let me have beer last night.’ What kind of idiot do you take me for?”

“Just be careful,” I cautioned. Liz and Josh agreed.

Trevor and Stephanie returned from dinner a few minutes later just as guests started to arrive for our party. Jay, Max Rosen, Bruce MacCauley and Charlie Taylor came in together. Jay and Max were in great moods. Max got his first start. Jay came in and won a big game for us.

I was surprised at the guys with Jay. He nearly always took Molly Reed out to dinner after a game. Kelly commented on where Molly was when Jay came in. A couple minutes later we bumped into Jay in the kitchen.

“Where’s your friend Molly?” Kelly asked. “The two of you rarely missed a Saturday night together.”

“Molly’s parents are celebrating their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary this weekend,” Jay explained. “She went home to help her brother throw the party.”

“That’s cool,” I commented.

“You and Molly make such a nice couple,” Kelly said. “When are you going to ask her to be your girlfriend?” I winced at my girlfriend’s directness. Jay didn’t.

“I don’t know,” he answered.

“You do like her, don’t you?” Kelly asked.

“Of course,” Jay agreed. “She’s a great girl.”

“You don’t want to lose her, do you?” Kelly asked.

“No, of course not,” Jay replied. “It’s just that.... I don’t know.... A long term commitment is so....”

“Long term?” I asked. Jay nodded his agreement. “It can be great. Look at Kelly and me. We’ll celebrate our second anniversary together in a few months. It’s been wonderful.”

Kelly slipped her arm in mine and snuggled against me. "It is great," Kelly agreed. "If I'm a little down Kyle picks me up and vice versa. We get to share our successes."

"It would have been nice to share today with Molly," Jay agreed. "Going out and winning a big game for our team – that's what I imagined back when I signed my letter of commitment to play here."

"You did play well today," I agreed.

"You were great Jay," Kelly added. "You should ask Molly to share these kinds of things with you. You don't want some other guy coming along and stealing her away."

"Yeah, you're probably right," Jay agreed. "I'll have to think about that."

I hoped Jay would take the advice Kelly and I was giving him. Molly was a great girl. Anyone who went steady with her would be a lucky guy.

Jay went back out to the living room and got the music started. Our party got going. The guest enjoyed our food. Beer flowed freely. Liz and Josh met my friends and teammates. They stayed within my rules but still had a good time.

Plenty of cute girls showed up to meet my unattached teammates. Jay found someone to invite to bed with him quickly. I was half surprised. He supposedly was thinking about asking Molly to go steady with him. Then again, Jay was one of the more popular guys for the girls to sleep with. He did have a reputation as a good lover.

Chip showed up on crutches half an hour after the party started accompanied by his best friend Austin Dilworth. Chip's injured ankle triggered the mothering instinct in a couple sophomore cuties. The guys planned to parlay the interest into more before the evening ended.

Brian Henson and ET LeBlanc showed up late, nearly an hour after most guests. Brian headed straight for the kitchen, bumping into me as I brought second beers for Kelly and me back to the living room.

"Hey Coach, who is the hot freshman over there?" Brian asked as he pointed towards my sister. "I'd love to take her to one of the bedrooms and show her a good time."

"Dude, she's my sister," I answered.

"Oh, sorry," Brian replied. "I didn't know you had a sister that went to school here."

"She doesn't," I explained. Josh returned from the bathroom and gave Liz a hug as I talked with Brian. "She is visiting with her boyfriend."

“He doesn’t look like much,” Brian said. “I could take him.”

“I hope so,” I said. “A year of weight training here would be wasted if you couldn’t take a high school kid.”

“High school? No way your sister is in high school,” Brian said. “What is she, a senior?”

“Way,” I answered. “Liz is a junior.”

“I guess I’ll find someone else for companionship tonight Coach,” Brian said. He shook his head. “You don’t have an older sister that isn’t jailbait, do you?”

“Sorry, Liz is my only sister,” I replied.

“I guess I’ll just have to find companionship elsewhere,” Brian commented as he headed for a cluster of girls. I saw he hooked up with Emily Galloway, a cute blonde haired freshman.

I kept my alcohol consumption in check that evening. I tried to keep Kelly’s to reasonable limits too using the strategy from a few weeks earlier. I attempted to divert her attention by keeping her horny and hot for my body that evening.

Kelly and I danced and made out heavily through most of the evening. Kelly was so worked up that just before midnight the two of us had to grab a quickie standing up in the downstairs bathroom. Kelly celebrated with another drink post coitus.

My plan for the evening worked, more or less. Kelly ended up consuming five beers over the evening. She was drunk but not ready to pass out when we went to bed. We made love twice before we cuddled and went to sleep.

Kelly dropped off immediately. I held her and listened to the sounds of the night. Trevor and Stephanie were quiet in the room next door to us. I could hear Jay and his girl upstairs for a couple more minutes. I recognized the sounds of my sister and Josh in the throes of passion upstairs in Damian’s room.

I counted the day as a victory for me. My sister and Josh had fun and were safe during the campus visit. Kelly and I hadn’t fought, had expressed our love for each other and were cuddled together for a pleasant night of sleep. I just needed to keep this going. Maybe Kelly and I could make things last.

Chapter 48

It was a little after ten o'clock when I woke up on Sunday morning. Kelly was climbing back into bed with me after a visit to the bathroom. Snuggling with my naked lover got me amorous. I gave one of Kelly's tits a caress and pressed my body against her back. My hard erection slotted itself in her crack.

"Not now Kyle, I have a headache," Kelly moaned.

"Do you want some aspirin and water?" I asked.

"No, just let me alone so I can sleep a little longer," Kelly answered. I gave her a quick kiss on the neck and pulled away. It was for the best. My bladder was bursting and I needed to pee. I threw on a robe and went upstairs to the main bathroom. I took care of business and grabbed a shower.

I dressed and headed down to Pollock Commons for a newspaper and some food so I could make breakfast for Kelly, Liz, Josh and me. My cell phone rang as I was walking back. It was my mom.

"Hey Mom, what's up?" I asked as I answered the phone.

"I was calling to see how your sister and Josh are doing," Mom replied.

"They're fine," I reported. "They were still sleeping when I left to go down to the store to get something for breakfast for everyone."

"That's good," Mom said. "I hope they had fun yesterday."

"They did," I replied. "Say, aren't you supposed to be in church right now?"

Mom chuckled and replied, "I'm outside the sanctuary. Church will start in a couple minutes."

"Tell Rev I said hi," I said.

"Have Liz and Josh call before they drive home," Mom said.

"I'll do that," I replied. "Love you Mom."

"Love you too Kyle," Mom said before ending the call.

I put my food in the refrigerator when I got back and went to my room to check on Kelly. She was awake but still lying in bed.

“How are you feeling?” I asked.

“Like shit,” Kelly growled.

“Would you like aspirin and water?” I replied.

“Please,” she responded.

“Why don’t you go take a long hot shower,” I said. “You’ll feel better.”

“Thank you Kyle,” Kelly said. “That will help.” I got aspirin and a glass of water for Kelly while she got her shower things together. She headed upstairs while I went out and settled on the couch with the newspaper.

Florida was idle on Saturday. Jeremy’s Notre Dame team went out to LA and beat UCLA 34-21. Jeremy had nine tackles and an interception in the game. Rutgers hosted Syracuse, beating the Orangemen 31-20. Hal Long had four PATs and a field goal to help his team win. Jake Kring did not play for Syracuse. West Virginia lost to Cincinnati 27-24 in overtime. Drew McCormick had a dozen carries for 47 yards in the loss.

The undefeated teams at the top of the BCS listings stayed that way, even Georgia Tech. They played up in Virginia this weekend. The #13 Cavaliers were favored over the #7 Yellowjackets by one point. Things worked out better than that for GT. They won 44-17 in a rout. People were going to have to give the Yellowjackets some respect.

Kelly came downstairs before I could read further in the paper. “Are you feeling better honey?” I asked.

“I feel like crap,” Kelly answered.

“Do you want breakfast?” I asked.

“I don’t know,” Kelly answered.

“I could make you toast and orange juice,” I suggested. Without thinking I added, “That usually goes OK on the stomach when you have had too much to drink.”

I knew the second Kelly fixed her bloodshot eyes in mine that I was in terrible trouble. “Drink too much!” Kelly snarled. “DRINK TOO MUCH!” Kelly launched into a diatribe excoriating me. She called me a hick Mennonite farmer, a temperance Nazi and a overbearing, intolerant, manipulative prick.

I did surprisingly well at holding my usually quick temper. I let her go on for about five minutes before I interrupted her.

“God damn it Kelly!” I exclaimed over her squawking. She paused to let me speak.
“You drink too much. I love you and don’t want you to get hurt. We just can’t continue this way.”

“FINE!” Kelly snapped. “I need a ride back to my apartment.” Kelly turned her back on me and pointedly looked away from me. I grabbed my keys and escorted Kelly out to my car. We drove back to her place in cold, chilling silence.

When we arrived outside her apartment I leaned across closer to Kelly and said, “I hate when we fight. I’m sorry. I love...” Kelly turned away, climbed out of the car and slammed the door in my face. I pulled away and drove back to my apartment.

The fight between Kelly and me woke up everyone else in the apartment. Jay and his girl du jour were upstairs showering. Trevor and Stephanie were hanging out in the living room with Josh and Liz. I briefed the four of them about my fight. Everyone sympathized with my predicament. I offered to make breakfast for everyone. Trevor and Steph passed. They were going downtown for brunch after they cleaned up.

I made breakfast for Liz and Josh while they waited for their turns in the shower. The couple thanked me for letting them stay overnight after the game and letting them enjoy a real college party. They headed for home after breakfast and their showers.

I went back to reading the newspaper after Liz and Josh left. I moved on to the next page where the Inquirer covers local football teams. Andy’s team went down to Richmond yesterday and beat the Spiders 28-24 yesterday. It put Andy’s Blue Hens firmly in first place in the southern division of the Colonial Athletic Association. Andy caught two passes for 52 yards and the winning touchdown.

I spent the rest of the afternoon reading the paper and then reading my anthropology assignment. I flipped on the TV and watched Pittsburgh thrash Cleveland as I worked. The occasional trailer across the bottom of the screen caught my attention. Zack and the Green Bay Packers were beating up on the Seahawks out in Seattle. By the time the afternoon was done Zack’s team had won 31-10.

This was excellent news for my good friend. After an 0-4 start Zack’s team had won three straight games. The three teams they beat were the Rams, the Lions and the Seahawks, but still it was a good performance after the shaky start for the season.

Chip Brinton got into trouble with Coach Burton when he showed up for dinner Sunday night without his crutches. Coach made Chip sit until his roommate Matt Frye could go back to Hartranft and retrieve the crutches the trainers wanted Chip to use. Protests that his ankle felt fine and he didn’t need them anymore fell on deaf ears. I could see Chip was still limping a little. Maybe Chip would be ready to play on Saturday.

Jay was still riding the emotional high of winning a huge game for us. He expected that his performance would lead to him starting next Saturday when we played Iowa. One of my friends was going to be bitterly disappointed. I decided to keep my head down, focus on my own role on the team and let Coach Burton sort out who would start the next game.

Kelly had not cooled off by history class on Monday. She sat at the opposite side of the room and did not speak to me at all before or after class. I let her cool down. Hopefully she would see reason eventually.

Chip showed up at Monday's practice in street clothes and watched from the sideline. The crutches were gone but the trainers wouldn't let him practice yet. Maybe he could go in tomorrow if his ankle continued healing.

Jay ran the first string offense throughout practice. He ran the team with confidence and authority. He hit me on three deep passes that were things of beauty. This was how I had expected the offense to run a year ago before Jay's accident. Jay was going to make Coach Burton's decision on who would start difficult.

Chip showed up for practice Tuesday afternoon dressed to work. Coach Burton had him watch for the first half of practice while Jay ran the first team. Coach sent Chip in to run things in the second half of practice. Neither Jay nor Chip were happy to share reps as the first string quarterback.

Both of my friends strived to outshine the other at practice. Both assumed the starting quarterback spot was up for grabs. Neither knew what Coach Burton had said a couple hours earlier during his weekly interview session with the press. We didn't find out until Wednesday morning when the Daily Collegian reported the press conference.

Coach Burton was asked directly who would start on Saturday against Iowa. He answer: 'Brinton is my starter assuming his ankle is healed. Our trainers tell me he will be ready to play on Saturday so you will find him under center when the game starts.' Apparently the reporters pressed Coach for comparisons of the two quarterbacks. He said this about Jay: 'North is a top notch quarterback who will do well if he has to play. Our team is confident regardless of which man is the QB.'

The reporters continued to press him about the "quarterback controversy." Coach was unequivocal. 'I have no interest in playing musical quarterbacks. I chose Winfield Brinton to start last August. He's my starter as long as he is healthy and effective.' The reporter asked, 'In light of his eleven interceptions, is Brinton effective?'

Coach was direct in his answer, 'He is effective when you balance the interceptions against nineteen touchdowns passing.' There was no doubt after Coach Burton's press conference. Chip would start on Saturday.

Jay did not take the news well. He went into as a deep a funk as he had back in August when he lost the starting job to Chip in the first place. He was withdrawn and uncommunicative before practice on Wednesday. He went out and did his job but talked with no one.

Coach Burton had Chip run the first team for the first half of practice that afternoon. Jay ran the first team for the second half of practice. Chip wasn't limping anymore. Everyone knew he would be ready to play Saturday.

Kelly and I called a truce to our fight before history on Wednesday. Neither of us was ready to change our position on drinking but we missed each other. We let the issue wait for later resolution. We made plans to have lunch together Thursday. Our busy schedules didn't allow more time together until the weekend.

The two of us were invited to go out to dinner with Mom and Dad after the game on Saturday. Dad is just as big a barbecue hound as me. I convinced him to try out Damon's Grill instead of stopping at the steakhouse like we usually did.

Kelly met me outside the Sparks Building a few minutes after noon on Thursday. I didn't have another class until 2:30, so we decided to have a leisurely lunch downtown. We ended up having sandwiches at Spats. We had a good, long, pleasant conversation as we ate. We purposely skirted the drinking issue. Neither of us was ready to face up to that yet. We parted with kisses and exchanges of 'I love you.' We wouldn't see each other again until Saturday after the game.

Iowa always presented challenges for our team. They were well coached and played fundamentally sound football. They were patient and waited to take advantage of mistakes that their opponents made. The game could be a trap for us with our inconsistent but explosive offense given how we made too many mistakes during our games this season. If we got careless with the ball we would lose.

Chip ran the first string alone on Thursday and Friday. His ankle was a little tender but would be ready for Saturday's game. Coach Burton's game plan for Iowa was similar to our plan for Ohio State. That made sense since Iowa played football similar to Ohio State. They had a big offensive line. They played conservatively and waited for their opponent to make a mistake.

We would run the ball in the first half and wear down the Iowa defensive line. Our offensive line would be able to get comfortable with straight forward run blocking. We would stick to safer short and medium depth passes to start with. In the second half when Iowa's defense wore down we would stretch the field with play action passes. We were confident our coach's plan would work.

The weather through the week had been pleasant, for State College, with temperatures varying from the mid-thirties at night to the high forties or low fifties during the day. Thursday night an arctic cold front came down from Canada and froze us.

It was twenty-two degrees Friday morning when I walked down to the Mix to get a breakfast sandwich and the newspaper. I needed a hat and gloves. I also wished I knew where I had put the scarf I packed when I moved back to campus in the summer. The weather report said the arctic air was going to stick around for a few days.

The grad assistants warned everyone before our afternoon practice to dress for the cold. Coach decided practice would be outside. The temperature was still below thirty when practice started at 3:45 pm. Everyone kept moving during practice to stay warm. Coaches worked us for our full practice time before letting us go inside to shower and warm up.

The team dinner and meetings filled the evening before we headed over to Toftrees for the night. Wind howled outside our rooms that evening. Trevor and I turned the heat up in our room before bedtime.

I flipped on the TV while Trevor showered Saturday morning. The weatherman reported the temperature dropped to nineteen degrees last night, tying the record for the coldest October 29th set back in 1976. I felt sorry for all those students back then. This was just too damn cold for the end of October.

I hoped Mom and Dad dressed warmly for the game. They would freeze in the stands otherwise. I had the advantage of working hard when I was on the field or standing near our sideline heaters when the defense was playing.

ABC made our game one of their regional games, so kickoff was at 3:30 pm. We had extra time to prepare and also had extra time for the sun to warm our stadium. The blue buses hauled us over to the Lasch Building after breakfast.

Tyler Madden, Josh Bruno and Wyatt Smith were hosting this week's recruits with a game time assist from Jon Stafford. We had four visitors this weekend: Grant Turner, a running back from Williamsport, Pa, Daniel Murphy, a free safety from Massillon, Ohio, Kevin Giordano a safety from Reston, Va., and Mark Markovich, a linebacker from Youngstown, Ohio. All four were seniors making official visits to our team.

The recruits and their parents had lunch with the team. After lunch we completed our pre-game preparations and rode over to the stadium. It was damn cold when we went outside to "warm up." I helped Chip warm up his arm and fielded a few punts for Mitch Jackson while he got himself ready.

I spotted the "Kyle's Krazies" sign the guys from East Halls always hung up. I went over and talked with them for a couple minutes. I call them the guys from East Halls but I didn't really know where they stayed anymore. They were juniors like me and I was sure

they lived off campus now. They hung their banner at every home game. I felt I owed them for their steadfast support for the past two years.

I looked around for Bev, Cindy, Kelly and Jen's sign but couldn't find it. I asked Christian, "Have you seen our girlfriends? I don't see our sign." The four roommates had hung the first "Kyle's Krazies" and "Christian's Crew" sign for us two years earlier when few people knew who we were.

"Bev and Cindy had a fight with Kelly and Jen," Christian explained. "The girls are worried about how much drinking and partying Kelly and Jen are doing."

"Ah, I see," I said. "I didn't know Kelly was getting pressure from her roommates too. She and I have been fighting about the same thing."

"I know," Christian said. "Bev has explained about the uhh...tension." Christian pointed towards the lower end of the student section. "Bev and Cindy are over there." I nodded my understanding. "I have no idea where your girlfriend is sitting." I started scanning the student section, looking for my girlfriend. "Keep the faith Kyle," Christian said. "You're doing the right thing getting your life under control."

"I know I am," I agreed. "I just wish I could get Kelly to understand that too."

"God willing, she'll come to understand," Christian replied.

"Amen to that," I agreed as Christian and I jogged back into the tunnel and into the warm locker room.

Iowa won the coin toss and took the ball on the kickoff. Our defensive line is big and tough. They stood up to the pounding from Iowa's big offensive line. Josh Bruno, Brendan Hayden and Jarrell Cook filled the holes and stopped the Hawkeyes running attack. Five plays later they punted the ball back to me. I made a good twenty-one yard return but wasn't able to break through.

We started at our own 41 yard line. They put two defensive backs on me every play. They shaded a linebacker underneath me too on obvious passing plays. They weren't interested in taking chances with me the way Michigan and USC had. Christian and Max were both singled covered. I expected them to have big days.

We worked the ball down the field patiently, relying on Damian to carry the load. Nine plays later, six runs and three short passes, Damian blasted the ball into the end zone to give us our first touchdown.

Our defense continued to play solid. This time they forced Iowa to punt after seven plays. Christian took their punt and returned it to our 31 yard line. Coach Burton

continued pounding Iowa's defense, running Damian or Wyatt Smith at them repeatedly. On third and two at our 40 yard line we tried to cross up Iowa's defense. I ran an eight yard crossing route. Chip hit me in stride as I passed the middle linebacker who had primary coverage for that short zone. I broke away from the strong safety's tackle and then ran away from the free safety. I sprinted down the field and into the end zone. Score: 14-0 Penn State

I was happy on the sideline. Talk about good YAC – yards after the catch. I caught an eight yard pass and made fifty-two yards after the catch. That is the way to do it!

Our fired up defense stopped the Hawkeyes after three quick plays and a punt. Coach Burton gave the Hawkeyes more of the same when we got the ball back. A lot of running with a few passes mixed in. Ten plays later Damian took an outlet pass from the four yard line and bulled his way into the end zone when Chip couldn't find an open wide receiver in the end zone. Score: 21-0 Penn State

Iowa did manage to score a touchdown on us in the first half with a lot of hard running and a good play by their best receiver. He managed to get in behind Denzel Hunt and slip into the end zone before Tyler Madden could tackle him.

We were satisfied to go into half time with a 21-7 lead. Iowa's defense had been on the field for nineteen of the thirty minutes in the first half. Our pounding had to be taking its toll.

I took the second half kickoff at the goal line and returned it 27 yards. Iowa's coverage was excellent. Coach Burton called a run up the middle for our first play. Chip recognized that Iowa slipped an eighth man up in the box to defend on the run. He called an audible and switched us to a play action pass.

Christian headed deep at the snap. I smiled as I saw the free safety sprint towards Christian to help cover him deep. I was one on one with my cornerback. I faked an out route and turned back inside when he went to my left. Three steps later I was open and Chip fired the ball to me. I caught it, turned down field and sprinted for the end zone, angling away from the out of position free safety. No one touched me before I streaked into the end zone. Andrew booted the PAT through to extend our lead to 28-7.

Iowa managed to sustain a drive on the next series. Our defense yielded but held them to a field goal instead of a TD. With a 28-10 lead in the third quarter, Coach Burton went into ball control mode. Damian, Wyatt and Charlie took turns running the ball at the Hawkeyes. We didn't manage to score but we ran nearly eight minutes off the clock. Mitch Jackson pinned Iowa down at their seven yard line with his coffin corner punt.

I must give Iowa credit. They were persistent and poised. They worked the ball down the field, mixing passes and runs to keep our pass rush at bay. Their quarterback got hot. He squeezed balls into impossible locations. We had him down to third and twelve. Shawn Byrd had the primary receiver blanketed so he could barely breathe. The QB

drilled the ball in to the receiver anyway. I had no idea how he did it. He kept the drive going, ending up floating a ball into the back of the end zone to his tight end. Score: 28-17 Penn State

Half a minute remained in the third quarter. Coach Burton had us begin another pounding, time consuming drive. Damian, Wyatt and Charlie pounded the ball at Iowa's defense. They tried sliding an extra guy up into the box to help with the run. Chip spotted it immediately and made the Hawkeyes pay. This time he hit Max Rosen going across the middle on a slant. Max took off after he caught the ball and sprinted downfield. Iowa's free safety took him down fifteen yards short of the end zone. Chip found Christian one on one in the back of the end zone on the next play and drilled the ball to him. Score: 35-17 Penn State

We were successful scoring but we only ran three and half minutes off the clock. Iowa took the ball and went to work. Our defense harassed them. Trevor sacked the QB. Bill and Mehmed kept him under pressure. They were forced to punt the ball back to us. Brian Henson took the punt, sprinted right and dodged a couple tacklers before he was taken down. Brian gained 22 yards on the return, giving us the ball on our 45 yard line.

We punched the ball right at Iowa again. Damian was gaining more yards with each carry as the defense tired. Chip hit me with a quick out pass to keep the defense off balance. Damian ran up the middle again. Chip went for a quick out to Christian this time to loosen things up. Unfortunately the cornerback on that side anticipated the play and jumped in front of Christian to intercept the ball. The cornerback ran the ball back 63 yards before Christian and I could push him out of bounds.

Iowa had the ball on our 12 yard line. Our defense is good but we still couldn't keep them out of the end zone. It took them five plays but they stuffed the ball into the end zone and then kicked the PAT. Our lead was reduced to 35-24, which was considerably less comfortable.

We played ball control again. We pounded the ball down the field. Our drive stalled out at Iowa's 34 yard line. Andrew Perkins tried a 51 yard field goal. The ball bounced off the left upright and skittered out. It was still a good drive. We left 1:57 on the clock for Iowa. They needed two scores to win.

Iowa's quarterback ran their two minute offense to perfection. He moved his team right down the field on our defense. Our defense stiffened when Iowa got close to our red zone. They needed six plays and all three of their time outs to get the ball into the end zone. 0:37 remained on the clock when they kicked the PAT to narrow our lead to 35-31.

Coach Ferguson sent the hands team out for the on-side kick. Christian scooped the ball up before any Hawkeye could touch it. Chip kneeled down to run the clock out on the game.

Iowa had proved to be a good opponent, pushing us harder than we had expected. Our team played well. The offense had two penalties all day. Chip threw four touchdowns against the one interception.

Christian was our leading receiver, catching eight passes for 122 yards and a touchdown. Damian carried the ball 24 times for 142 yards for one touchdown. He caught four passes for 37 yards and his other touchdown.

I caught six passes for 172 yards and two touchdowns. I added one kick return for 21 yards and one punt return for 27 yards. It was a good day for me but not a great day. Iowa was determined that I wouldn't kill them. That opened things up for Christian who was able to make them pay.

I did the obligatory interviews from the tunnel where I was out of the cold. Now that the game was over and the sun was down it was freezing outside. Most of the questions were routine. I tried to emphasize that I thought Chip played well in the game, reminding every reporter that he had four TDs against the one interception.

It was almost eight o'clock by the time I showered, changed and met Kelly and my parents outside the Lasch Building. Dad offered to drive everyone since Damon's Grill was close by.

Damon's was packed when we arrived. We waited half an hour for a table. I did autographs and talked with fans while we waited. Kelly was totally used to that. It was a standard part of any date we had. Dad had been to enough games by now not to let the fans bother him. He knew what it was like for me on game day. Mom was less comfortable with all the people coming up to talk with me. This was her second time at dinner with me after a game.

I ordered a whole rack of ribs for myself. I was famished after the light lunch and no food after the long game. Dad ordered half a rack of ribs. Mom and Kelly both ordered the pulled pork sandwiches. Dinner was delicious.

Kelly excused herself to go the lady's room as we were finishing dinner. As soon as Kelly was gone Mom asked, "Are you and Kelly having problems? Things seemed strained between the two of you this evening."

"Kelly and I had a fight last weekend," I admitted. "We're working things out but it takes time."

"I could talk with Kelly if you want me to," Mom offered. "Maybe a woman to woman talk would help."

"Thanks for the offer Mom but I don't think so," I said.

I desperately wanted to shout out ‘Yes, help me fix this. I love this girl but she’s driving me crazy right now.’ I couldn’t say it. That would lead to too many admissions about my past drinking and about Kelly’s drinking. Mom wouldn’t approve of any of that.

All I added was, “This is something Kelly and I have to work out on our own.”

“Your father and I are always willing to listen Kyle...” Mom said. “... to anything.”

“Thanks Mom, we’re fine,” I hedged. Maybe I did need to find someone to talk to but our troubles but it wasn’t Mom or Dad. Maybe Justin Baer, Zack Hayes or.... Will! I should call Will tomorrow. Maybe my big brother would have some ideas that would help Kelly and me.

Kelly returned a minute later. None of us let on about our discussion while she was gone. We decided to live dangerously and have dessert. Dad drove us back to campus after we finished our meal.

I had Dad drop us off at the corner of Pollock and McKean. If Dad dropped us off at my apartment Mom and Dad might want to drop in. Jay and Trevor were setting up for the night’s party. We didn’t need parents visiting and finding all the beer.

Kelly and I thanked Mom and Dad for dinner and wished them a safe drive home. Kelly and I walked the couple hundred yards over to my apartment. Trevor, Stephanie and Jay were nearly finished setting up for the party. Kelly and I helped our friends finish preparations.

We had a good turnout for our party. Tyler Madden brought the recruits over from the party at the apartment Josh Bruno, Wyatt Smith, Bill Daugherty and Elijah Pitts shared. The recruits visited the guys over there but weren’t into the whole country music and NASCAR interests of the partiers. They were more interested in rocking out with us.

Kelly’s brother Mike showed up escorting Amanda Long again. Mike proudly let us know they were a couple now. I congratulated them. Kelly had known for about a week.

I planned to divert Kelly’s attention from drinking that evening the way I had the previous weekend. I planned to make out a lot and keep her more interested in sex than in drinking. It worked, but only to a limited extent.

Kelly and I were in the kitchen getting our third beers for the evening when she announced, “This party is boring. Let’s go down to Omega Chi and see what’s up.”

“No, I’d rather not,” I replied. “You remember what happened the last time we went to one of their parties.”

“Drinking!” Kelly growled. “Are you going to start on the temperance lectures again?” Before I could answer she snapped, “I am NOT in the mood for lectures tonight.” She

spun around and stormed out of the kitchen. I followed at a safe distance. Kelly's outburst was heard in the living room. Trevor, Stephanie and Jay all gave my sympathetic looks when I came back into the room.

I talked with the recruits to kill time while Kelly cooled down. Mark Markovich, the linebacker from Youngstown, Ohio was a real student of the game. I enjoyed talking about defensive and offensive philosophies.

Mark knew football and he was a big guy for a high school senior. He weighed maybe 230-235 pounds. He was big enough to play in the Big Ten today. He was going to be a real handful when he started proper weight training and went on our diet regimen.

Mark followed some of the top linebackers around the country, commenting on the strengths and weaknesses he saw as he watched them play on TV. I couldn't help laughing when he told his favorite college linebacker was Jeremy North.

I told him Jeremy and I were close friends who grew up together. Mark's mom was pushing him to go to Notre Dame. Their family was Catholic. Mark's dad was more pragmatic. He wanted his son to attend the school that gave him the best experience as an athlete and a student. I pushed our university's reputation as Linebacker U. Mark helped recite the long list of great linebackers that had played at Penn State over the decades Joe Paterno coached the team. Mark promised me he would give Penn State a fair chance after he visited Notre Dame in two weeks.

Kelly pointedly ignored me and sulked during the evening. She drank like crazy. I let her alone. I knew anything I said or did would just make things worse. I had to call my brother Will tomorrow afternoon. I could see my relationship with Kelly going down the tubes and I didn't know how to fix it.

By the time the party was over Kelly was passed out on the couch. Trevor, Stephanie, Jay, Molly, Mike and Amanda cleaned up the apartment quickly before heading to bed. Mike had gotten permission from Damian to sleep over with Amanda in Damian's bed. Mike helped me carry Kelly back to my bedroom before he and Amanda went upstairs.

I stripped my girlfriend down to her panties, put one of her T-shirts on her that she kept at my apartment and laid her down on the bed. I stripped down and joined Kelly in my bed. I didn't feel like cuddling so I just lay beside the comatose lump that was my girlfriend.

I woke up about 10:30 on Sunday morning. Kelly was dead to the world. The other couples in the apartment were still sleeping. I took a shower and headed down to the Mix to get breakfast and the Sunday newspaper.

The sports section had a big headline about our "close call" with Iowa. I had explained to Jeff Morgan, Inquirer beat reporter, last evening that while the 35-31 score looked close,

we had been in firm control of the game from beginning to end. I was going to have to talk with him next Saturday out in Evanston. Last night he said he understood my point.

I turned to page two to see how the other college teams fared. Ed's Gators beat Kentucky 34-28 yesterday. Ed didn't play. Jeremy and Notre Dame beat Purdue 41-38 but it took a last minute drive to come from behind. Jeremy had ten tackles, a sack and an interception in the game.

Rutgers lost to Connecticut 27-17. Hal made both PATs and a 27 yard field goal to help his team. Syracuse's troubles continued. They lost 27-14 to Virginia yesterday. Jake Kring didn't play in the game.

Yesterday was a big day for upsets in the Big Ten. Michigan State upset Michigan 28-17 in East Lansing. Even bigger, Wisconsin dominated Ohio State behind their big offensive line. The final score in the game was Wisconsin 24, Ohio State 22. It was huge news for us.

We were in a three way tie with Ohio State and Michigan for the lead in the Big Ten. If we took care of Northwestern, Wisconsin and Michigan State in the next three weeks and Ohio State managed to beat Michigan in the last game of their season we would go back to the Rose Bowl again. That game would be played at the Horseshoe in Columbus. The Buckeyes were murder to beat in their stadium. I wouldn't mind another trip to sunny southern California for Christmas and New Year's.

Delaware lost to Towson 49-35 yesterday. The paper said Andy had scored a touchdown on a punt return in the third quarter. He also caught three passes for 62 yards. The Blue Hens still led their division in spite of their second loss.

Jay, Molly, Trevor and Stephanie all got up around 11:30. The foursome headed downtown for brunch after they showered. Mike and Amanda got up fifteen or twenty minutes after Jay, Trevor and their girls left.

As he and Amanda were getting ready to leave Mike commented, "Sis was really hitting the juice last night. How's she doing?"

"I checked on her fifteen minutes ago," I answered. "She's still dead to the world."

"My family is pretty loose compared to most when it comes to drinking," Mike said. "Mom and Dad know we have beers on the weekend. Hell, Dad let Patrick have a beer while he was still fourteen. But what I see Kelly doing is over the top. Is she OK?"

"I don't know," I answered. "Kelly and I have been fighting about this off and on for months. I'm worried about what she is doing."

"I'll say something to sis," Mike replied. "I'm her brother. I can do that."

“Make sure my name doesn’t come up at all if you talk to her,” I said. “If my name is involved she is going to blow up again.”

“It needs said,” Mike answered. “I care about my big sister and I don’t want her to get hurt. I will talk to her and I will not use your name in the discussion.”

“Thanks Mike,” I replied. “I appreciate any help you can give me.”

“No problem,” Mike said as he and Amanda started out the door. “You have an away game next week, right?” I confirmed that. “Do you mind if Amanda and I come to the party in two weeks?”

“Mike, you and Amanda are always welcome here,” I answered.

I checked on Kelly again after Mike and Amanda left. She was still asleep. I got aspirin and a bottle of water ready to help her with her hangover when she woke up.

I made myself sausage, eggs and hash browns while I waited for Kelly. I knew she would be too hung over to want much food. I read my paper as I ate my brunch.

Kelly finally got up around 12:30 in the afternoon. I gave her aspirin and hydrated her before sending her upstairs for a long hot shower. Kelly was still pretty out of it when she came back downstairs.

“Do you want something to eat?” I asked.

“Oh no, I couldn’t stand the thought,” Kelly replied quietly. “My head is pounding. I think I’d throw up anything right now.”

“Do you want to hang out this afternoon together?” I asked. “If not, I can give you a ride back to your apartment.”

“I think I could use the ride,” Kelly answered. There was no anger in her voice, just tiredness. “I just want to curl up and sleep until this headache goes away.”

I drove Kelly back to her apartment. We parted with a quick kiss and a hug. I went back to my apartment, flipped on the TV. I was lucky, Fox had the Eagles/Cowboys game on. I settled in on the couch with my paper, ready to read and watch my childhood favorite team beat up on the hated Cowboys.

Donovan McNabb, DeSean Jackson, Brent Celek, Jeremy Maclin and LeSean McCoy could light things up. They beat up on the Cowboys defense. Unfortunately the Eagles defense wasn’t much better. The game was tied at 28-28 in the fourth quarter when the Eagles pulled ahead to stay. Dallas double covered Jackson and Celek. Maclin broke free from his DB. McNabb found him and hit him in stride. Maclin scooted into the end zone untouched for a 51 yard TD. I had to give the man credit. He could play.

I was compared to Maclin in college frequently. I led the NCAA in offensive yards again this year. My 260 yards/game average beat the nearest competitor by over fifty yards a game. The last time the leader was as far ahead as me was when Jeremy Maclin was lighting things up out at the University of Missouri. Hopefully I could do as well as him when I turned pro.

David Akers kicked an insurance field goal as the clock wound down. I decided to give my brother Will a call.

“Hey little brother, what’s up?” Will asked when he answered the phone.

“I was wondering if you had a little time,” I replied. “I’ve got a problem and could use some advice from my big brother.”

“I’m just watching the Eagles beat up the Cowboys,” Will replied. “Sweet, isn’t it?”

“Indeed it is,” I agreed.

“What’s on your mind Kyle?” Will asked.

I spent about ten minutes outlining the problems Kelly and I had been having over her drinking this fall. I didn’t spare any details including the two times I screwed up and passed out at frat parties.

“What am I going to do Will?” I asked when I concluded my story. “I love her totally but she is driving me crazy right now. How do I get her to change?”

“What have you tried to get her to change?” Will asked.

“We’ve talked a lot,” I said. “Sometimes she seems to get it and agrees to cut back on the drinking. The very next weekend she at it again. Other times she just blows me off when I try to warn her about her partying.”

“Did you listen when your friends were telling you to cut down on the drinking last year?” Will asked.

“Eventually I listened to Zack and Anders,” I replied.

“Did you change because they told you to or did you change because what happened that Saturday night last April?” Will asked.

“More that I scared myself that weekend,” I agreed. I had confided in Will last summer about the disastrous four-way. “How do I get Kelly to realize how dangerous it is to party the way she does? I want the sweet girl I fell in love with when we were freshmen back again.”

“Can you get her to change?” Will asked. I didn’t answer. “I don’t know if you can.”

“Well, what am I going to do?” I complained. “I love and I can’t lose her.”

“I think you’re going to have to decide,” Will said. “Are you better off staying with her or are you better off breaking up with her?”

“Break up?” I replied. “I can’t do that! I love her.”

“And she is making you crazy,” Will countered. “You said it yourself. You can’t take this anymore. Are you better off with her or without her? You have to decide.”

“I can’t break up with her,” I said. I thought to myself, ‘Somehow I have to make this work.’ I just couldn’t bear the thought of losing Kelly.

“Remember the question the next time you two fight,” Will said.

“I’ll try to remember that Will,” I replied.

“How are you doing Kyle?” Will asked. “I hear you are cutting down on your own partying.”

“I thought your Penn State spy moved to Green Bay last summer,” I answered.

“I still have my sources,” Will countered.

“Chip?”

“Yes, I keep in touch with Chip,” Will said. “He impressed me last summer. I hope he comes back to camp for work next summer. Do we have a shot at keeping him?”

“Maybe,” I allowed. “Chip and I haven’t talked about it. I think it was a little bit of a fluke that he ended up working at camp last summer. He couldn’t find a summer job back home. Working at camp gave him a chance to work with me all summer and improve his shot at becoming the starting quarterback. Chip may not have the same motivation next summer.”

“Encourage him Kyle,” Will said. “He is an excellent employee. I would love to have him back.”

“I’ll do what I can,” I promised.

“Keep in mind the key question Kyle,” Will said as he wrapped up our call. “Are you better off with Kelly or without her? You have to decide that.”

“I know,” I agreed. “That’s a tough call right now. Thanks for the advice big brother.”

“See you at Thanksgiving,” Will said. “Have a good game next weekend.”

Will gave me a lot to think about, mostly things I didn’t like. I DID love Kelly. The two of us had planned to spend our lives together. I hated the idea of breaking up with Kelly but my life had been hell the past couple months. I was going to need time to think this through.

I watched the Eagles beat the Cowboys 38-24. That was one small pleasure for my afternoon. I flipped the TV over to CBS to watch the late afternoon game. I was delighted to find it was the Broncos against the Chargers.

Coach Jeff Baldwin was letting Brady Rasmussen have his first start that afternoon. The Broncos ran the ball a lot, making Brady’s introduction easier. The Chargers blitzed Brady on every obvious passing down. Coach Baldwin gave Brady three step drop short passes and maximum protection on those downs. The receiver often caught the ball two or three yards downfield and would have to fight to get to the down marker. Sometimes they made it, sometimes they didn’t.

It was quite a contrast to the way Coach Bauder was breaking in Zack up in Green Bay. Zack probably would have more confidence in his ability to pass, assuming he survived his initiation.

The Broncos had found an excellent tailback out of Oklahoma in the second round of the draft last spring. Simeon Thomas had to carry a lot of the load for the offense right now.

The Broncos made another good find on defense in last spring’s draft. They used the second round pick they picked up in a trade from Detroit to take Marcus Everett. Marcus was an excellent defensive end I remembered from when we played USC in the Rose Bowl when I was a freshman.

The Broncos lined Marcus up beside Antwaan Booker. Antwaan tied up two or three blockers on every play. It left Marcus and the other two defensive linemen golden opportunities to harass Philip Rivers. Good play by the defensive line and the linebackers kept the Chargers bottled up through the first half. The score was 10-7 Broncos at half time when I had to head over to the Training Table for dinner.

Coach Burton and rest of the coaching staff conducted a post-mortem on the win over Iowa. By and large they were complimentary of our efforts. They pointed out places where we could improve. Chip got chewed out for the fourth quarter interception. Chip didn’t let the criticism disturb him. He filed the information away in his head and made sure not to make that mistake again in the future. It is a good characteristic for someone who plays a high profile position like quarterback.

Jay flipped on the Sunday night game on NBC when I got back to the apartment. The four of us hung out in the living room watching Baltimore take on New England. At halftime I found out how Brady and the Denver Broncos fared. The Chargers had scored a touchdown in the second half to take the lead. In the fourth quarter Antwaan Booker sacked Rivers and stripped the ball away. Marcus Everett scooped the ball up, and ran fifty-seven yards to score the go-ahead TD. The Broncos won 17-14.

I sent of an e-mail congratulating Brady on his first NFL victory. Zack and Green Bay didn't do as well. They lost to the Bears 27-13 in the afternoon.

I thought Kelly might have cooled down by Monday. I was wrong. She sat at the opposite side of the history classroom from me. She caught me when I left the room after class.

“Did you put Mike up to lecturing me about my drinking?” she demanded.

“No, I didn’t,” I replied. “As a matter of fact, I warned him to keep me out of the discussion. I knew how you would react if I was involved.”

“Why in the hell would Mike talk to me like that otherwise?” Kelly demanded.

“Your drinking scared him on Saturday night,” I said. “He loves you and cares what happens to you. So do I.”

“I DO NOT HAVE A PROBLEM!” Kelly snapped. She stormed down the hallway.

The only thought in my mind was ‘Am I better off with her or without her?’ I wasn’t sure anymore.

Chip, Christian, Max and I did some video study of our next opponent Monday afternoon before practice. The video was revealing. Northwestern had a young, inexperienced secondary. They were ranked in the lower end of the FBS. Their defensive line was on the smallish side. It looked like we wouldn’t need to play smash mouth football this week. We may be able to crank up our aerial attack instead.

That is exactly what Coach Burton outlined when we started practice and went over the game plan for Saturday. We would stretch Northwestern sideline to sideline and take them deep. Coach Burton felt we would be able to protect Chip to make the plan work. Damian and the other running backs were happy with the plan too. With the receivers spreading the defenders out they would be able to run much more effectively and with fewer bruises.

The captains and the other team leaders kept the younger guys focused on the tasks we needed to carry out to beat Northwestern. Coach Burton drilled us on our assignments but kept the hitting to a minimum. I thought our practices went well.

I had a Landforms Geography term paper due on Thursday. Dr. Brennan assigned us another term paper for our Gettysburg class that would be due in two weeks. Classes and football took nearly all my available time during the week.

It was just as well that Kelly and I didn't have a lot of time together. Our ongoing fight about drinking continued unabated all week. We called a truce long enough to get together Thursday night after I finished with football for the night. We went downtown together for a snack at Cold Stone Creamery.

I created a sundae with mint ice cream, brownie pieces, chocolate chips and chocolate sauce. Kelly chose one of their signature creations – Cheesecake Fantasy with cheesecake ice cream, graham cracker pie crust pieces, strawberries and blueberries. For half an hour we were able to forget the difficulties in our relationship and enjoy our time together. Kelly wished me luck out in Illinois for Saturday's game when I dropped her off at her apartment.

The team met at the Lasch Building at 9:30 on Friday morning for the flight out to Illinois. Our charter landed at O'Hare Airport in Chicago. Buses took us up to the Hilton Garden Inn near Northwestern's campus.

Trevor and I had just finished unpacking in our room before dinner when my cell phone rang. I glanced at the name. It was Zack Hayes.

“Hey Zack, what’s up?” I asked as I answered the call.

“I was wondering if you have plans for dinner,” Zack said.

“Dinner? Umm... I’m meeting the team at our hotel in fifteen minutes,” I said. “Why are you asking? Where are you?”

“I got a bye week this week,” Zack replied. “It’s a three hour drive from Green Bay. Leigh Ann and I decided to come down to watch the game tomorrow.”

“You’re in Evanston?” I said. “Cool!”

“Leigh Ann and I want to take you out to dinner,” Zack said. “What do you think?”

“I’ll have to talk with Coach Burton,” I replied. “I don’t know if I will be allowed out of the team dinner.”

“It’s already arranged,” Zack said. “I talked with Coach fifteen minutes ago.”

“Do you have a place you’d like to go?” I asked.

“How does barbecue sound?” Zack asked.

“It sounds like you are reading my mind,” I replied.

“There’s a place a couple blocks from the hotel,” Zack said. “What time are you free?”

I glanced at the clock. It was 4:52. “I’m free right now,” I said. “Do you want to go early? I have a team meeting at 7:30 pm tonight.”

“I know,” Zack replied. “Coach Burton told me that you had to be back for the meeting.”

“Where are you staying?” I asked. “Will it take long for you and Leigh Ann to get over here?”

“We’re on the sixth floor,” Zack said. “You’re in 414, right?”

“Yeah,” I agreed. My friend’s sources of information were impeccable.

“We’ll be down in two minutes,” Zack said. “See you then.”

“Cool, see you then,” I agreed.

I grabbed my coat while I waited for Zack and Leigh Ann. There was a knock at the door a minute later. I opened it and greeted my good friend. We exchanged handshakes before I saw Leigh Ann standing behind her husband.

Zack had written last month to let me know he and Leigh Ann were going to be parents next spring. Leigh Ann’s belly bulged out much farther than my sister-in-law Abby’s belly when I saw her a few weeks ago. I stared too long and mumbled a greeting.

“I guess our secret is out,” Zack commented.

“Zack said you were due in the spring,” I said to Leigh Ann. “I didn’t expect that Uh...”

“March is spring,” Zack said.

“I’m due March 1st,” Leigh Ann said. “I know, I look huge.”

“No, that isn’t what I meant,” I replied. “You look lovely as always. It’s just that I didn’t expect you to be showing yet from what Zack’s e-mail said.”

Trevor came over to rescue me from my fumble mouth. Zack and Leigh Ann greeted Trevor warmly.

Zack, Leigh Ann and I headed downstairs to Coach Burton's room before we left. Zack and Leigh Ann wanted to say hi to Coach. Coach was polite and friendly to his ex-quarterback and his wife. I could see by Coach's face that he was just as surprised at how advanced Leigh Ann's pregnancy was. He managed not to put his foot in his mouth the way I had. Coach warned us to make sure I was back to the hotel for my meeting later that evening.

We walked a block south on Maple Avenue, a block east on Clark Street and half a block south on Benson Avenue. We passed a couple other restaurants on the way. We stepped inside Merle's Barbecue.

Merle's had a full bar along one side of the restaurant. The rest of the dining room was filled with tables and booths. The hostess seated us at one of the tables in the center of the room. Our waiter stopped by thirty seconds later. He did a double take when he saw Zack.

"You're... you're..." he stuttered as he stared at Zack. "Hayes... You play for the Packers, don't you?"

"That's me," Zack agreed.

The waiter lowered his voice. "Don't tell anyone here. I'm from Madison. I'm a huge Packers fan. Are you going to get our team going again?"

"I'll do my best," Zack promised.

The waiter eyed me. "Are you a football player too?" he asked. I nodded yes. "I bet you're here with Penn State." I nodded yes again.

"Kyle Martin," I said as I extended my hand to him to shake. The waiter shook with me.

"Be kind to my Wildcats tomorrow," the waiter said. "I saw what you did to them last year."

"I'll try," I agreed.

"Would you like autographs?" Zack asked.

"That would be great," the waiter agreed. He placed the menus in front of us. He withdrew to give us time to make our selections. . Zack told me not to worry about costs. He was paying for dinner. He ordered a plate of Angus cheddar sliders, a garden quesadilla, and a plate of potato skins. Zack ordered a beer. Leigh Ann and I ordered Cokes.

The three of us perused the menu. It didn't take Zack or me long to make up our minds. I wanted a rack of the St. Louis style ribs. Zack went for the baby backs. Leigh Ann wasn't into great slabs of meat like us. After careful consideration she chose the Cobb Salad.

We enjoyed our appetizers while we talked and caught up with each other's lives. Thanks to the pregnancy Leigh Ann did not look for a job after graduation. She would be a stay at home mom for a year or two after their child was born.

Zack talked extensively about the West Coast offense he was learning in Green Bay. He swore that I should hope one of the West Coast teams drafted me when I came out in the draft in a year and a half. Zack said the offense was geared to a receiver like me perfectly. Everything was sight adjustments based on the defensive scheme. The system put a premium on smart football players.

I gave Zack my evaluation of our football team. I felt we were coming together. The offensive line had come together in the past month. Damian, Wyatt and Charlie gave us a strong group of running backs. Our wide receivers were nearly unstoppable when Chip had time to work.

Our defense had made excellent progress this year too. I told Zack we were peaking at the right time. If Ohio State could beat Michigan at the Horseshoe in two weeks we stood an excellent chance at returning to the Rose Bowl again.

Our dinners arrived. My ribs were big, juicy, fall off the bone tender and displaying the pink smoke ring characteristic of quality barbecue. I had corn bread, baked beans and cole slaw with dinner. It was excellent. Zack and Leigh Ann enjoyed their meals too.

We were nearly finished eating when Leigh Ann asked the uncomfortable question I sort of anticipated.

"How are things between you and Kelly?" Leigh Ann asked.

I took a deep breath and exhaled. "We've been better," I admitted. "Kelly and I have been fighting about her drinking."

"Kelly and I keep in touch," Leigh Ann said. "Is that what the problem is about? Kelly told me she is so frustrated with the way you are always trying to control her. She also is mad that you never want to go out on Saturday nights. All you want to do is sit around at your apartment."

"At the team party me and my roommates throw every weekend," I added.

"You could take her out sometimes, couldn't you?" Leigh Ann asked.

“We have. It was an absolute disaster all three times we went out to other parties,” I explained. “Two times both of us got totally wasted. We passed out and woke up at a frat instead of spending a nice night together in bed. The third time I had to practically drag Kelly back to my apartment after she drank too much. It wasn’t pleasant.”

“Well, drink a little less and take Kelly out more,” Leigh Ann said. “The two of you need to work this problem out.”

“Drink a little less... that is exactly what I am trying to get Kelly to do,” I countered. “I might be willing to go downtown to parties more often with Kelly if I knew she wasn’t going to get so wasted at them. I’m scared that we’re going to get in trouble this way.”

“You’re exaggerating the danger Kyle,” Leigh Ann said.

“No, no he’s not,” Zack added. “You probably don’t know what it was like for football players six years ago when I was a freshman. We went downtown to parties like other student. Drunks would try to prove their manhood by picking fights with us. I don’t know how many guys got arrested for drinking, fighting, etc. A lot of them got kicked off the team. That is why the team organizes on campus parties in a safer environment.”

“This is what I’m trying to tell Kelly,” I explained. “She can’t or won’t understand. If I did what she wants I’m afraid she’d get carried away and I’d get kicked off the football team.”

“Kyle’s got his head screwed on right,” Zack agreed. “...finally.”

“I could talk to her Kyle,” Leigh Ann offered. “Maybe that will help her understand why you are insisting on avoiding those parties.”

“I’d like to think it would help Leigh Ann but it won’t,” I replied. “If you bring up the subject of drinking with Kelly she is going to assume I put you up to it and refuse to listen. I know, her friends and her brother already tried to reason with her. It will blow up if you do.”

“You need to do something Kyle,” Leigh Ann said. “Things are falling apart between you and Kelly.”

“Don’t I know it,” I agreed. “I’ve tried everything I can think of to get through to Kelly. I think it is going to take something really big and ugly to finally get through to her that she can’t drink the way she has been. I’ll try to be a good and patient boyfriend until she understands that.”

I could see both Zack and Leigh Ann were dubious about my plan but they let it go. It was the only hope I had left. No amount of talking seemed to reach Kelly.

Our conversation moved on to more pleasant topics. Coach Burton got Zack a sideline pass for the game tomorrow. Leigh Ann was going to sit with Mrs. Burton and a couple other coaches' wives during the game.

I tried to leave the tip for the meal since Zack was treating me. He wouldn't hear of it. He reminded me I was a poor college student and he was a millionaire. I could treat him to dinner after I signed my first NFL contract. I reminded Zack nothing is guaranteed in life. I would promise to treat him and Leigh Ann to dinner when I got my first job.

We walked back to the hotel, arriving just in time for me to join my teammates in a conference room for the team meeting. My teammates and I spent an hour or so reviewing the game plan to prepare ourselves for the game.

Evanston got hit with snow flurries over night while we slept. The squall blew through quickly and was gone by the time we got up for breakfast. I listened to the weather while Trevor showered. The temperature at 6:30 am was 32 degrees. A high of 47 degrees was expected before mid-afternoon. It was to be clear and breezy for game time.

We had a 7:30 team breakfast before heading over to Ryan Field. Northwestern vs. Penn State wasn't a big game nationally or even regionally. We would be televised on the Big Ten Network with a 11:15 kickoff.

Our buses took us over to Ryan Field after breakfast. Wildcat fans were gathering outside and setting up to tailgate. We went out to check out the field immediately after arriving. The dusting of snow was melting already. The field was firm and relatively dry. It looked ready for a football game.

We headed back inside to dress and prepare for the game. The air had warmed by the time we came back out for warm-ups. The steady 10-12 mile per hour breeze blew through the stadium. It shouldn't a problem given how strong Chip's arm was. He would deliver the ball where we needed it.

The athletic department arranged a light lunch for us before we took the field. Northwestern's band did their best to excite the crowd as the Wildcats took the field. The announcer said the crowd exceeded 31,000 fans. The upper third of the stadium was mostly empty. I guess a lot of Northwestern fans expected us to blow out their team and stayed home.

Jibril Sloan called the coin toss correctly. Coach Burton chose to receive the kickoff since he didn't expect wind or weather to be a factor in the game. I lined up down at the southern end of the field with the breeze blowing into my face. The kick came down a couple yards in front of me. I adjusted, grabbed the ball and headed up field behind my wedge. Northwestern had good coverage. I slipped around the knot of players in front of

the wedge and cut towards the sideline. I made a couple guys miss before the pursuit caught me. They put me down at our 45 yard line.

Northwestern covered me with a cornerback and rotated the free safety my way. The two gave me a ten yard cushion. Christian and Max both drew single coverage. They were going to have big days.

Our confidence about our ability to handle Northwestern wasn't misplaced. Our offense worked exactly the way coaches drew it up. Northwestern couldn't cover Christian with one guy. If they moved the free safety over to cover him, I came free.

Christian had a career day – nine catches for two touchdowns and 187 yards. Max and I each caught six passes. Each of us added touchdowns to the cause. With the receivers spreading the defense Damian, Wyatt and Charlie had plenty of room to run.

We were ahead 24-7 at half time. Coach Burton didn't let up on the gas pedal in the second half. We added ten points in the third quarter.

Our team suffered one significant loss in third period. Tyler Madden came out cradling his left wrist after a particularly hard hit on the Wildcats tailback. The trainers splinted Tyler's wrist as soon as he came off the field and took him in for x-rays. Dave McCall went in and did a good job at free safety filling in for Tyler. Tyler returned to the sidelines part way through the fourth quarter in street clothes sporting a cast from his elbow to his knuckles. He would be out for a few weeks.

Coach Burton sent Jay and the second string in to play just before the fourth quarter. I hung out with Zack on the sideline as the fourth quarter played out. Jay's crew added ten more points before the game ended.

I was surprised at the number of reporters that wanted to interview me. I tried to redirect them to the day's heroes, Christian and Chip. Not that it did me any good at all, but I tried.

The first reporter, Jeff Morgan from the Philadelphia Inquirer, hit me with a question that was totally unexpected.

"Kyle, you set single season reception and yards receiving records last season. You broke those records this season," Jeff Morgan said. "You beat Bobby Engram's career yards receiving record two weeks ago. You just beat Deon Butler's career receptions record today. What's left for you?"

"Well," I said with a wink. "Two, probably three more games this season."

"After this season Kyle," Jeff continued. "You hold every receiving record at Penn State. Do you come back for your senior season or are you going to declare for the NFL draft?"

I couldn't help laughing at Jeff's question. Over the last year and a half I had talked with Jeff weekly during the season and half a dozen times during the off season. Jeff knew I was a regular reader of his paper. As reporters go, Jeff was a really decent guy that I trusted as much as any reporter. He was surprised at my laughing at his question.

"Jeff, you know I love to play football," I explained. "Playing football isn't my goal. I want to teach high school and coach football as a career. Playing in the NFL would be nice but it isn't my life's goal. I need a degree to teach and I'm a year and a half away from a degree. For better or worse Penn State is stuck with me for another eighteen months."

"I don't think anyone at Penn State is going to shed tears if you stick around Kyle," Jeff replied.

"I guess not," I said. "Any way, I still have one more goal to accomplish at Penn State. I want to see us win another national championship." I gave Jeff a wink. "I think I'll need another year to accomplish that task. I don't see all eleven teams in front of us losing two or three games each in the next month. I doubt we'll be in the BCS Championship game this season."

Jeff quizzed me about my evaluation of our team. I said I thought we had a lot of excellent players to replace from last season. It had taken time but our team was coming together. I said we were ready to play with anyone now.

None of the other reporters asked me about my future plans. That was fine. I didn't want to encourage questions like that. I was returning to Penn State next season. Going into the NFL would be fun but that wouldn't do me any good with my chosen career path.

We went in, showered and dressed after we finished with the media. The athletic travel staff hurried us. Our bus was leaving Ryan Field at 4:30 pm for the drive to the airport.

I said good bye to Zack after I was dressed. He and Leigh Ann planned to walk back to their hotel tonight and drive back to Green Bay tomorrow. I wished him luck with the second half of his schedule. He would need it too. Seven of the remaining eight opponents had winning records. The only easy game left on his schedule was the one against the Lions on December 10th.

We grabbed snacks for the road before we boarded our buses for the trip down to O'Hare. We got dinner on the plane after we took off for Pennsylvania. The buses delivered us back to the Lasch Building a little after 11:00 pm. Around a thousand fans showed up to cheer us when we stepped off the buses. Steph showed up to greet Trevor, Molly for Jay, Bill, Melanie and Sarah were there for Damian.

I talked with Bev and found out Kelly had gone to a party downtown with Mark and Jen that evening. I headed back to my apartment with the other couples. Damian and Billy headed for Billy's apartment. I went to bed.

I grabbed a newspaper and breakfast sandwich at the Mix late Sunday morning when I finally got up. I was anxious to see how my friends did yesterday in their games. The biggest one was the Gator's game against LSU. Florida was third ranked in the nation. LSU was ranked #5. The winner had an excellent chance to win the SEC title and to go to the BCS Championship.

I skipped past the coverage of our win yesterday on the front of the sports section straight to page 2. The lead article was headlined, "Gators beat LSU 27-20." The subheading was what caught my eye. "Backup QB Leads Come From Behind Victory," Excitedly I read on.

The Gators fell behind in the first half 17-13. LSU's defense did a good job frustrating Terrence Walker, the Gators starting QB. Terrence hurt his ankle in the third quarter and couldn't continue. Ed Fritz played spectacularly in relief, leading his team to two touchdowns. The second TD was a dramatic, two minute drill drive to break the tie as time expired on the clock. Ed completed 12 of 18 passes for 202 yards. He had no interceptions or sacks.

#1 Oklahoma was upset by unranked Nebraska. #5 Texas struggled against Texas Tech but managed to beat the Red Raiders in the end. #8 Michigan had trouble with Iowa yesterday. They needed a last second 47 yard field goal to win 31-30. They didn't help their chances of going up in the polls. The BCS rankings were going to get shook up thoroughly in the evening.

West Virginia went to Rutgers and lost. Hal Long kicked the winning field goal in the game. Drew McCormick carried the ball 13 times for 42 yards in the losing effort. Notre Dame had a bye.

I flipped to the next page to check on Delaware. James Madison University upset my brother's team 44-24 yesterday. Andy had three catches for 57 yards and a touchdown. My brother's chances of going to the FCS playoffs went down a little after that game.

I went on-line to check on my high school Wolverines. Matt Sauder, Dave Mitchell, Cody Stevens and friends had beaten Sadsbury on Friday night 45-7. This was their final regular season game. They would begin the playoffs next weekend. I didn't need to wait for the playoff seedings. The Wolverines were the only undefeated AAA team in District 3. They would be the number one seed.

I gave Kelly a call after lunch to see if she wanted to get together. She was feeling ill and decided to rest at her apartment. I was shocked! How unusual for my girlfriend to feel unwell on a Sunday. I was a bachelor for another afternoon.

I worked on my anthropology term paper for awhile and then went over to the player's lounge to relax with my teammates. It was an enjoyable afternoon.

Coach Burton assembled the team in the auditorium at the Lasch Building after dinner for a review of our game against Northwestern. It was a fun review. Coach got after a few people for missed passes, poor blocks or missed tackles.

We got bad news about Tyler Madden's injury. He had a broken wrist. He would be in a cast for at least four weeks. Our captain would miss Wisconsin, Michigan State and possibly our bowl game too. David McCall was a capable free safety but we would miss our fiery captain's on-field leadership and hard tackling.

Nearly all of us headed for the player's lounge when the meeting was over. We wanted to see the latest BCS poll. The new poll showed: Florida-#1, Georgia Tech-#2, Alabama-#3, Texas-#4, Oklahoma-#5, Boise St-#6, LSU-#7, Michigan-#8, Penn State-#9, Notre Dame-#10, and Ohio State-#11. Jeremy was going to be ticked off that my team bypassed his team in the polls while they were idle.

Preparations for Wisconsin began Monday afternoon. The Badgers had their usual big offensive line that powered their running game. We were confident that our defensive line and linebackers could handle them. Coach Burton wanted us to get out to a fast start in the game and force the Badgers to pass to keep up with our offense.

This wasn't because Wisconsin's quarterback was bad. He wasn't. The Badgers ran 60% of the time. That was their comfort zone. We wanted them uncomfortable. We planned to stack up the running lanes and challenge them to beat us passing. Shawn, Dave, Salim, Denzel and GJ could handle their receivers.

Coach Burton kept practice light so the walking wounded had time to heal. A few of our backups had bad hamstrings or sprained ankles. The rest of us were nicked and dinged but healthy, except for Tyler Madden. Our captain showed up for practices in khakis and a blue Penn State polo shirt like the coaches did. He cheered and scolded our work on the field, doing his best to lead us.

It was a bitter blow for Tyler to miss Senior Day at Beaver Stadium. The other captains and leaders on the team agreed that Tyler would lead us into the Stadium Saturday and would do the coin tosses for the remaining games in the season.

Kelly was civil to me on Monday. It gave me hope that maybe we could work things out. I had time after my football meeting on Monday night to think about what I could do to repair our relationship. I learned about conflict resolution in Youth Leader Training when I was in scouts. I needed to apply those lessons to our problem.

I always tried to lecture Kelly about her behavior. It was counterproductive. What I was taught in scouts was to listen first before trying to resolve a problem. How had I missed that step?

Kelly had a test Wednesday morning so I knew she would be busy studying Tuesday night. Wednesday after history I would suggest the two of us go out for a snack. I would ask Kelly to tell me what I was doing wrong. Once she got talking and had explained her point of view and needs to me I hoped she would be receptive to listening to what I had to say.

Will's question, 'Are you better off with her or without her?' stayed in my mind. The question was in my mind nearly constantly since he posed it to me. I didn't like the answer I was coming to. I loved Kelly so much. I just couldn't bear to break up with her. Something in the dynamic of our relationship HAD to change.

Kelly found me outside our history classroom Wednesday afternoon before class. I greeted her with, "Hey honey, how are you doing?"

"Doing? JUST PEACHY!" Kelly snapped. "How dare you enlist my friend Leigh Ann in your temperance Nazi campaign?"

"I didn't," I insisted. "As a matter of fact I begged Leigh Ann not to talk to you about it. I knew how you would react."

"How do you think I'd react something this underhanded?" Kelly snapped. She stormed into the classroom without waiting for my answer. I went in and sat down beside her. She moved across the room as soon as I was settled. I let her go. Cameron Miller, who witnessed the exchange, looked on sympathetically.

My plan to resolve our relationship problems – toasted. My hopes to strengthen our relationship – crushed. I felt as low as a person could get. Were Kelly and I doomed?

Coach Burton called Chip, Charlie Taylor, Jon Stafford and myself into his office Wednesday before practice. We would be the guides for this week's group of recruits. William Smith Jr., a tight end from Mt. Pleasant, Pa., was one of our guests. Bill was a senior. The other three recruits were well known to Chip and me – Matt Sauder, Cody Stevens and Dave Mitchell of Paradise, Gordonville and Paradise respectively. My friends were juniors on unofficial visits to Penn State.

Coach Burton reviewed the plans with us for the weekend. The recruits and their parents would arrive around 11:00 am on Saturday and meet with Coach Burton. We would meet the group around 11:30 and take them to lunch with the team. Jon would take the group on a tour of campus while the rest of us prepared for our 3:30 game. The four of us would take the recruits downtown for dinner while the coaches took the parents out. We

would give the recruits a chance to meet team members at the party at my apartment. I would drive them back to the Penn Stater Hotel Saturday night. It was all quite standard for me by now.

I didn't hear from Matt, Cody or Dave before they came up to Penn State. I was sure the three were totally focused on their first playoff game on Friday night. My Wolverines were seeded #1 in District 3. They would play #16 Shippensburg at McCaskey Stadium in Lancaster. It was football and anything could happen but I was confident my 10-0 Wolverines would beat 6-4 Shippensburg.

Christian was named Big Ten offensive player of the week for his efforts the previous Saturday. The Daily Collegian did a feature article on him Thursday after he was honored. The reporter interviewed me for the piece. He tried to find out if we had a rivalry going but I assured him that Christian and I were close friends and had been for many years. I was pleased to see my friend get the recognition that he deserved.

Kelly cooled down enough by Friday's history class to sit with me again. We discussed plans for dinner on Saturday night. She was looking forward to seeing Matt, Cody and Dave again.

Dad invited an important insurance client of his to attend the game. Dad and his client would meet us after the game at the Lasch Building so his client could meet Chip and me. That would be good to impress his client. Taking the client to dinner with a bunch of high school kids, not as impressive. Dad planned to take him down to Boalsburg after he introduced us.

We did a pep rally at the Jordan Center on Friday night. The Blue Band, the Lion and the cheerleaders revved the crowd. Coach introduced every one of the eighteen graduating seniors on our team. The crowd gave our seniors a good sendoff.

It was sobering to stand out on the floor beside the seniors. Twelve months from now this would be me. Where had the time gone?

Buses took us over to Toftrees after the pep rally. My usual poker crew met in Christian and GJ's room for the game. We paused the game about 10:30 pm.

A lot of the guys' high school teams were playing in the playoffs that evening. Christian and I were interested in how District 3 AAA teams fared. We went on-line at LancasterOnline and found good news for both of us. My Wolverines played Shippensburg, beating them 48-9. They would play Daniel Boone Area High School next weekend.

Christian's Central team played #12 Hersey, winning a close game, 24-21. They would face Greg Nowicki's East Pennsboro team next Friday night. Greg's team upset West York to advance.

My friends and I killed time until curfew with our poker game. The grad assistants came around at 11:30 doing bed checks and making sure everyone got a good night's sleep before tomorrow's game.

We were up for a team breakfast at 8:30 and then headed back to the Lasch Building to prepare for Wisconsin. I reviewed the game plan and got myself mentally prepared for the game. Around eleven o'clock I went out to the reception area to greet my friends when they arrived.

Dave Mitchell and his parents were sitting in the lobby when I got there. I greeted my friend and neighbor warmly. William Smith and his dad showed up while we were talking. I introduced William (Bill) to Dave and welcomed him to Penn State. The Stevens family and the Sauders family showed up last. They rode up to campus together. I greeted Matt, Cody and their parents before letting Marie know all the recruits were ready to see Coach Burton.

I went back to the locker room for awhile while they met with Coach. Twenty-five minutes later Marie paged Chip, Charlie, Jon and me. Coach Burton walked with the recruits, their families and the guides as we took them over for lunch. Coach Adams sat with me and the Mitchells. Coach Jackson, Matt and his parents sat with Chip and Jon. Coach Goodwin and Charlie sat with the Stevens family. Coach Curry sat with the Smiths.

Jon Stafford took the recruits and parents on a campus tour while the rest of us went back to the locker room to suit up and prepare for the game. We were blessed with exceptional weather for State College in the middle of November. The temperature was 55 degrees when we came out for warm ups. Weather wouldn't be a factor in the game.

Kelly and Jen sat with Bev and Cindy this game. The Kyle's Krazies and Christian's Crew sign was on display again. I gave the girls a smile and a wave after I finished warming up. The team went back inside for final preparations for the game.

Each of the eighteen seniors were introduced including our starters Memed Marsic, defensive tackle; Salim Roger, hero (strong safety); Ben Walker, right guard; Max Rosen, slot receiver; and our three captains Jibril Sloan, tight end; Andrew Perkins, kicker and Tyler Madden, free safety.

Tyler Madden, Coach Adams and Tanner Riggs did something really nice for Senior Day. Tanner's broken ribs had healed enough that he was cleared to play half a game

today. Tyler and Tanner asked Coach Adams to have Max play the first half so he could be a starter in his final game at Beaver Stadium. Max had come a long way this fall.

The rest of us followed the seniors as they ran across the field to our benches. Wisconsin took the field to polite applause. Wisconsin won the coin toss and elected to receive the ball. Our kick cover team did a great job, taking down their return man on their 18 yard line.

Wisconsin went immediately to their power game. The 250 pound tailback went straight into the middle of our line for three yards. They repeated the play for three more yards. They muscled their way ahead on third down and four to go. Mike Pollard and Memed Marsic held firm in the middle as Josh Bruno and Brendan Hayden filled the gap. We thought we had them stopped. The Wisconsin players signaled first down. The refs spotted the ball, eyeballed it and then brought the chains in to check.

Wisconsin made the down by inches. They tried stuffing the ball up our gut again. Coach C anticipated them and had a run blitz called. Josh Bruno occupied the guard while Trevor stunted and shot by him into the backfield. Trevor almost made it to the handoff. Trevor didn't go for the tackle. He punched at the ball as the tailback received it from the quarterback, knocking it away.

Trevor jumped on the fumble before the Badger players could react. Our ball on Wisconsin's 23 yard line. Damian ran off tackle behind Elijah Berks and Jibril Sloan. He picked up five yards. Damian went wide on a pitch out on the next play, picking up three more yards. On third and short Coach Burton threw a play action pass at them.

The free safety came up to help stop Damian. I was by the cornerback in a second. Chip lobbed the ball fifteen yards down field to me. I cruised into the end zone untouched. Andrew kicked the PAT. Score: 7-0 Penn State

Coach C had the right game plan to contain Wisconsin and our guys played the plan to near perfection. We went up 14-0 at the beginning of the second quarter when Chip hit Max on a crossing route against a linebacker and he outran the pursuit.

Our lead forced Wisconsin to curtail their running game and to pass. Unfortunately they did well passing. They answered Max's score with a field goal. Wisconsin adjusted to our plans, holding us without score as the second quarter continued. We punted the ball back to Wisconsin with less than two minutes to go to halftime.

Wisconsin ran no huddle, using shotgun and quick passes to avoid our rush. They moved the ball down the field on our defense. Coach C tried a blitz. Unfortunately for us, Wisconsin ran a screen play. Their tailback scooted downfield behind his blockers. Dave McCall forced him out of bounds at our 22 yard line. Wisconsin used their big offensive line to push deeper into our red zone. After three runs they hit their tight end just short of the end zone. Josh Bruno went for the tackle. He wasn't able to keep the tight end from bulling his way into the end zone. Score: 14-10 Penn State

Andrew Perkins and I gathered the kickoff return team together just before halftime ended. We challenged the guys to hit their blocks hard. We needed a big return to start the second half right.

“Get me a hole guys,” I demanded. “We can’t let the Badgers run on us. Make them play our game and chase us. Give me that hole and we’ll make them chase us again.”

“We need a big play guys,” Andrew echoed. “Give Coach room to work and he’ll get us a big play.” Andrew huddled us and we chanted “We are...” “Penn State” and took the field.

The guys took our exhortations to heart. I took the ball on our 3 yard line and ran forward to get behind the wedge. Joe Ricci blasted the tackler in front of him, driving him to the ground. Jeff Knox kicked out the tackler he faced towards the sideline, leaving me a huge hole in the coverage. I shot through at top speed.

Joe also took out the next guy I faced as I angled towards the right sideline away from the coverage. The only guy left with a play on me was the kicker. I eyed him as we closed. The guy had to be the smallest football player I had ever seen – 5’-7” or 5’-8” at most. I decided to run over him to save time.

I lowered my shoulder and blasted into him. He crumpled but had enough football sense to grab my leg as he went down. I tried to shake the sucker but couldn’t. The pursuit took me down from the back. I tossed the ball to the ref when they unstacked the pile. It was our ball on Wisconsin’s 40 yard line.

Coach Burton pressed our advantage immediately. He lined us up in the wildcat formation. The snap came back to me and I headed for the left side of our line. I expected to see the corner covering Jared Cantrell staying with Jared. Instead he went to tackle me as I approached the line of scrimmage. I planted my feet and hurled the ball downfield. I even got a decent spiral on the ball. Jared was alone. He adjusted slightly, caught my pass and then sprinted for the end zone. The free safety recovered just in time to push Jared out of bounds at the two yard line.

We flooded the end zone with receivers on the next play. Damian stayed in the middle of the line to help block for Chip. Or so it looked. When all the pass defenders had committed to a man Chip flipped the ball forward to Damian on a shovel pass. Damian burst between two rushing linemen into the end zone.

The Penn State crowd cheered wildly for my roommate. Andrew Perkins came in and booted the PAT through the uprights. Score: 21-10 Penn State

The big plays put our team firmly in the driver’s seat again. The Badgers were going to have to pass to keep up with our scoring. Shawn Byrd ended the Badger’s scoring

chances on their first drive of the second half, picking off the ball and returning it to our 38 yard line.

We had the Badgers down but they wouldn't give up. They turned us away on our next drive. A couple timely sacks stopped Wisconsin's next opportunity. We went on a long drive on the following possession. Unfortunately it ended with a missed 51 yard field goal try. Timely blitzes and a big sack by Trevor stopped Wisconsin again.

We got things going on our next possession. Chip hit me in stride on a slant on the fourth play. I took it 49 yards before being pushed out of bounds at Wisconsin's 22 yard line. Damian ran a couple times but only gained five yards. I was double covered on the next play so Chip hit Christian six yards downfield. Christian spun out of the tackle and headed for the end zone. He juked the safety out of the tackle and streaked into the end zone. Andrew's successful PAT increased our lead to 28-10.

The Badgers were not disheartened. They put together an excellent drive mixing in more runs than earlier. Our defense did its best but we couldn't stop them. Wisconsin scored a touchdown to bring the score to 28-17 our favor. Thirteen minutes remained in the game.

Coach Burton tried to out-muscle the Badgers by running Damian, Wyatt and Charlie at them. We burned eight minutes off the clock on the drive but a couple penalties pulled us out of field goal range. Mitch Jackson punted the ball into the corner of the field. Wisconsin took the ball at their nine yard line.

Our defense stopped Wisconsin and forced them to punt back to us. The Badgers had good coverage and Christian was forced to fair catch the punt. We started on our 31 yard line. Damian, Wyatt and Charlie pounded the ball down the field burning time off the clock. Wisconsin spent their remaining time outs to keep us from using all the time on the clock. An unfortunate holding penalty pulled us out of field goal range. We punted the ball back to Wisconsin. Mitch wasn't able to pin them against the end zone.

Wisconsin had 1:52, no timeouts and needed two scores to win. Coach C put our team in prevent defense. The Badgers moved the ball downfield, taking the short passes we weren't defending. They needed eight plays to get into the end zone. An excellent pass gave them a touchdown. They kicked the extra point to cut our lead to 28-24. Twenty-four seconds remained in the game when they tried an on-sides kick. I jumped and caught the short kick. Chip took the ball, kneeled down and let the clock run out.

I had a good day but not a great day. I had two punt returns for 39 yards, one kick return for 57 yards, six catches for 128 yards and a touchdown. I also completed one pass for another 38 yards. I wasn't the big hero today. We really didn't have a big hero in this game. Everyone played nice and steady. We executed the coaches' game plan and beat a good but not exceptional team. That is what top teams did.

I did interviews with the reporters after the game and headed inside. I called Kelly and Dad to let them know my schedule. Half an hour later the team was back in the locker

room at the Lasch Building showering and changing for the evening. Jon Stafford brought Matt, Dave, Cody and Bill into the locker room so they could see and feel victory at our level of play.

Matt, Dave and Cody were comfortable talking with the players. I guess being friends with Chip and me took some of the mystique away from playing for a top college team. Bill Jones was shy. I called him over and talked with him as I dressed.

I tried to draw him out. I found out where Mount Pleasant was. It was in Adams County southeast of Gettysburg, not too far from Hanover. Bill's high school, Littlestown High, made the playoffs too. They beat the Milton Hershey School last night in AA ball. Physically Bill was a perfect specimen of a tight end. At 6'-3" he was about an inch shorter than me and outweighed me by around twenty pounds. We'd see in the morning if Bill had the speed and skills to catch passes but he definitely looked the part.

Chip, Jon, Charlie and I gathered up our four recruits and headed out to the lobby to meet their parents and our coaches. Kelly, Dad and Dad's client were waiting inside with the parents. Coach Burton talked with everyone about the evening's plans and then left with the parents and other coaches.

Kelly greeted me with a hug and a kiss. She was in a good mood. Dad introduced his guest, Jim Horst, to us. I introduced Mr. Horst to Chip, Charlie and Jon. Mr. Horst seemed excited to meet Chip and me.

I introduced Matt, Cody, Dave and Bill to Mr. Horst. After Matt was introduced he asked, "Are you JJ's dad?"

"Yes... yes, I am," Mr. Horst. "How do you know my son?"

"Football camp last summer sir," Matt replied. "I think your son will be a good tight end. I was impressed with what I saw."

"My son does love football," Mr. Horst agreed. The rest of us learned more about his son JJ, actually James Horst Jr. He was a seventh grader on the middle school team. Matt and Dave had worked with him a little on his receiving skills last summer.

Dad and Mr. Horst thanked us for stopping by. Chip and I gave him autographs for him and his son. I promised to check up on his son in the spring when I helped with spring drills. I told Dad I would see him in two Wednesdays. I expected to be home for dinner the night before Thanksgiving.

The group headed downtown, talking about options for dinner on the way. Matt, Cody and Dave didn't want to go anywhere too expensive since they had to pay their own way. We settled on the Penn State Diner.

Matt, Dave and Cody peppered Chip and me with questions about the game as we enjoyed our supper. Bill mostly listened but asked a few questions too. Chip, Charlie, Jon and I did our best to sell the Penn State football program to our charges. The nine of us headed back to campus and my apartment.

Trevor, Steph, Damian and Billy had the apartment set up for the party. I went over the ground rules with the recruits. Charlie and Damian engaged Cody and Bill in conversation about playing running back and tight end here at Penn State. Chip introduced Matt around the party.

Christian and I spent some talking with Dave about lessons he had learned so far playing wide receiver. I made sure Dave connected with John Crosby and Brian Henson so he could get perspective from the younger guys.

Kelly played hostess for awhile. I noticed she was getting bored so I danced with her a bit. I planned to keep Kelly interested in lovemaking not drinking that evening. It wasn't the most successful strategy in the past but it was all I had. Kelly was already on her third beer when I turned my attention to her.

I shuddered when Kelly's cell phone rang a few minutes later. "Hey Jen, what's up?" Kelly said as she answered the call.

I knew what this call meant. Kelly commented, "Omega Chi? Cool," as she listened to her wild roommate. Kelly clicked the phone off and said, "Jen and Mark are down at a really bitching party at Omega Chi. We should go down there."

"You know I can't do that honey," I said. "I'm in charge of the recruits tonight."

"They're doing fine," Kelly countered.

She pointed towards the boys. Matt and Chip were talking up a couple girls. I knew Chip's intentions. Matt's girlfriend Annie was Liz's best friend. I wasn't sure what Matt was up to other than enjoying a little flirting. Dave and Brian Henson were flirting with a couple other girls. Cody and Bill were engrossed in conversation with Damian, Charlie and ET.

"It won't hurt at all if we go over to Omega Chi tonight," Kelly replied.

"I have to drive the guys back to the hotel at 11:30," I said.

"We can go for an hour or an hour and a half," Kelly shot back.

"No, I can't leave," I said.

"Damn it Kyle!" Kelly snapped. "I'm tired of this boring party every weekend! We need to get out of here and have some fun!"

“I can’t,” I retorted. “We would go down there, drink too much and feel like shit in the morning. We’ve done that too many times.” My patience was growing short.

“God damn it! Not another friggin’ temperance lecture,” Kelly snapped. “I should just go to the party without you.”

“FINE!” I barked. “Do what the hell you want.”

“Fine, I will!” Kelly growled. “I’m out of here. I’m going to go have some fun!” Kelly stormed off, found her coat and left in a hurry.

I let her go because I was pissed. Why was I putting up with all this shit Kelly put me through? Will’s question, ‘Are you better off with her or without her?’ took on more urgency. How could I go on like this? The question would have to wait until morning. I had duties to concentrate on tonight.

The party went well. Cody and Bill enjoyed talking with Charlie, ET and Bob Smith. Charlie got to talk about the rush he felt playing in front of 110,000 fans. Bob and ET played in today’s game too, though only on special teams.

Dave Mitchell got to second base with a freshman Brian Henson hooked him up with. Dave made out on the couch while Brian took his girl back to my bedroom for a romp. Matt Sauder was the only recruit to score with the ladies. Beth Naylor ended up taking Matt upstairs to Damian’s room for forty-five minutes. So much for Matt’s fidelity to his girlfriend Annie.

I rounded up the other three recruits when Beth finished with Matt upstairs. I loaded them up in my VW and drove the group back to the Penn Stater Hotel. Cody and Dave teased Matt on the way back about boning a college girl.

I asked, “What is Annie going to say about your affair this evening?”

“Annie?” Matt replied. “She isn’t going to say anything. Annie dumped me a week ago.”

“She did?” I responded. “I didn’t know that.”

“You don’t think I would have screwed a strange girl if I was still going steady do you?” Matt demanded.

“People do funny things for sex,” I said.

“Coach... I would NEVER cheat on my girlfriend,” Matt said. “Now, my ex-girlfriend... that’s an entirely different story. Beth was fun tonight. Do you know what year she is?”

“Beth is a freshman,” I answered.

“Cool!” Matt replied. “Maybe she and I can hook up again when I get to college. She’ll still be here.”

“Do you think you’ll come to school here?” I asked.

“Hell yeah, if Coach Burton offers me a scholarship,” Matt replied.

That was good news for our team, assuming Matt did well tomorrow morning with his workout for the coaches. I would have to report this to Coach Burton.

I dropped the boys off in the lobby and headed back to my apartment. The party was winding down. Damian, Billy, Melanie and Sarah took off for their Billy’s apartment. Trevor, Steph, Molly, Jay and I cleaned up the apartment before retiring for the night.

I got a surprise when I went to my room. It was still occupied. Marco Cuchiella was still in there with a freshman I didn’t know.

“Marco, I need my room,” I said as I banged on the door.

“Sorry Coach,” he replied. “Give us a couple minutes. Allison and I are almost there.”

I waited a couple minutes outside in the hallway, forced to listen the sounds of teen sex. Marco and Allison came out of my room disheveled and trying to button and tuck everything in.

“Coach, I got a problem,” Marco said. “Jon took a girl back to our room for the night. I don’t have a place to stay. Could I crash on your couch?”

“I’ll go one better,” I suggested. “I don’t think Damian would mind if the two of you spent the night in his room. He’s downtown at his lover’s apartment.”

“Really?” Marco said. “You’re sure that’s OK?”

“I’m sure it is fine,” I said. I headed into my room while Marco negotiated with Allison to convince her to stay the night with him. I changed my sheets, went to the bathroom and collapsed in bed. In spite of my relationship problems, I fell asleep quickly. My problems with Kelly would have to wait until tomorrow.

My cell phone’s ringing woke me from a sound sleep. I tried to ignore it. It rang again a minute later. I grabbed the phone and barked, “What?”

“Sorry to wake you Kyle,” the voice said. “I didn’t know who else to call.” I finally recognized the voice. It was Joel Peterson, my neighbor from my first two years in the dorm.

“What’s up Joel?”

“I didn’t know what else to do,” Joel repeated. “Kelly and her friends Mark and Jen are here at the frat. They’re drunk beyond belief.”

“That’s saying something for your parties,” I commented. Joel chuckled briefly.

“Mark wants to drive the girls back to their apartment,” Joel explained. “We can’t let him do that. He’s fucking accident waiting to happen. We took away his car keys.”

“What do you need?” I asked.

“Can you pick these three up?” Joel asked. “If someone doesn’t get them home I think they’ll try walking back to their apartments. The cops will pick them up for sure.”

I let out a big sigh. My clock said it was a couple minutes after 2:30 in the morning. “I’ll be down in fifteen or twenty minutes to pick them up.”

“I’ll try to keep them here until then,” Joel said.

“Thanks,” I said. I clicked the phone off and climbed out of bed. How in the hell did I get into messes like this? I dressed and headed for my car. It didn’t take long to reach the frat house. I went inside. Joel and frat president Cole Sellers met me at the door. The three of us helped Kelly, Jen and Mark stagger out to the car.

The three were totally wasted. Mark and Jen were quiet. Kelly wasn’t. She was running her mouth off saying the stupidest things. I knew the drill. I had been there with her before. Joel and Cole helped me stuff Mark and Jen in the back. Kelly had to sit up front with me.

I thanked my friends for the help before I headed across town. I was stopped at the light at Beaver Avenue and Atherton Street when a police car pulled up behind me.

“Be quiet and behave,” I commanded. Mark, Jen and Kelly immediately looked behind us and gave the policeman a wave. “Stop that!” I said as the light changed to green. I pulled away carefully. I didn’t need to arouse suspicion in the policeman. He followed us across the intersection.

I slowly drove north on Beaver Avenue, the police car following me. Kelly kept fidgeting in her seat and looking back and waving to policeman.

“Stop that and behave!” I demanded.

“It’sh fine,” she giggled. She gave him another wave just to spite me. We had to stop again at the light at Garner Street. I pulled away carefully when the light changed. I went about fifty feet when the policeman flicked his siren and lights on. He motioned for me to pull over.

“Everyone be cool!” I commanded. I looked back at Mark and Jen. They were quiet and understood the gravity of the situation. Kelly was still laughing. She was too far gone to understand the jeopardy she was in.

The policeman approached my car from my side. I rolled down the window. “Are you aware you have a taillight out?” he asked me.

“I’m sorry officer,” I replied. “I didn’t know that.”

“License and registration please?” he asked politely.

I handed over my paperwork to the officer. He looked it over. “Kyle David Martin,” he said as he shined his flashlight into my face.

“Yes sir,” I answered automatically.

He shined the light on Kelly’s, Mark’s and Jen’s faces. “Have you been at a party?” he asked. Mark and Jen nodded yes silently.

“Yesh! It was a great party!” my drunken girlfriend replied enthusiastically.

“I wasn’t there,” I explained. “I’m on the football team and...”

“I KNOW EXACTLY WHO YOU ARE,” the officer answered sharply. “Football stars do not get any special treatment from me.”

“No sir,” I answered. “I was just trying to explain. I was the guide for four recruits this evening. I hosted a gathering for them to meet football members. I wasn’t at the party my friends are talking about.”

“I’m not interested in excuses son,” the officer said curtly. “Would you please step out of the car?” I followed his orders. “Face the car, put your hands on the roof and spread your legs,” he commanded. He patted me down when I did as directed.

“You stay right there Martin,” he directed. Leaning into the car he added “I need to see IDs from everyone. Mark and Jen turned their driver’s licenses over to the policeman. Kelly fumbled around in her purse but eventually produced her license too. The officer inspected them.

“Mrs. O’Keefe, you are under twenty-one,” he said. “Have you been drinking?”

“Just a little,” my girlfriend admitted.

“Mr. Martin, have you been drinking?” he asked as he redirected his attention to me.

“No sir, I haven’t,” I replied.

“Would you take a breathalyzer test to confirm that?” he asked.

“Certainly,” I agreed. I blew into the machine for him.

The officer looked at the machine for a second, shook it and said, “Damn thing. It’s not working right.” He had me blow into the machine again. He got a sour look on his face when he looked at it again.

“Martin, I need you to take a field sobriety test,” the officer directed.

“Whatever you need sir,” I said.

I did the test as directed, without any problems. Or at least that is what I thought.

“Mr. Martin, please stand beside your car facing it,” the officer directed. He grabbed my left arm and twisted it behind me.

“What’s going on?” I asked. This wasn’t going the way I expected.

“Don’t resist,” the cop said. He pulled my left arm hard until I winced in pain. He took my right arm, brought it behind my back and cuffed it to my left arm. “Stay right there Martin.” I was stunned beyond belief. This idiot was arresting me!

“Miss O’Keefe, please step out of the car,” the cop demanded. Kelly finally lost the silly grin on her face. She complied meekly with the cop’s demands. He patted Kelly down and hand cuffed her on the opposite side of the car. He led Kelly around and had her lean against the car beside me.

“What is going on?” I demanded.

“Mr. Martin, Miss O’Keefe, you are being arrested for underage drinking. Martin you are also being charged with driving under the influence.”

“I have not been drinking tonight!” I insisted.

“Martin, shut the fuck up!” the cop growled. “I don’t need shit from some hot shot football star.” He led Kelly over towards his car. “Martin stay put or you are going to be in a world of trouble.” He put Kelly in the back of the police car and came back for me.

“You are making a mistake officer,” I said as politely as possible.

“Don’t give me that shit smart ass,” the cop growled. “Get in the back.” The cop led me over to his car and helped me into the back of his car.

Kelly looked at me. She was scared out of her wits, as she should have been. The gravity of this situation finally penetrated the haze of alcohol clouding her brain. “I’m sorry Kyle.”

“This is Officer Vaughn,” the cop said into his radio. “I have a 922 on the four hundred block of East Beaver Avenue. I have four persons, two underage. I need an 11-48 for a male and female. I also need an 11-85 for the suspect’s car. I will bring in the under aged perps.” [922 is code for a drunk person, 11-48 is a request for transportation for Mark and Jen and 11-85 is a request for a tow truck for Kyle’s car]

“10-4 officer,” the dispatcher replied. “... another car and a tow truck will be dispatched.”

The cop turned his attention back to us. He read us our rights. He went outside to wait with Mark and Jen by my car. A second police car arrived a couple minutes later. The cop helped Mark and Jen into the back of the other car. He came back and climbed into the front of his car. He drove us to the Borough Hall and police station on Allen Street between Beaver and Foster.

“Is a field sobriety test all you need to do?” I asked as he drove us to the station. “Don’t you need to do a blood test too?”

“No, I do not need to do that,” the cop replied. “Shut up or things will be worse than they are now.”

“I have a right not to incriminate myself,” I said. “I know that. Why can’t I get the blood test if I ask for it? It is going to clear me.”

“Martin, I don’t want to hear it!” the cop snarled. “Shut the fuck up!”

I kept silent for the rest of the two minute ride to the station. Officer Vaughn wasn’t going to be any help to me at all. The officer led Kelly and me into the police station. The sergeant at the front desk took our information and the report from Officer Vaughn.

“Will you do a blood test so I can show you I haven’t been drinking?” I asked politely to the desk sergeant.

“Shut up hot shot,” Officer Vaughn growled. “I don’t need anything else to arrest your ass.”

“Sergeant?” I asked, still trying to sound as polite as possible. “Shouldn’t you do the test if I give my consent? If I am lying about not drinking you will have me nailed. If not, then you will avoid making a mistake.”

“He doesn’t need the damn test,” Officer Vaughn growled. “Throw the smart mother fucker in the can sarge.”

“Give him the test Mike,” the sergeant replied. “He’s right. If he’s been drinking this will make the case air tight. If not....” The sergeant let the sentence die unfinished.

A woman police officer took Kelly away. I went with Officer Vaughn so he could fill in his report on my arrest. They finger printed me, photographed me and took a sample of my blood before they put me in a cell. I sat down on the bed in the cell as the heavy steel door clanged shut. How in the fuck did I get myself into this mess?

Chapter 49

An officer came by my cell half an hour later. “I have the right to a phone call,” I asked politely. “Can I make it please?”

“Kid, it’s the middle of night,” the officer replied. “You can call someone in the morning.”

I slept fitfully the rest of the night on the thin, uncomfortable mattress on the bunk. I woke up to the sound of someone opening the door to my cell.

“C’mon Martin, you made bail,” the officer at the door said.

“Huh?” I grunted as I tried to wake up. This all had to be a bad dream. I WAS in a jail cell. Last night was VERY real. “How did I make bail? I didn’t even get to make a phone call yet.”

“Don’t know kid,” the officer replied. “Follow me.”

I followed the officer out of the jail area to another room. I found who my savior was. Anders Voight was standing beside the booking sergeant from last night.

“Anders, thank God you’re here,” I exclaimed. “How did you know?”

“Bev called Christian, Christian called me, I called Coach Burton,” Anders explained.

“Coach knows?” I said.

Anders nodded yes. The rest of the shit just hit the fan. I knew Coach and his policies on alcohol use and conduct detrimental to the team. None of this was going to look good for our team.

Anders filled out the required paper work and paid my bail. The sergeant itemized my belongings and had me sign paperwork to acknowledge I received everything I had on me last night when I was arrested. Fifteen minutes later I was following Anders out the front door of the police station.

“Where do I get my car?” I asked.

“You get it later from the police impound,” Ander answered. “... after you pay the impound fee.”

“Do you know how much it is?” I asked. “I have some money in my wallet.”

“No, I have direct orders from Coach Burton to take you straight to his office,” Anders answered. “You will have to get your car later.”

Anders drove us down Allen Street to College Avenue and then back onto campus.

“Kyle, I thought you got this shit with drinking too much out of your system,” Anders commented as he turned onto Pollock Road.

“I did,” I answered. “I didn’t have anything to drink last night stronger than Coke. This whole thing is bullshit.”

“Really?” Anders said as he glanced over at me. “Kelly too?”

“No, Kelly was very drunk,” I explained. I related the happenings to my friend (and coach) as he drove us to the Lasch Building. “I hope this works out for you Kyle,” he said when I finished my story. “It’s going to be ugly for awhile – at least until the police drop the charges.”

“Thanks for picking me up Anders,” I said. “I appreciate your help.”

“I was there more as a football coach than a friend this morning,” Anders explained. “I’m just doing my duties.”

“Still, I appreciate it,” I answered.

Anders pulled into the parking lot in front of our building. “Time to face the music,” Anders commented as we climbed out of the car. I followed him inside and back the hallway to Coach Burton’s office. Anders knocked at Coach’s door and stuck his head inside. “I have Kyle out here coach,” Ander said.

“Send him in.”

Anders pointed towards the door and then disappeared as I started inside. Coach was behind his desk. “Have a seat Mr. Martin,” Coach said from behind his big desk. He pointed at the chair in front of his desk. Normally when we meet it is informal and both of us sit on his couch. I had a seat as directed. The ‘Mr. Martin’ worried me too. Coach Burton always called me Kyle or used my nickname ‘Coach’.

Coach Burton stared me straight in the eye, took a deep breath and said, “Driving under the influence, disorderly conduct and underage drinking,” Coach began. “You’ve had a busy night.”

“None of it is true Coach,” I explained.

“Tell me exactly what you did last evening, starting with when you left the building with the recruits,” Coach directed.

I related my evening in detail, leaving out nothing except the part about the recruits having a couple beers at the party and Matt having sex. Otherwise, I told the complete and honest truth about everything.

“You insisted on a blood test?” Coach asked. I nodded yes. “That may save your ass Kyle.”

“I hope so,” I agreed.

“The blood test will confirm all of this when it is done?” Coach asked.

“Guaranteed Coach,” I said.

“Was there alcohol at the party you took the recruits too?” Coach asked.

“Some of the team members are over twenty-one Coach,” I explained. “Some of the guys that are of age did have alcohol.”

“You had none?” Coach asked.

“Absolutely none Coach,” I replied. “I had iced tea for dinner and Cokes after that until I took the recruits back to their hotel. After that I went straight to bed.”

“This certainly is a mess you have gotten yourself into Kyle,” Coach said. I took some comfort that he was calling me by my first name again.

“What is going to happen now Coach?” I asked.

“I have to suspend you from the team until the police and magistrate decide on charges,” Coach said.

“I kind of expected that,” I answered. “Will it take them long to do the blood test? Do think this can be wrapped up before next weekend’s game?”

“I doubt it Kyle,” Coach answered. “I suspect it will take longer than that.”

“Great,” I said. “I’m sorry I let you down.”

“This isn’t over and you haven’t let me down if you are telling me the truth,” Coach said. “Meantime, while we wait for the judicial system, you cannot practice with, eat with or workout with the football team. Anders will escort you to the locker room where you may pick up any personal items from your locker. You are banned from the Lasch Building until your case is resolved and you are reinstated on the football team. Your scholarship and apartment on campus will remain for the remainder of the year if you are found guilty.”

“I didn’t do it Coach and I will be back,” I said. “I’m not worried about my scholarship. They will find me innocent.”

“I hope that is the case Kyle,” Coach said. “The athletic department will put out a press release today announcing the charges and your suspension until the charges are resolved. Be prepared Kyle. I’m sure you will get reporters calling you. Be careful how you discuss this with them.”

“I will Coach,” I promised.

Coach Burton called Anders back in using the intercom. I followed Anders towards the locker room.

“Are you suspended?” Anders asked.

“Yeah, pending resolution of the charges,” I answered.

“I’m sorry man,’ Anders said. “I hope all of this works out for you in the end.”

“It will, once the blood test comes back,” I said.

I gathered up my personal things from my locker, loaded them in the gym bag I kept there and followed Anders to the entrance of the building. Anders held the door open for me.

“Good luck Kyle,” Anders said as I walked.

“Thanks for bailing me out,” I replied. “I’ll see you around.”

I felt totally alone as I walked back to my apartment. My support and lifeline in this huge university was suddenly gone. What now?

I wandered back to my apartment. It was 7:30 in the morning and the place was quiet as a morgue. Everyone was asleep. I put my things from my locker in my room and went down the street to the Mix to grab breakfast and a newspaper. As I was walking back I remembered one other detail I needed to attend to: Kelly was still in jail.

The answer to Will’s question about my relationship was obvious. I would have been much better off last night without Kelly. Regardless of how our relationship went in the future, the decent thing to do would be to get her out of jail.

I called the police department and asked about Kelly when I returned to the apartment. The receptionist told me that Kelly was out on bail too. I asked about my car. I could go down Monday during regular hours and pay the towing and impound fees and get my car.

One thing I knew I would need was a lawyer. Everyone was talking about filing charges. I needed someone who knew what they were doing that was on my side. I decided I'd better call home and break the news to my parents as soon as possible. I glanced at the time. My family didn't normally leave for church for another twenty minutes. I got Dad when I called home.

"Dad, I have some bad news," I said. "I was arrested last night for driving under the influence, disorderly conduct and underage drinking."

There was a few moments pause before Dad said, "OK." There was a longer pause while he collected his thoughts.

"None of it is true Dad," I added to the silence.

"Tell me exactly what happened," Dad finally said.

I related the entire story to Dad; answering any questions he asked when he interrupted my story. When I finished I commented, "I guess I'm going to need to find an attorney. Do you have any suggestions Dad?"

"I could suggest a couple here in Lancaster County but I don't know any in State College," Dad replied. "I'll talk to Mr. Groff and see if he knows any one where you are." Mr. Groff was Dad's personal attorney.

"Thanks Dad," I said.

"Can I assure your mother that you did not drink?" Dad asked.

"You can assure Mom that I did not drink one drop of alcohol last night Dad," I promised. "The blood test will confirm it."

"Carefully worded Kyle," Dad chuckled. "That assurance will have to do for your mother. I won't ask about any other nights other than last night."

"Thanks Dad," I said. "I'll keep in touch and keep you up to date on what is happening up here."

I ate my breakfast sandwich while I read the newspaper. The Inquirer had a good article on our victory over Wisconsin yesterday. This time the paper correctly noted we were in control of the entire game. Our 28-24 win was not a close call. Jeff Morgan had gotten my point through to his editor.

Ed Fritz led Florida to a close victory over Georgia. His team won 14-10 in a tight defensive battle. Ed threw both touchdowns. He had no interceptions. Terrence Walker's ankle wasn't expected to be healed until next Saturday.

Jeremy North's Fighting Irish beat Navy 30-24 yesterday. Jeremy had two sacks, an interception and eight tackles. Hal Long's Rutgers lost to Connecticut 27-17. Hal was one for two on field goal tries. Drew McCormick's West Virginia Mountaineers beat the Syracuse Orangemen 38-14. Jake Kring did play in the fourth quarter in mop up duty.

All nine teams ahead of us in the BCS rankings won their games. Our team wouldn't climb in the polls this week. Michigan and Ohio State both won so we were still tied with them for the lead of the Big Ten. There were going to be a lot of Nittany Lions fans cheering for Ohio State next Saturday. If Ohio State beat Michigan we would take the Big Ten title and go to the Rose Bowl again. I harrumphed. I'd go if this mess was cleared up so I could play again.

I checked the next page of the sports section. Andy's Blue Hens beat William and Mary 28-14 yesterday. The paper reported Andy caught three passes for 81 yards and scored one of the touchdowns for his team. I had to chuckle. 81 yards on three passes was excellent. Andy must have broken a tackle and ran in for a long touchdown.

Trevor was the first person up in our apartment. It was only 8:30 when he came out of his bedroom, heading for the downstairs bathroom. He stopped short when he saw me.

“What the hell Coach?” Trevor gasped. “What are you up so early for?”

“It's a long story, have a seat,” I said.

“I desperately need to pee,” Trevor said. “Give me a second.”

Trevor returned a minute later and had a seat on the couch. I told my story about all the happenings last night and this morning.

“Damn Coach, suspended?” Trevor exclaimed when I was finished. “I can't believe this is happening.”

“It is,” I replied.

Stephanie came out of the bedroom looking for Trevor. She saw the two of us talking and asked, “What is going on?”

“Oh man, I can't tell this story one person at a time,” I complained. “This is going to kill me.”

“I'll get everyone together,” Trevor said. “I can see where you wouldn't want to repeat this story all day. I'll get everyone over here.”

Trevor disappeared into his room for a half a minute. He came back out talking on his cell phone. "Billy, tell Damian to get his ass back here right now." Trevor bounded up the steps and then called down, 'Who's in Damian's room? Kelly's brother?"

"Marco" I replied.

"Cuchiella, get your ass out of bed. I need you downstairs now!" Trevor said as he beat on Damian's door. "Jay, let's go. Coach needs us downstairs."

Trevor called Tyler Madden, Jibril Sloan and Andrew Perkins. They would assemble key members of our team. Everyone was to gather in our apartment in thirty minutes.

Trevor, Tyler and the other team leaders assembled an amazing number of our guys for a 9:00 am meeting on a Sunday morning. Tyler, Jibril and Andrew included Chip, Tanner, Max, Christian, Damian, Elijah Berks, Greg Nowicki, Ben Walker, Trevor, Bill Daugherty, Josh Bruno, Brendan Hayden, Shawn Byrd and Salim Rogers in the meeting. Marco stayed for the meeting since he was here already.

Tyler started things off. "Coach had a problem last night guys that all of you need to know about. Fill us in Coach."

I took about ten minutes giving a blow by blow description of what happened last night and this morning. My teammates' faces went from curious to disturbed to shocked as I continued the story. My teammates stared at me in utter shock when I explained that Coach Burton suspended me from the team until the charges were resolved.

As I finished the story Chip blurted out, "What the hell are we going to do without Coach next week? We're already missing Tyler on defense."

This started a spirited discussion as everyone threw their thoughts into the discussion. Tyler finally brought order to the discussion. "We have one hundred and twelve people on the team. Two of us will miss the game. It isn't the end of the world."

"Tyler's right," I agreed. "Brian is just as fast as me. Christian is my equal as a receiver. Max is playing excellent ball. Tanner is as good as anyone going over the middle. You won't have a problem replacing me."

The discussion continued with my teammates expressing more confidence in their ability to play without me. As the discussion continued more guys asked what was going to happen to me. I didn't have any answers. Max did.

Max explained that I would have to appear before the district magistrate. Underage drinking was a misdemeanor that resulted in a 90 day license suspension, \$300 fine and up to 90 days in jail. Max reassured me that they rarely jailed first time offenders. He didn't know what the penalties were for DUI. He hadn't been caught behind the wheel last year.

I thanked everyone for their support when the questions finally died down. Most of the guys headed back to their apartments or rooms. Some of the guys, including Jay, Chip and Shawn were helping work out the recruits this morning.

Christian stayed when most of the guys left. "Things are a mess over at the girl's apartment," Christian explained. "Bev says Kelly has been crying since I got her home from the jail."

"Oh, you were the one who bailed Kelly out?" I asked. Christian nodded yes. "Thanks man. I wasn't in a position to do that myself."

"No problem," Christian replied. "I went over to get both of you but the sergeant said Anders bailed you out already when I got there. Now I get it. He was hauling you over for your meeting with Coach Burton."

"Yes," I agreed.

"What about you and Kelly?" Christian asked. "I know the two of you have been having problems for awhile. Are you going to forgive her for this fiasco?"

"I really don't know," I answered. "I haven't had time to think that through." My brother's question echoed in my head again. 'Are you better off with her or without her?' The answer to the question was painfully obvious. Could I actually give up the girl I loved? I had a lot to think about.

I thanked Christian for helping Kelly this morning. I told him that I would call Kelly eventually after I had time to think things through.

I spent the rest of the morning reading the Sunday paper. It helped get my mind off my troubles. After I finished the paper I walked down to the Mix again to get a sandwich for lunch. On the way down my cell phone rang. I looked at the screen. It said Matt Sauder was calling.

"What's up Matt?" I asked when I answered the phone.

"Where in the hell did you get to Coach?" Matt asked. "I thought you were to join us for breakfast and the workout."

"I was," I agreed. I took a deep breath. "You'll hear on the news soon enough. I was arrested last night for drunk driving."

"No way!" Matt responded. "Hell, I don't think you had anything to drink last night. All I ever saw in your hand was cans of Coke."

I related the night's story to my young friend. He responded, "That sucks Coach."

I overheard his mother say, “Matthew! Language!”

“Sorry Mom. That really stinks Coach.” Matt said. “Let me tell the other guys and parents what happened.” Matt got back on the phone with me. “Dad and Mr. Mitchell want to take you out to lunch before we go home. Dave, Cody and I owe you so much for everything you do Coach. What do you say? Can we pick you up at your apartment?”

“I am heading down to Pollock Commons,” I answered. “I guess friends from home would be welcome. Where are you guys at?”

“We’re at the parking lot outside the Lasch Building,” Mr. Sauder said. Matt had given his phone to his dad.

“Drive down Hastings Drive,” I explained. “I’ll meet you at the corner of Hastings and Bigler Roads.”

“You got it Kyle,” Mr. Sauder said. “How long will it take you to get there?”

“About thirty seconds,” I answered. “I was out walking that way anyway. I have the intersection in sight.”

“We’ll pick you up in a minutes,” Mr. Sauder said. Three cars pulled to a stop at the intersection in less than a minute. Mr. Sauder, Mr. Mitchell and Mr. Stevens huddled with me for a moment to talk about where to go to lunch. They wanted somewhere with on-site parking so I listed the options I knew. We ended up going to Damon’s Grill.

The restaurant wasn’t too busy on a Sunday at noontime. They found ten seats for our group within a couple minutes. The waitress handed menus to everyone.

“Order whatever you want Kyle,” Mr. Sauder said. “This meal is my treat.”

“I can’t,” I replied. “I’m a member of the football team and Well, I was a member of the team.... I don’t know what the rules are when you’re suspended.” Finally I said, “Maybe I better pay my own way so I’m safe. I don’t want to be accused of accepting illegal gratuities from a fan.”

“Whatever you want Kyle,” Mr. Sauder said.

“Exactly what happened after you dropped the boys off at their hotel?” Mr. Stevens.

“Bob, you are being too direct,” Mrs. Stevens said. “I’m sorry for my husband Kyle.”

“No, it’s all right,” I replied. “The whole world will hear about this tomorrow when it hits the press.” I went on to relate the whole story, pausing when the waitress stopped by to get our orders.

Dave Mitchell was first to speak when I finished telling me story. “That does stink Coach,” Dave said. “You do a good turn for Kelly and her friends and you get arrested for your trouble.”

“It will work out in the end,” I said. “I’m glad they took blood to test my blood alcohol content. Everything should work out eventually. I’m innocent and the test will show that.” Everyone seemed relieved at my conclusion. “Enough about me. How did your workouts and meetings with Coach go?”

“Good,” Dave said. “Good,” Cody added.

“Unbelievably fantastic!” Matt said. “I may be a teammate of yours. Coach Burton offered me a full scholarship today.”

“A full scholarship?” I asked as I stared at my young friend. “Are you serious?”

“Absolutely,” Matt replied.

“Wow, that’s amazing,” I commented. “That is excellent news Matt. By the way Matt, if you accept the scholarship and come here, you won’t be my teammate. I graduate before you can start college.”

“Not necessarily,” Matt countered. “Chip and Jay both said it would be smart if I finish high school early and start college after Christmas next year.”

“Matthew, I don’t know if you should plan on graduating early,” Mr. Sauder cautioned.

“I think the only credits I will be short on for early graduation are credits in English,” Matt countered. “I can take a double load of English next fall and graduate in December. It would give me a huge leg up on learning the offense here at Penn State.”

“You’ll only be seventeen when you graduate,” Mrs. Sauder said. “That is so young Matthew.”

“Mom, I’ll turn eighteen about a week after spring classes start,” Matt said. He turned towards me. “Classes start the middle of January, right Coach?”

“They do,” I agreed.

“We don’t need to decide your future over lunch Matthew,” Mr. Sauder said, closing that discussion.

I asked, "Dave, Matt – how did your talks go with Coach Burton?"

"I didn't get a scholarship offer," Dave said. "Neither did I," Cody added.

Both guys were disappointed not to be embraced the way Matt was. Coach did say they would be welcome as walk-ons on the team. I reminded them that I had gotten the same offer when I was a junior.

I questioned the boys about their workouts. Dave had run a 4.41 second 40. Cody did it in 4.45 seconds. I suggested that Dave and Cody would benefit from going out for track and field in the spring. I improved my sprint starts tremendously thanks to track.

Our food arrived. I talked about things the three kids could do to improve and prepare for college level football. I talked about my experiences when I was a freshman. The parents were particularly interested in Coach Paterno's efforts to monitor and help athletes succeed academically.

It was nice to spend time with my friends and their parents. It took my mind off my problems. This was a decidedly sympathetic audience to my problems. Mr. Stevens promised to talk with my parents when he got home and let them know I was holding up OK so far.

The checks came and everyone settled up the bills. Matt teased, "Since you're not busy Friday night, are you going to come to our playoff game?"

"That's a good idea Matt," I replied. "I would drive myself crazy sitting in my apartment alone Friday and Saturday nights while all my teammates are out at Michigan State. You may see me at the game."

"That would be excellent Coach," Matt agreed. Dave and Cody seconded Matt's feelings.

I thanked the three families for inviting me to lunch with them and for providing a sympathetic audience for my story. I told the three kids to make sure they kicked Daniel Boone's butts on Friday night. Mr. Sauder drove me back to campus.

I had four messages on my voice mail when I got back to campus. All were requests for interviews about my legal problems. I decided I would wait until they contacted me again. I wasn't anxious to call them to talk about what happened.

Fifteen minutes later a reporter from ESPN called me. I talked with him briefly, outlining the events that happened. I explained I was helping friends who had too much to drink get home from a party. I insisted I had nothing to drink last night and that I would be cleared of the charges as soon as the blood test was completed.

I did another dozen interviews over the course of the afternoon. It definitely was a pain in the ass. I was sick of that by dinner time. Jay, Trevor and Damian headed for the Training Table at 5:45. I realized I had nothing for dinner at the apartment. I decided to head to the regular dining hall in Pollock Commons for dinner. It was weird eating with all the underclassmen. I didn't know a soul in the dining hall. I picked an empty table in the back and ate my dinner quickly.

My lonely dinner gave me time to think about the other problem I had. What future did Kelly and I have? I was so mad at her that day. In spite of six months of warnings about her drinking, her actions had put my football future into jeopardy. Could I forgive that?

I went back to my apartment after dinner, grabbed a book and my MP3 player and collapsed on the couch to read and listen to some music. Hopefully it would sooth my mind, if only temporarily.

Kelly called around 7:30 in the evening. I almost let her call go to voice mail but decided I better talk with her a little.

“What?” I barked into the phone as I answered it.

“I’m so, so, soooo sorry Kyle,” Kelly pleaded. “I really didn’t think that....”

“That’s right,” I growled. “You didn’t think! I really don’t want to talk right now.”

“What are we....” Kelly said before I ended the call. My phone rang again a minute later. It was Kelly again. I let my voice mail take the call. If I talked to Kelly right now I knew I’d lose my temper. If our relationship had a prayer of continuing, I didn’t need to make things harder to resolve by saying the wrong thing in the heat of the moment.

Jay, Trevor and Damian returned from the team meeting at the Lasch Building around 8:30. They plopped down in the living room with me. Jay flipped on the TV to watch the Sunday night NFL game on NBC. I continued reading my book in the living room while the other guys watched TV.

I got a call from Christian around 9:00 in the evening. “Yeah, Christian, what’s up?” I asked as I answered his call. I headed back to my bedroom to get a little quiet so I could hear.

“Kelly is a basket case,” Christian said. “She’s crying constantly. Bev, Cindy and Jen are trying to help but I think she really needs to hear from you. She is afraid she’s wrecked your relationship. Please talk to her. Give her some comfort.”

“I wish I could Christian,” I answered. “I’m so mad right now if I talked to her I know I would destroy whatever chance may remain of us reconciling by saying the wrong thing in the heat of the moment. Kelly is going to have to give me time and space to calm down and sort things out.”

“At the least, can I tell her you aren’t dumping her right now?” Christian asked.

“She made a God awful mess,” I replied. “I don’t know that you can tell her that. I don’t know if it is possible to fix this.”

“OK” Christian said slowly. “I wish there was more I could do to help her.”

“Thank Bev, Cindy and Jen for comforting Kelly,” I said. “Tell Kelly I still love her but I don’t know if that is enough. She needs to give me time to sort out my own feelings.”

“OK, I’ll pass that message on,” Christian said.

“Thanks for being a good friend Christian,” I said. “I’ll see you later.”

“See you Kyle,” he replied. “Bev and I will both be praying for you and Kelly to work this out.”

“Thanks,” I answered before ending the call. I didn’t have a truer friend among the 50,000 people on this campus than Christian. We didn’t share that many common interests other than scouting and football but he literally would do anything to help me. That is the kind of friend you want to hang onto for life.

I tossed and turned a lot Sunday night as I wrestled with my issues. What did I want from my relationship with Kelly? What was most important in my life? What did I need? And of course, ‘Was I better off with Kelly or without her?’ I didn’t have any answers when I finally fell asleep.

I got up around eight o’clock Monday morning. I grabbed a breakfast sandwich at the Mix on the way downtown to retrieve my car. The towing fee was \$85. The impound fee was \$125. My good turn Sunday morning was proving to be very expensive. I parked my car in the East Parking Deck and headed back to the apartment.

I found an e-mail from Dad when I got back. He talked with his attorney and got the names of two local attorneys that might be able to help me out. The first name on the list was Michael C. Allen, Esq. I looked him up in the phone book and called. I spoke with the receptionist briefly and explained why I needed to talk with her boss. I had to wait a minute until Mr. Allen was available.

“Hello, Michael Allen, how my I help Mr. Martin?” he asked when he answered my call. Before I could answer he added, “Are you Kyle Martin, the receiver for the Lions?”

“I am,” I replied.

“I saw the article in the paper this morning,” Mr. Allen said.

“Oh... wonderful,” I replied. “I didn’t know it made the papers yet.”

“It did,” Mr. Allen responded. “DUI, underage drinking and disorderly conduct – that is quite a list of offenses you racked up. I should warn you. I don’t do miracles. If you were drinking Saturday night when you got in this trouble you should just save yourself the attorney’s fees and plead guilty unless there are some extenuating circumstances. It will save you and the magistrate a lot of time and trouble.”

“Extenuating circumstances like I didn’t drink any alcohol that night?” I said.

“None?” Mr. Allen asked.

“None at all,” I replied.

“OK, how is your schedule?” Mr. Allen asked. “Can you come in and talk? How about 3:30 today?”

My first reaction was ‘No, I have football practice then.’ Of course I don’t have football practice anymore. “3:30 will be fine,” I agreed.

I killed the last half hour before I had to go to Geography 30 rereading our assignment for the day’s lecture. I stopped by the Mix for a sandwich to eat on the way to the Hosler Building. On the way in I grabbed a copy of the Daily Collegian.

I found a seat in the lecture hall and started browsing the paper. My arrest and suspension from the team made the front page – below the fold at least. I was on speaking terms with most of the guys who sat near me for the lectures. All of them expressed their sympathy for my plight.

I did OK concentrating on Professor Stewart’s lecture. I needed to do well in the class. I a few years I could be teaching this subject and geography was never my strong suit in school.

I didn’t do as well concentrating the following period when I went upstairs for the Geography 30 lab. I kept thinking about what I would say to Kelly when we ended up together in our history class. I wasn’t as mad as yesterday but I wasn’t ready to resolve things with Kelly yet.

I was nervous as I headed over to the Thomas Building for history. Kelly was standing outside the classroom when I arrived. That wasn’t unusual. Her statistics class that just finished was downstairs on the first floor of this building. I steeled my nerves and walked up to her. Her eyes were puffy from all the crying I was told she had done. She looked defeated and forlorn.

“I’m so, so, soooo... sorry Kyle,” Kelly began. “I know you are mad at me and you have every right to be. I just hope you will give us another chance. I will give you time and space to think things through.”

“I have a lot to consider Kelly,” I answered. “I will get in touch when I’m ready to talk about whatever future we might have.”

Kelly stiffened and her eyes went wide when I said ‘whatever future we might have.’ I know that hurt her but so be it. I didn’t know if we could go on from here. I went into the classroom and Kelly followed me in. I found a seat. Kelly thoughtfully took a seat across the room from me.

Cameron Miller came in and had a seat beside me. He leaned in close and whispered, “Joel feels terrible about calling you Saturday night and getting you into this mess.”

“It isn’t Joel’s fault,” I whispered back. “He did the right thing that night making sure Mark didn’t drive. He would have killed someone if he tried to drive home.”

“Still, you wouldn’t have been arrested and kicked off the team if he hadn’t called you,” Cameron answered. “He feels horrible that you got in so much trouble for helping out.”

“There is nothing to apologize for,” I said. “Tell Joel and Cole that I appreciate what they did Saturday night. It was the right thing. I know where the blame lies for this mess.”

“What’s happening between you and Kelly?” Cameron asked. “Are you going to break up with her?”

“I don’t know Cam,” I answered. “I really don’t know.”

“I hope things work out for you,” Cameron said.

Dr. Brennan called for quiet. Cameron and I turned our attention to our professor. Kelly didn’t wait for me at the end of class. She apparently meant it when she said she would give me space to make my decision about our future.

I went back to my apartment and worked on Geography 30 homework from the lab until it was time to go downtown to meet Mr. Allen. His office was a couple doors down from Spats on the second floor above a jewelry store. I went upstairs and met the receptionist. She had me wait a few minutes before ushering me into Mr. Allen’s office.

Mr. Allen was a middle aged man with flecks of gray in his otherwise dark brown hair. I guessed he might be in his late forties or early fifties. He stood and extended his hand to shake.

“Thank you for coming Mr. Martin,” he said politely. I could see he was about 6’-2” in height and quite trim and fit for someone his age.

“Please call me Kyle,” I answered. “Thank you for seeing me on short notice.”

“Tell me about what happened Sunday morning Kyle,” he answered as he indicated I should sit down at the chair in front of his desk.

I sat down and spent the next ten minutes narrating my story of Saturday night and Sunday morning. Mr. Allen didn’t interrupt at all. He simply sat and listened closely. When I finished he sat and pondered for a few moments.

“You know I can’t work miracles,” he said. “You would be better off taking the punishment if you are guilty. I mostly likely won’t get you off if you were DUI. Are you certain that you had nothing to drink that evening?”

“Iced tea for dinner and Coca-Cola after that,” I replied. “I did not drink one drop of alcohol.”

“The police took a blood sample to test for blood alcohol content?” he asked.

“Yes they did,” I said. “I think the disorderly conduct charge is from me insisting strenuously that they had to take the blood sample. The policeman didn’t want to do that.”

“Really?” Mr. Allen said. “That is unusual. He had you take the breathalyzer test twice? Did he tell you the result?”

“No he didn’t,” I explained. “He got real mad after the second time I blew in the machine and he said it was broken. Then he had me take the field sobriety test.”

“That’s not standard procedure,” Mr. Allen said. “Normally the police prefer to have a suspect take the blood test.”

You’re absolutely sure the blood test will come back showing you consumed no alcohol?” Mr. Allen asked.

“It will be 0.0% unless the Coca-Cola Company spiked my unopened cans of Coke,” I answered. “I would never, ever drive drunk. I lost a close friend when I was in high school to a drunk driver. Another friend had much too close a call last fall when a drunk nearly killed him.”

“I see,” Mr. Allen replied.

“How long do you think it will take for the police to get the results back from the lab?” I asked.

“It usually takes a two or three days,” Mr. Allen said. “Are you sure you want to retain me Kyle? It sounds like things should resolve themselves.”

“I want to make sure everything goes properly,” I said. “My reinstatement on the football team depends on the charges being dropped. The moment Officer Vaughn found out my name and that I was on the football team things went bad. Something about the whole process didn’t seem right. I felt like he was railroading me.”

“The officer did not follow normal procedure Kyle,” Mr. Allen said. “My rate is \$150 an hour if you want to retain me to represent you. I am willing to take your case.”

“The money won’t be a problem,” I said. “How many hours do you think it will take to clear this up? I need to let my Dad know how much money to send me.”

“I don’t think it will take more than two or three hours Kyle,” Mr. Allen said. “I agree with your analysis of your arrest. Something does seem off. I will call the police chief tomorrow morning and inquire about the status of the blood test.”

“What happens if they find me guilty?” I asked.

“The law is quite harsh with under-aged drinkers who drive,” Mr. Allen explained. “You will lose your license for a year, pay a fine of up to \$5,000, do community service and could serve up to a year in jail.”

I felt the blood drain out of my face as I gulped. “A year in jail?”

“A very unusual sentence for a first time offender,” Mr. Allen reassured me. “Most likely I will make a phone call or two, your blood test results will come back and the charges will be dropped if the BAC is 0%.”

“What about the disorderly conduct charge?” I asked.

“I think they probably will drop that if your BAC is clean,” Mr. Allen said. “I will be in touch in a couple days after I hear more from the police.”

“Thank you Mr. Allen,” I said as I rose. He shook my hand again.

“Good luck Kyle,” Mr. Allen said. “We’ll get this problem resolved for you. Sue will take you and your parents’ contact information before you go.”

I stopped by Sue’s desk. She took down my address, home phone and cell phone numbers as well as my home address and phone number back in Paradise. It felt good to have someone else working on my case for me. Maybe we could get things turned around in my life.

I stopped by the Chinese restaurant down the street and picked up food for supper. I didn't want to go eat with a bunch of strange underclassmen in Pollock Commons tonight.

Word got around my network of friends during the day. I was swamped with phone calls. Ed called, Jeremy called. Hal, Aaron, Andy, Will and Justin Baer all checked up on me that evening. It was nice to know I still had friends.

Zack Hayes was the last to call me. It was nearly 9:30 when the phone rang.

“Hey Zack, what's up?” I asked when I saw his name on my phone.

“I called to ask you that question,” Zack replied. “What the hell happened yesterday?”

I related the happenings of Saturday night and early Sunday morning to my mentor.

“I've known you since high school,” Zack said. “You did some crazy things back then but nothing like what you've done in college. Why is that? What's different?”

“I would have done just as many dumb things back then Zack,” I said. I chuckled at the memory. “Penny kept me straight. She always reeled me back to earth if I got too carried away.”

“And now?” Zack asked.

It hit me like someone smacking me on the head with a 2x4. “Kelly,” I blurted out. “If I get a little crazy she goes along. Hell, she often pushes me further out there.”

“So it's all Kelly's fault?” Zack asked.

“This time it is,” I replied. “Most times it's not entirely her fault. I haven't always exercised the best judgment.”

“No, you haven't,” Zack agreed. “You need to think things through my man. Figure out your priorities. How important is playing football to you? Where are you going in life? Are you better off getting there with Kelly?”

“Or am I better off without her?” I said chuckling. “Your advice is the same as Will's. I just don't know the answer to the question.”

“You need to figure it out pretty soon,” Zack replied. “Kelly is a basket case. She's afraid she destroyed the relationship. You don't have weeks to make up your mind. You need to decide whether you are going to work out your problems or you are going to break up.”

“I know,” I agreed.

“Whatever happens between the two of you, you need to understand something,” Zack said. “Leigh Ann and I have been friends with Kelly for a couple years. That isn’t going to change if the two of you split up. Of course we’ve been friends with you also and that won’t change.”

“I understand that Zack,” I agreed. “I will make up my mind soon. I suddenly find myself with a lot of free time now that I’m not spending twenty hours a week heh... heh... heh... on football.”

Zack chuckled too. “Yeah... twenty hours a week.... that is a funny one isn’t it. Think things through Kyle and decide what is best for your future and then let Kelly know. You owe her that much.”

“I will Zack,” I agreed. “Thanks for calling. Give Leigh Ann my love.”

Zack was right. I did owe Kelly a decision about whether I thought our relationship could continue. I said good night to my roommates and headed for my bedroom. I grabbed my MP3 player, flicked the lights off and lay down to think.

What did I want out of my life? That was a place to start and an easy question. I wanted to teach and coach football. Everything I had done over the past few years confirmed my life’s goals to me. This is what I wanted to do.

Part of what made me so mad at Kelly was that her irresponsibility had gotten me kicked off the football team. I could probably still become a high school football coach if I never played football again. Still, I knew ten times as much about football now than if I had never played at the college level. I had a lot more to learn too.

One of the things I learned was how important networking was to coaches. Coach Burton got a job here as a quarterback coach and then offensive coordinator because he had played for Coach Paterno. Coach Schroeder had no connection to Penn State before he replaced Coach Burton as the quarterbacks coach here. They knew each other from Lehigh University where Coach Schroeder worked for Coach Burton when he was the head coach there.

I was making contacts here at Penn State, not just the guys I played with but the opposing players too. Twenty years from now I could be hiring Terrell Ross or Eldon Burkholder to work for me, or vice versa. It happened for Coach Caffrey. He worked football camp for Coach Burton last summer because they knew each from playing against each other in college. Contacts mattered a great deal in my chosen profession.

Whatever happened between me and Kelly, I had to make sure I didn’t have any more screw-ups like this again. Being successful in my future profession required me to know

as many people as possible so I could find good jobs when I was coming up through the coaching ranks and so I could hire good people when I got a head coaching job.

My priorities needed to be: #1 – Education – the degree was crucial, #2 – Play as much football as possible to learn and make contacts so I could be a successful coach, #3 – Family – that is something I want.

Kelly and I are compatible in so many ways. We love reading, following current events and studying history. Both of us love the outdoors, camping and hiking. The two of us are very good in bed together. At one time I could see the two of us getting married, raising a family and having a very happy life together. We had talked about it quite a few times over the almost two years we had been a couple.

Had Kelly destroyed the chance for that? Could I trust her any longer? That was the crux of the question. I probably could forgive her if this was the last time she got wild and totally wasted and then needed me to pick the pieces for her. Was that possible? I fell asleep without answering that question. I woke up a couple hours later still dressed with my earphones on my head. I stripped and hopped back in bed and went to sleep.

After breakfast Tuesday morning I walked across campus to the Walker Building for my Landform Geography 115 course. It gave me time to think some more about Kelly and me. I focused on the critical question for me. Could I trust Kelly to moderate her drinking so I didn't get in another jam like the one I was in now?

Why was an otherwise sensible twenty year old acting this way? I understood her strict upbringing. I could see where she would want to blow off a little steam now that she was out from under mom and dad's rules.

One thing stuck in my head from my conversation with Zack last night. Zack sparked a realization about my relationships. I was impulsive and had a quick temper. When I went steady with Penny in high school she often tempered my excesses. Kelly was just the opposite. When I went too far Kelly just pushed me to go further. I needed to understand what was motivating Kelly if I was going to solve this riddle.

I got to Room 112 in the Walker Building and found a seat. I didn't have a lot of time between that class and Anthropology 45. My cell phone vibrated while I was listening to Dr. Pearson's lecture. I checked it quickly and saw a strange local number. My reply would have to wait until after class.

I called the number when I got out of class. Sue, the receptionist at Mr. Allen's office answered. Mr. Allen was out to lunch but wanted to speak with me. Sue promised to have Mr. Allen call again when he returned to the office.

I headed back to Pollock Commons to get a sandwich at the Mix. I made it back to my apartment before my phone rang again.

“Hello, Kyle Martin,” I said as I answered the call.

“Kyle, this is Mr. Allen, your attorney,” he began. “I spoke with the police chief this morning. I relayed to him your claim that you hadn’t consumed any alcohol Saturday night and our interest in getting the blood test done as soon as possible. The chief promised me that would get the test done expeditiously.”

“Thank you for the information,” I said. “It sounds like everything is going well.”

“I think so,” Mr. Allen agreed. “I’ll check back with the chief on Thursday and let you know where things are at.”

“Thank you,” I replied. “I appreciate your help with this.” I finished up my lunch and then went for a walk around campus. It would give me time to think and sort out my feelings. My Teaching Secondary Social Studies I class didn’t start until 2:30 pm.

As I walked I thought about Kelly’s motivation for her behavior. I was pretty sure it was related to her strict upbringing and the opportunity she had here at college to rebel and enjoy her freedom. That would explain why I had so much trouble getting Kelly to follow through when she promised to cut down on her drinking. This may be a deep seated need for her.

I knew if I sat down with Kelly now and asked her to promise to reform she would tell exactly what I wanted her. She would believe it herself too. I also knew that within a few weeks she would get that phone call. ‘Hey, there’s fun party going on. You should come.’ Kelly would want to go. We would fight about it. She’d go.

Kelly and I were stuck in this same pattern all fall. We fought as often as we made love. It was exhausting. Maybe getting arrested might be a big enough shock to change things but I doubted it.

Could I stake my future on Kelly changing? I stopped abruptly. No, I knew I couldn’t count on Kelly to do that. This was it. I would be better off Kelly. I choked back tears. It hurt like hell but I knew in my heart that it was the right decision.

I glanced at my watch. I had lost track of time. It was 2:26. I had to be at the Chambers Building by 2:30 for my class. I hustled down Curtin Road. I had ended up near the Creamery. I slipped into class a minute late. Dr. Ward noted me as I took a seat but said nothing.

Chad King, my friend and study partner from freshman year, leaned over at the first break. “You look like hell Kyle,” he said. I guess you’ve had a hard few days.”

“I have,” I agreed. “It just got worse before class. Do you remember my girlfriend Kelly?”

“Are you still with her?” Chad asked, clearly surprised.

“Yes...” I said. “... and no. She was the cause of my problems Sunday morning. I just decided I need to break off with her before class.”

“Ouch, that sucks,” Chad replied. “How did she take it?”

“I haven’t had a chance to tell her yet,” I said. “I have to get together with her after class is over and tell her.”

“I’ve been there Kyle,” Chad said. “That is tough. Good luck with it.”

“Thanks Chad,” I said.

I struggled to pay attention to Dr. Ward’s lecture that afternoon. I kept going back to my decision. I did love Kelly, even after what happened this weekend. Was I doing the right thing?

I headed back to my apartment after the class ended. I tried to steel my nerves for the difficult phone call and then conversation I needed to have with Kelly. I dropped off my books in my bedroom, sat down at my desk and started to dial Kelly’s number. I stopped twice. How in the hell could I do this?

I finally managed to dial her number. It rang three times before Kelly answered.

“Kyle, it’s so good to hear from you,” Kelly said enthusiastically.

“Can we get together to talk?” I asked.

“Yes we can,” Kelly replied. “I was so afraid you were going to dump me.”

“I didn’t... uh... Kelly we need to talk,” I answered.

“You’re breaking up with me,” Kelly said. I could hear the alarm in her voice. “If that is what it is, just tell me.”

“I don’t want to do this over the phone,” I said. “Please let’s get together and talk.”

“You are....”, Kelly stuttered out. I heard her choke up and clear her throat again. “This is... it.”

“I’m sorry,” I said lamely. “I wanted to talk this through face to face.” I could hear Kelly trying not to sob but not succeeding. “I’ll always love you Kelly but we make each

other crazy. We've done little more than fight to the last three months. It is best this way..."

I trailed off when I realized Kelly had ended the call. That didn't go at all the way I hoped. In addition to feeling horrible to lose Kelly now I felt like a heel for dumping her on the phone. I collapsed on the bed and closed my eyes. God, please make the pain stop!

I must have fallen asleep. I woke up to the sound of Christian knocking at my door and calling my name.

"Come in Christian, what's up?" I called out.

"How could you do it by phone if you were going to break up with her?" Christian demanded. My normally even tempered friend was angrier than I had ever seen before.

"I didn't want to do it that way," I explained. "Kelly wouldn't sit down with me to talk until I told her whether we would stay together. She gave me no choice."

"Oh... that isn't what she told Bev," Christian replied. "You wanted to meet with her and she wouldn't do it?" I nodded yes. "I'm sorry I jumped to conclusions. I should have known you had more class than that."

"It's OK," I replied. "This whole thing has everyone involved a little crazy. How is Kelly doing?"

"She's devastated," Christian said. "The girls are trying to hold her together. She said being with you was the greatest thing in her life."

"I don't know about that," I said. "She seemed to value partying above our relationship. What would you do if Bev behaved the Kelly did this fall?"

"I guess I'd try to talk her out of it," Christian replied.

"And when that didn't work?" I asked.

"Ummmm..." Christian said. "I'm not sure."

"I've tried to get her to see why I couldn't party the way she wanted for three months," I explained. "She never understood. Saturday night was the last straw. I couldn't take it anymore. I know you well enough to know that you wouldn't continue to date someone who acted the Kelly has been acting."

"I guess you're right," Christian agreed. "How are you holding up Coach?"

“It hurts like hell,” I answered. “Not that I’m planning on going on a drinking binge the way I did the last time.”

“That’s good,” Christian said. “Picking up after you when you went on the bender was pretty ugly.”

“At least you won’t have to clean me up if I change my mind,” I said. “I have other roommates to do that now. I’ll come around eventually I guess.”

“Good luck buddy,” Christian added before he left.

Christian informed my roommates of the break up before he left. Jay, Damian and then Trevor stopped in to talk with me and offer sympathy and any help. I offered each the lame joke that all I really needed was a girlfriend who didn’t drink so much. I thanked each of them for their concern and said I would be all right eventually

Breaking up with Kelly hurt like hell. I felt like I had failed at maintaining my relationship. At the same time I didn’t feel as forlorn as I had two years ago when I broke up with Penny. I would grieve for my loss for awhile but I knew I would find someone else eventually. Hopefully the girl wouldn’t be as interested in partying as Kelly.

One thing I wasn’t looking forward to on Wednesday was history class. I had no idea how I would react when I saw Kelly or how she would react to me. I purposely slipped into the classroom as late as possible without actually being late for class. I scanned the room for Kelly when I walked in the door. She wasn’t there. I sat down beside Cameron just as Dr. Brennan called for everyone’s attention so she could start class. Kelly never showed up for class, which I felt terrible about. I knew she didn’t come because she couldn’t face me.

Jay, Trevor and Damian stopped by the apartment after practice was over Wednesday before they headed over to the Training Table.

“How was practice?” I asked as they came in.

“It sucked!” Damian growled. “People were playing worse than the first day we put on pads last August. Dropped balls, missed blocks, stupid penalties – we better get our shit together before Saturday.”

“It’s that damn Brinton,” Jay added. “Coach needs to bench the kid. I could get things organized again.”

“It’s not quite that bad,” Damian countered. “but Chip definitely misses Coach being in the huddle.”

“I’ll talk to him,” I said. “I’ll help get his head on straight.”

“I can meet with him too,” Trevor offered. Trevor and I knew Chip better than anyone else on the team. We had known him since he was a sophomore in high school.

“Are you sure you’re allowed to do that while you’re suspended?” Damian asked.

“I can’t play, practice, attend team meetings or work out at the Lasch Building,” I said. “I’m not contagious. I can go talk to my friend.”

“Any chance the police will have your blood test done in time for you to come to Michigan State with us?” Trevor asked.

“I doubt it,” I said. “I’m pretty much resigned to missing the game. My attorney is calling the police tomorrow to check on the status of the test.”

“You’re doing your workouts so you will be ready to play if you are cleared before Friday?” Trevor asked.

“I’ve been working out over at the White Fitness Center,” I said. “The facilities aren’t too bad. The pain in the ass was that I had to buy a semester’s membership to use it at all.”

“Couldn’t you use the East Area Weight Room?” Damian asked. “That’s a lot closer than the White Building.”

“That weight room is for athletes only,” I explained. “They turned me away when I tried to use it Tuesday.”

“That sucks,” Trevor agreed. “Keep yourself ready in case lightening strikes and you get to come out to Michigan State with us.”

“I will, I promise,” I agreed.

My friends headed over to the Training Table. I heated up soup and grabbed my supper sandwich from the refrigerator. I read my book on the Battle of Bentonville, one of the closing battles of the Civil War. When I finished eating I decided to head over to the White Fitness Center to workout. My phone rang before I got out the door. The call was from Justin Baer.

“Hey Justin, what’s up?” I asked.

“Hey dude,” Justin answered. “Matt Sauder tells me you may be coming to our game on Friday night.”

“I thought I might,” I replied. “It beats sitting around an empty apartment all weekend while my friends are out at Michigan State.”

“We’ve got a really tough game against Daniel Boone,” Justin explained. “Would you mind working the sideline with Coach Caffrey? You know how Boone is. They are always trying new things to keep us guessing. Coach will have his hands full keeping all the kids on the same page.”

“OK, you sold me Justin,” I answered. “I’ll help out.”

“Cool! That is most excellent,” Justin said. “How are things going between you and Kelly?”

“We broke up,” I answered simply.

“I’m sorry to hear that man,” Justin replied. “I’m real sorry to hear that. I thought she was a pretty special girl.”

“She is, except for the drinking,” I agreed. “Where is the game at on Friday night?”

“It’s at Eastern’s football stadium,” Justin said.

“That’s on the east side of New Holland, off Route 23, right?” I said.

“You got it Kyle,” Justin said.

“My last class ends at 2:15 on Friday,” I said. “I’ll probably get dinner at home and then meet you guys at the stadium before the game. It’s at 7:30, right?”

“You got it man,” Justin said. “Thanks for helping us out of a jam.”

“You understand that if my blood test comes back tomorrow and I get reinstated on the team, I’ll be begging Coach Burton to take me to Michigan State this weekend,” I said.

“Understood,” Justin said. “You’re on temporary loan to the Wolverines until the Lions need you again.”

“You got it,” I said. “I’ll see you guys on Friday night.”

I knew Coach Caffrey could handle things on the sideline without me on Friday night but it was nice of him and Justin to ask me to help out. It would give me something to occupy my mind other than my troubles.

After I got back from working out I gave Christian a call. I wanted his opinion on some unfinished business Kelly and I had. I wanted to send her an e-mail explaining why I felt

it was best that the two of us go our separate ways. I also wanted her to know that I wouldn't make a scene at history if she showed up.

Christian decided it wouldn't hurt for me to try. I sat down in my room and composed an e-mail to Kelly.

To: kokeefe352@psu.edu

From: kmartin87@psu.edu

Subject: History Class

Kelly, I hope you aren't avoiding history class because of me. I won't bother you at class. If I came in after you I will take a seat at the opposite side of the room. I know how much you love Dr. Brennan's class and I don't want you to drop or miss the rest of the course on my account.

I hope you will keep reading this e-mail. There were some things I wanted to tell you when we met to talk. I want you to know I will always love you even though I don't think we should be a couple anymore.

You deserve a chance to have a normal college experience, including having fun at some parties on the weekends. I'm sorry that my being a football player interfered with what you wanted to do on weekends. I hope you find the right guy for you in the future. I want nothing more than happiness for you.

I'll love and remember our time together always.

Kyle

I hoped Kelly would read what I wrote. I meant every word of it. Both of us deserved a partner that made us happy. It just happened that we weren't the right people for each other.

I called home after I finished the e-mail to Kelly. I talked with Mom and Dad for awhile and let them know about developments since Sunday morning. I promised Mom I would be home on time for dinner with the family on Friday night.

My cell phone vibrated for a call when I was in Anthropology 45. I checked and saw it was a call from Mr. Allen. I hurried outside as soon as class was over and called him.

Sue, the receptionist, connected me with Mr. Allen as soon as I called.

“Hello Kyle,” he said. “I wish I had better news to give you this morning. I called the police department again to find out when they expected the blood test to be completed. They hemmed and hawed a bit and couldn’t give me a straight answer when I pressed for the date they sent the tests out and which lab is doing the tests. The clerk was unable to answer any of my questions.”

“This doesn’t sound good,” I observed.

“I demanded to speak with the chief of police,” Mr. Allen continued. “I read the riot act to the chief about the slipshod way his department was run. I implied that we would look at the possibility of filing a wrongful arrest suit if they didn’t produce the exculpatory evidence they possessed damn quick and have the testing done.”

“Did that work?” I asked. “I really don’t want to sue the police over this. I just want to be cleared of the charges.”

“I was blustering,” Mr. Allen explained. “It worked too. The police chief promised me he would find your blood sample and get the testing done immediately.”

“Thanks for your help Mr. Allen,” I said.

“It’s what you are paying me for,” he answered. “I’ll be in touch again when I hear more.”

I headed back to my apartment by way of the Mix. I picked up a sub, some chips and drink and headed back to my apartment. I relaxed after I finished my lunch, reading on in my book on the Battle of Bentonville. My phone rang half an hour after I finished eating. I recognized Mr. Allen’s number.

“Hello Mr. Allen,” I said.

“Hello Kyle, I have significant news for you,” Mr. Allen began. “I just got off the phone with the district attorney for Centre County.”

“I thought you said this kind of case goes to a magistrate,” I asked. “What does the district attorney have to do with this?”

“Normally he wouldn’t be involved in something like this,” Mr. Allen said. “I apparently rattled quite a few cages at the police department. Mr. Herrington assured me that the police had located your blood sample. A police officer will hand deliver it to the testing lab today where they will expedite your test. He has assured me that we will have the results tomorrow afternoon. If your blood alcohol content comes back at under 0.02% he will have all charges dropped.”

“Thank you for the good news,” I said. “I appreciate all the help you have given me.”

“I will give you a call tomorrow after I hear the results,” Mr. Allen said. “Good day.”

All the commotion Friday morning attendant with Trevor, Damian and Jay’s departure for East Lansing, Michigan woke me earlier than I desired. I got up to see my roommates off. I wished them luck against the Spartans.

Kelly showed up for history that Friday. She avoided me carefully and sat at the opposite side of the room from Cameron Miller and me. I caught her staring at me a couple times during Dr. Brennan’s lecture. She hurried out before I had any chance to try to talk to her – not that I planned to do that. I headed back by way of the East Parking Deck to move my car over nearer the apartments.

I packed an overnight bag of things for my weekend at home and then headed for Lancaster County. I was a little disappointed. I had hoped to hear from Mr. Allen before I left State College. Oh well, that would have to wait until Monday.

I was passing Thompsontown, about an hour east of State College, when my cell phone rang. I answered it.

“Hello Kyle, this is Michael Allen. Do you have a minute?”

“Let me pull off the road,” I said. “I’m going home for the weekend.” I pulled my VW onto the shoulder and stopped. “OK, I’m ready to talk.”

“I have excellent news Kyle,” Mr. Allen began. “The DA called to let me know that the blood alcohol level in your blood was 0%. Absolutely clean.”

“Excellent!” I exclaimed.

“The police are dropping all charges,” Mr. Allen explained. “You are totally in the clear.”

“I don’t know how to thank you Mr. Allen,” I said. “This is fantastic news. Thank for everything.”

“You may want to hear the back story too Kyle,” Mr. Allen said. “It’s quite interesting. It explains some of the odd twists and turns in your case.”

“OK, what happened to make this so difficult?” I asked.

“Officer Michael Vaughn has history with football team members,” Mr. Allen explained. “He had a couple run-ins with them five or six years ago. He received formal reprimands twice for poor handling of their cases.”

“So I was just someone at the wrong place at the wrong time,” I commented.

“Partly,” Mr. Allen said before continuing. “The watch commander tried to cover for Vaughn when he realized that proper procedures had not been followed in your case. My phone call to the chief yesterday morning got everything rolling. It seems the borough council member who supervises the police department was in the chief’s office when I called.”

“Is that significant?” I asked.

“Very,” Mr. Allen said. “The borough councilman is a huge Nittany Lions fan. He blew his top when he found out the department was dragging their feet on your test. He lit the fire under the chief and also called his friend, the DA. The two of them got everything expedited after that.”

“That is excellent,” I gushed. “I don’t know how to thank for your help.”

“You should know you may have grounds for suing the police department for false arrest,” Mr. Allen said. “I can recommend a litigator to help you if you want to proceed that way.”

“No, I’m not interested in that at all,” I said. “All I need from the police is a press statement saying that my blood alcohol level was zero and that I am innocent of all charges. That will satisfy me completely.”

“I will convey your request to the police department,” Mr. Allen said.

“Thank you again Mr. Allen,” I said. “You have been a real life saver.”

“It was no problem,” Mr. Allen said. “Good luck when you get to the bowl game Kyle.”

“Thank you sir,” I said before clicking off my phone. This was dynamite news. My reputation was going to be restored. I knew Coach Burton would reinstate me on the team as soon as he heard.

I glanced at my watch. It was 3:40 pm. I tried to remember from two years ago if the team’s plane would be on the ground yet. Could I call Coach Burton before dinner? Maybe I could catch a commercial flight out to East Lansing and play tomorrow after all.

I thought better of that. The team didn’t haul my equipment out to Michigan State. They wouldn’t have a room for me. I was stuck here this weekend being a regular college student. I could go back to being a football player on Monday.

I realized there was one thing I could do. I called Marie, the receptionist at the Lasch Building, from the side of the road. I asked her if she could make an appointment for me to see Coach Burton Monday morning before I had classes. She tentatively scheduled me for a 9:30 am meeting with Coach, subject to his confirmation when he called in later in the afternoon when the team arrived at their hotel. I pulled back onto the road. I felt better than I had in a week.

Chapter 50

I pulled back onto Route 322 after finishing my phone calls and headed east for home. The rest of the drive was routine. Traffic was ugly around Harrisburg. I flew down I-283 to Lancaster and got stuck in another traffic jam around Lancaster. I pulled up in front of my house a couple minutes after 5:30 pm. Hopefully Mom wasn't in a hurry to eat.

I dropped my overnight bag in the foyer, threw my coat on the living room chair and hurried back to the kitchen so I wouldn't be late for supper. I called out, "Hey everyone, I'm home," as I walked into the kitchen.

"Unka Ky!" Noah chirped when he heard me. "Unka Ky!" his brother repeated as the two young boys scrambled off their booster seats and raced to greet me. Mom and Dad were seated at the table and the food was out. Hunter spotted me and tried to squirm out of his high chair and join his nephews.

"Welcome home son," Dad said.

"I was afraid you were going to miss dinner," Mom added.

I stooped down and gave Noah and Connor hugs and kisses, which they returned. "Traffic was brutal around Harrisburg and Lancaster tonight," I explained to Mom. Hunter squawked when no one paid attention to him. I walked over to Hunter's chair and gave him a kiss.

"Unka Ky!" my little brother squealed triumphantly. He continued repeating my name while Noah and Connor tried to get my attention again.

"Get p'ane ride Unka Ky?" Connor begged. Noah echoed, "P'ease get ride?"

"No boys, it is supper time," Mom commanded. "Get back in your seats so everyone can eat. Kyle will play with you after dinner."

"OK Mom-Mom," both twins agreed. They climbed back onto the booster seats and sat politely. I took the only empty place at the table. We bowed our heads and thanked God for the meal. Mom made a simple dinner – meatloaf, mashed potatoes and gravy and peas with pearl onions.

"Where did Liz go," I asked as we passed dishes around the table.

"Your sister went out to dinner with Annie and a couple other girlfriends before they go to the playoff game tonight," Dad explained as he cut up and prepared a plate of food for Noah. Mom worked on a plate for Connor. Hunter got a small bowl of diced up meatloaf, potatoes, gravy and peas.

“Are you going to the game tonight?” Mom asked as she worked on food for the little ones.

“Yes,” I replied. “Coach Caffrey wants me to work the sidelines with him tonight. I get a chance to coach.”

“That’s good son,” Dad said. ‘Have you heard anything else from your attorney? You said the police might have the results of the blood test today.”

“Oh jeez! How could I forget to tell you the biggest news of all?” I said. “Mr. Allen called while I was driving home. The report came back. My blood alcohol level tested at zero. The police are dropping all charges.”

“That is excellent news son,” Mom said.

“Will Coach Burton let you back on the team now?” Dad asked.

“I have a tentative appointment to see him Monday morning at 9:30 am,” I said. “He was a little busy traveling and getting ready for tomorrow’s game for me to talk with him today. He promised me last Sunday morning that I would be reinstated if the charges were dropped.”

“How are you handling the break up with Kelly?” Mom asked.

“It’s hard,” I answered. “I miss Kelly terribly. I still want to tell her about how my day went, to hear how her day was and to share things with her just like I have been doing for almost two years. It’s hard for me but I know I’m doing the right thing. Kelly’s partying was out of hand. I couldn’t put up with it anymore.”

“That was a wise decision Kyle,” Dad said. “It can lead you into all kinds of problems. What if you had a couple beers Saturday night before you were arrested?”

“I know the answer to that,” I said. “I lose my license for a year, pay a \$5000 fine and could serve up to a year in jail. I can promise the two of you that I will never drive after I’ve been drinking. I lost Greg Harrison to a drunk driver four years ago and nearly lost Jay to another last fall. I would never take a chance on doing something like those two idiot drunk drivers did.”

“How is Kelly doing?” Mom asked.

“I hear she is having a difficult time,” I said. “She never suffered through the breakup of a serious relationship before. When she broke up with her other boyfriend from high school, it was a mutually agreed upon thing after they graduated and decided to go to different colleges. They are still friends. On the other hand I know exactly how it feels to break up with a serious girlfriend, having experienced that pain a couple times already.

I know it will hurt now but there will be a light at the end of the tunnel and I will come out all right on the other side.”

Mom and Dad continued to quiz me about my decision to break things off with Kelly as we ate our dinner. I explained how I prioritized my own needs and desires and how I thought Kelly didn’t fit into them anymore. Mom and Dad asked a few questions but mostly listened as I talked and unburdened myself.

When I finished Mom aid, “I think you made a very mature and well considered decision Kyle.”

“You’re really turning into a decent, thoughtful young adult,” Dad added.

“I’m trying,” I agreed. “I tried to be smarter than two years ago. My breaking up with Penny was impulsive. I still regret the way we broke up. The two of us would have been so much better off if we had done the same as Kelly and her boyfriend Tom. Do a clean break after high school, stay friends and seek out someone at your college.”

“I agree Kyle,” Dad said. “I couldn’t handle being in State College while the love of my life was back here in Paradise.” That earned Dad a big smile from Mom.

Noah and Connor had been quiet while Mom, Dad and I discussed my breakup with Kelly. The boys were more perceptive than I realized. When we finished talking about Kelly Connor asked, “Keh-EE gone?”

“Yes Connor, she isn’t my girlfriend anymore,’ I explained. “She won’t be visiting here.”

“That sad,” Noah said.

“Keh-EE fun,” Connor agreed.

“Why Keh-EE go?” Noah asked. Mom added quietly, “His favorite question.”

“Kelly and I had a fight,” I explained. “You and Connor fight sometimes, don’t you?” Both twins nodded yes. “Kelly and I had a big fight. She isn’t my girlfriend anymore.”

“What is gir’frien?” Connor asked.

“You know how Josh is always over here with Lizzie?” I asked. Both boys nodded yes. “Josh is a boy and he likes Lizzie a lot. That makes him Lizzie’s boyfriend. Kelly is a girl and she’s my special friend. That made her my girlfriend until we got mad at each other and split up. Do you see?”

Both kids seemed confused by the concept. “Who your gir’frien’ now?”

“I’m like your Dad,” I explained. “Neither of us have girlfriends now.”

“OK,” Connor agreed. “P’ease find one ‘ike Keh-EE Unka Ky.”

“I’ll do my best guys,” I agreed. “Don’t expect me to find someone immediately. Finding a girlfriend can take a long time.” Noah and Connor seemed to accept my explanation about girlfriends.

“Are you interested in going to the Delaware game tomorrow with your mother and me?” Dad asked. “I’m sure Andy could scrounge up a ticket for you if you want to go.”

“I don’t know,” I said. “I was planning on watching Penn State/Michigan State on TV in the afternoon.”

“When is your game?” Dad asked. “It may not be a problem. Andy’s game isn’t until seven o’clock tomorrow night.”

“That would work out,” I responded. “Our game starts at noon. What time do you and Mom usually leave to get to Andy’s games?”

“We left at 3:30 the last time they played a late game, Dad said. “You should come. It would nice if you saw your brother play football one time while he’s in college. I doubt you will get very many chances otherwise.”

“OK, I’m sold,” I agreed. “I’ll go along. Who is looking after the kids tomorrow if both of you go to Newark?”

“Josh and Liz,” Mom explained. “They are working on earning enough money to buy season ski lift passes.”

“Yeah, that’s high school kids,” I said. “Always looking to pick up a little spending money.”

“Unlike college students who just bum the money off their parents,” Dad teased.

“I’ll go back to lifeguarding next semester,” I countered. “Any way, look at the bright side of my breakup. I won’t be spending money to take my sweetie out dining and dancing. I’ll save a ton of money on presents.”

I said it in jest but it reminded me of the best things Kelly and I had. I loved taking her out to dinner, going dancing with her and buying her presents. The sparkle in her eyes when she opened a present and found the new sweater or the piece of jewelry I bought always warmed my heart.

Mom and Dad sensed the change in my mood. They steered the conversation on to the family's plans for Thanksgiving and the holidays. I always enjoyed reconnecting with my family.

Mom didn't have anything special planned for dessert. I decided some ice cream would hit the spot. All three boys insisted on having some too (after Mom gave her approval). I helped Mom and Dad clean up the sticky boys after their dinner. I gave Noah, Connor and Hunter plane rides and rough housed with them a little. I spent about fifteen minutes playing with the kids before I had to head out for the playoff game.

I took my overnight bag downstairs. I thought it would be cool if I wore my Wolverines letterman jacket so I would blend in better on the sidelines. Wrong! I hadn't grown any taller but I had put on about thirty pounds since I bought the jacket four years ago. My arms were tight in the sleeves. It was tight around the chest. My shoulders were too broad for the poor old jacket. It was a graphic reminder of how much muscle I had put on at Penn State. I settled for a gray Penn State Football hoodie instead.

I took back roads over to Intercourse, crossed Route 340 and headed for New Holland. I had no trouble finding Eastern High School. I had trouble finding the right entrance to get me to the stadium but I found it after a couple wrong tries. The team buses for the Wolverines and for the Daniel Boone Blazers were in the parking lot so I assumed both teams were in the locker rooms. I decided to hang out on the sideline of the field until our team came out for warm-ups.

Mr. Montgomery, a reporter for the local paper, bumped into me while I was waiting for the team.

“Hey Kyle, how are you holding up?” Mr. Montgomery asked. He had interviewed me on Monday when the story about my arrest and suspension had broken. We always had a good relationship.

“Fantastic!” I answered with gusto. “How would you like an exclusive story?”

“Sure, what have you got?” Mr. Montgomery asked.

“I don't think anyone else knows yet,” I explained. “State College police got the blood test back on me. My blood alcohol level was zero. All charges have been dropped.”

“Wow, that is big,” Mr. Montgomery said as he pulled out his pad and pencil. He proceeded to interview me for about five minutes to get all his facts straight for the story.

“Do you think this will make tomorrow morning's paper?” I asked when he finished interviewing me.

“It may,” Mr. Montgomery replied. “I’ll try to get confirmation tonight but I don’t know if I’ll have enough time. I can’t print it without confirmation.”

“I understand,” I said. “My girlfriend is a … er, my ex-girlfriend is a journalism major. I understand about getting confirmation.”

“Is that the same girl who was arrested with you?” Mr. Montgomery asked. “Have they dropped the charges against her too?”

“This part has to be off the record,” I said. “She’s a regular person who doesn’t deserve to have her dirty laundry aired in public.”

“OK, I can accept that,” Mr. Montgomery said. I filled Mr. Montgomery in on the background of what happened last Saturday night and Sunday morning.

Mr. Montgomery agreed that Kelly wasn’t part of the story. He wouldn’t include anything about her when he wrote this up. He thanked me for giving him the head’s up on this before we parted.

The Wolverines team came out for warm-ups. I met up with Coach Caffrey, Justin, and the other coaches for our team. I got one surprise that I hadn’t heard about before. Coach Caffrey introduced me to his new offensive coordinator, Jason Turner.

Coach Graham, our long time offensive coordinator had retired at the end of last school year. Jason was hired to replace him, both as a social studies teacher and as a football coach.

“Kyle, I’ve heard so much about you. It’s good to finally meet you,” Mr. Turner exclaimed as he pumped my hand up and down. “You are about the closest thing to a hero around here.”

“Mr. Turner, it’s good to meet you,” I replied.

“You’re not a student,” Mr. Turner replied. “Please call me Jason when the kids aren’t around.”

“OK, Jason,” I agreed.

“I understand from Justin that you are going to help us out on the sidelines tonight,” Jason continued. “That’s awesome. Feed any observations or suggestions you have to Walt and me. If you have any tips for the kids, go ahead and help them out. I suspect you and I have similar philosophies of football. We have a few things in common.”

“Oh, like?” I asked.

“We both played wide receiver in college,” Jason answered. He chuckled. “I graduated from Lehigh University eight years ago.” He let me think about that one for a second.

I carefully looked over the young coach. He couldn’t be over thirty. It hit me. “Oh, you played wide receiver for Coach Burton,” I said. Coach Burton was head coach at Lehigh before coming to Penn State seven years ago.

“I’ve seen you play on TV Kyle,” Jason said. “I can see Coach Burton’s philosophy of football hasn’t changed any since I last worked with him. I was his grad assistant for a year after I graduated. I had to move on and find another job when Coach was hired at Penn State.”

“Where have you been until this year?” I asked.

“I worked as an offensive assistant and then offensive coordinator at Liberty High School in Bethlehem,” Jason explained.

“I have a good friend who went there, his name is....” I began.

“Shawn Byrd,” Jason added. “Shawn is a good man. I never could make him into a wide receiver but he is a hell of a cornerback.”

“That he is,” I agreed.

Coach Caffrey, Jason and Justin briefed me on their plans for Daniel Boone. It wasn’t anything unusual for the Wolverines. We’d pass the ball deep to our fast receivers to spread the defense and run when they weren’t expecting it. The formula had been working well for seven years. Why would we change it?

Daniel Boone Area High School was one of the better teams in District 3. They had an excellent mobile quarterback. Their run/pass mix was 55/45. He was an excellent runner too. He made nearly a $\frac{1}{4}$ of the runs for the team. Our defense would key on him since he was the key guy on 60% of the Blazers’ plays. Coach Caffrey and Coach Wyndham, our defensive coordinator, were confident our guys could handle them.

I got a chance to say hello to my various friends on the team before they went back inside. Coach Caffrey insisted that I accompany the team to the locker room if I was going to help coach them.

Coach Caffrey gave a good pre-game speech to motivate the kids to do their best tonight. He challenged them to reach for the goal they set for themselves at the beginning of the season – the state championship game. The kids were fired up when they took the field.

Our team took the kickoff. Our returner, a tenth grader I didn’t know, almost broke free on the kickoff. He gave us possession of the ball at midfield. Cody Stevens ran off tackle to the strong side behind Gary Harrison and the right tackle Jordan Mowrer’s

blocks. He picked up nine yards. We hit the exact same spot again, this time Cody gained thirteen yards. On the next play Matt faked the hand off to Cody who carried the fake ball into the same seam of the defense. The Blazers converged on Cody, losing track of Dave Mitchell who was running a post route. Matt lobbed the ball downfield, hitting Dave at the two yard line. Dave was in the end zone before any Boone player could react.

Boone tried to answer with a strong drive of their own. They worked the ball down the field mixing option plays, straight running plays and short passes to move the ball. A well timed sack forced Boone to try a field goal when they couldn't make a third and long at our 22 yard line. They didn't have a strong kicker. He missed.

Matt and our offense took the field again and proceeded to drive straight down the field like Patton through France. Nothing could stop my guys. It was 14-0 ten minutes into the game.

I gave Dave Mitchell, Taylor Ranck, our flanker, Garrett Houseman, our slot receiver and Gary Harrison advice while they were on the sidelines. The four boys were playing superbly.

I talked with the cornerbacks Josh Strickler and Chris Zimmerman along with the safeties Kevin Peachy and Andrew Krause. I gave them tips that I learned playing against good defensive backs in college. It was good to see Chris again. He had been in my patrol of new scouts five years ago. Chris had stayed in scouts about a year and a half. I hadn't run into him since. I think my tips were useful.

The Wolverines offense continued hitting on all cylinders. They had the score up to 28-6 (Boone touchdown with a missed extra point) when we went inside at half time. I was impressed with the whole offense but there were two stand outs. Matt Sauder had made a quantum leap since I worked with him last summer. I understood why Coach Burton had offered him a scholarship so early. Matt was playing better than any high school quarterback I had ever seen – and I had seen some excellent ones play.

The other stand out was Gary Harrison. He did well catching the ball over the middle. He was fantastic as a blocker. When Gary and right tackle Jordan Mowrer opened a hole for Cody it was so big my grandmother could have gained half a dozen yards through it. It certainly explained why our team favored running off tackle on the strong side of the formation.

Coach Caffrey was business like during the half time. He and Jason Turner went over a couple minor adjustments they wanted to make in anticipation of Boone's likely adjustments. The kids went back out confident in their ability to continue to dominate the Blazers.

The kids' confidence was not misplaced. The Wolverines defense stuffed the Blazers on three straight plays to open the second half. Nate Trimble dropped their quarterback for

losses twice on the three plays. Kathy Trimble's pesty little brother Nate had come a long way in the half dozen years I knew him. I suspected Nate had some personal coaching from Notre Dame's starting middle linebacker. Wherever he learned his craft, he had learned to play middle linebacker well.

The Wolverines first team scored three more touchdowns in the third quarter against one touchdown for Boone. Boone's kicker missed his second PAT on that TD. The score was 49-12 when Coach Caffrey sent our second team players in to give them some experience.

I offered a few suggestions to Jason and Coach Caffrey but I mostly stood and watched as they coached the team. I was very impressed with Jason. Our school had gotten extremely lucky to get someone of his caliber to be our offensive coordinator.

Logan Mitchell and the second string scored another touchdown in the fourth quarter. Our defense didn't let the Blazers score more points. The final score was 56-12.

Dave Mitchell caught two TDs, Gary Harrison two more. Cody ran for a 187 yards on 21 carries, catching one TD and running for another. Matt threw five touchdowns and ran another on a QB sprint out. The Wolverines offense was astoundingly good for a high school team.

The Wolverines players' celebration was muted. Matt Sauder preached that this was only a small step towards their goal for the season. Hopefully they had five more games before they would be crowned state AAA champions.

Coach Caffrey was doing interviews with the press. Jason Turner and I hung out waiting for Coach to finish.

"That was an amazing display the offense put on today," I commented to Jason. "You and Coach called a good game."

"The young men are amazing," Jason agreed. "I heard about all the off season work they do to prepare. I also heard about how you and your friends got that tradition started."

"Give credit to Zack Hayes," I said. "Zack started it. Ed, Jeremy and I just kept it rolling."

"When I started at football two-a-days last August I was shocked at how knowledgeable and well prepared these kids are. I've never seen anything like this before."

"They work hard," I agreed.

"The biggest shock to me was Gary Harrison," Jason said. "Do you know him?"

"Sure," I agreed. "His older brother was a close friend."

“Gary is big for a ninth grader,” Jason explained. “I wasn’t surprised that he was good at catching passes. That isn’t unusual for a young player. What is really astounding is how good the young man is at blocking. I’ve worked with tight ends for years who couldn’t do what Gary does. Where in the hell did he learn to do that?”

“I worked with Gary everyday last summer on his blocking,” I replied.

“You? A wide receiver?” Jason asked. “Where did you learn to block like that?”

“My roommate,” I answered. “Do you know who Damian Thompson is?”

“I’ve watched some Penn State games on TV,” Jason said. “I know who Thompson is. He taught you to block?”

“He did,” I agreed.

“You did a hell of a job with Gary,” Jason said. “All of your friends did a hell of a job. This team has the traditions to keep them on top for years to come. I am so fortunate to have gotten a job here.”

“I think our team is lucky to have you,” I responded.

“Are you going to be available next weekend?” Jason asked. “Walt and I could use your help on the sidelines.”

“I always come to the game after Thanksgiving,” I said.

“Excellent, I’ll see you next weekend Kyle,” Jason said. He headed off for the locker room.

I hung on the field for awhile enjoying the feeling of victory. I congratulated some of the players. I talked with Gary Harrison and his parents for a few minutes. I told my protégé how much I liked the way he played.

I caught up with Matt Sauder after he finished some interviews. “Hey teammate, what did you think of the game?” Matt teased when he met.

“Teammate?” I asked.

“Mom and Dad agreed that I could accept Coach Burton’s scholarship offer,” Matt said. “I talked with my guidance counselor earlier this week. She helped me plan out how I can graduate in thirteen months. I’ll be a Nittany Lion.”

“Congratulations,” I responded. “That is excellent news Matt. I told Coach Turner that you played as well as any high school quarterback that I have ever seen. ANY quarterback.”

“Wow, that’s high praise Coach,” Matt answered. “Thanks. Will you be back for the next game?”

“Coach Caffrey and Coach Turner asked me to work the sideline again next weekend,” I answered. “I’ll see you then.”

Matt headed off for the locker room. I headed for home. Even though my sister Liz left ahead of me with her girlfriends I made it home first by about ten minutes. I headed to bed. I needed to get up earlier than usual so I would be ready to watch my Lions take on Michigan State at noon tomorrow.

My alarm woke me up at 10:30 on Saturday morning. It sucks to need an alarm on a Saturday but I wanted time to have breakfast before I caught the Penn State/Michigan State game at noon. After I showered I headed upstairs to the kitchen. The three mooches (Noah, Connor and Hunter) showed up as soon as the frying pan came out of the stove drawer.

Mom let me make some extra French toast for the boys when I made my breakfast. The three boys enjoyed my cooking. I enjoyed feeding them and spending time with them. I was going to enjoy being a father someday. Now that Kelly and I broke up, that day seemed more distant than it might have otherwise.

I checked the headlines in local paper while I had my breakfast. The high school playoff results were on a banner across top of the front page. I flipped back to the sports page. The lead article was an account of the Wolverines’ victory over Daniel Boone High School. Right below it was an account of Central’s demolition of East Pennsboro. Christian’s high school team beat Greg Nowicki’s old team 38-17. The article said Central would face my Wolverines next Friday night at Hershey Stadium.

I was pleased to see a small article on the first page of the sports section reporting that the State College police had dropped all charges against me. Mr. Montgomery reported that I claimed not to have been drinking. The only thing the State College police would confirm was that “the charges had been dropped due to lack of evidence.” I was not pleased to see that the police had not followed through with my request. I would address that on Monday when I got back to State College.

The boys followed me to the family room after I cleaned up from breakfast. I flipped on the TV and switched it to ABC. As soon as the pre-game show came out Noah squealed “Foo-bah!”

“Yeah, foo-bah” Connor agreed. Hunter chimed in his delight even though he had no idea what his nephews were cheering about. The boys settled down to play with their blocks and other toys as I watched and waited for the game to begin. The boys checked the TV occasionally to see what was happening as they played.

The camera hovered on the Nittany Lion and the cheerleaders as performed for the small Penn State crowd in Spartan Stadium. The Lion caught the boys’ eyes. Connor leaped up and ran to the TV pointing, “Who dis?”

“That’s the Nittany Lion,” I explained. “His name is Patrick. He’s a friend of mine.”

“Pat-rick?” Connor asked. “What he do?”

“He leads the people cheering for Penn State,” I said. “See all the people in blue and white? They’re Penn State fans.”

“You p’ay Penn State Unka Ky,” Noah said. “Why here?”

“Has you dad or Mom-Mom ever given you a timeout when you are bad?” I asked. Both twins nodded yes. “My coach gave me a timeout.”

“Unka Ky bad?” Noah asked.

“No, I wasn’t,” I replied. Both boys looked confused. “Have you ever been given a time out for something you didn’t do? Say Connor or Hunter spilled something but Mom-Mom thought you did it?” Both boys nodded yes immediately. “It’s like that for me. Someone said I was bad when I wasn’t. Now I have a timeout until they figure out I wasn’t bad.”

“Unka Ky no bad?” Connor asked.

“No, I wasn’t,” I said. “My timeout should end on Monday. Anyway, the timeout has good things too. I get to spend time with my favorite nephews.”

“Good Unka Ky here,” Connor said. “Yes, good!” Noah agreed.

The commentators stopped yakking so I returned my attention to the TV. Michigan State won the coin toss and had first possession. Michigan State looked sharp. They moved the ball smartly down the field mixing passes and runs to keep our defense off balance.

“God damn it!” I howled when the Spartans scored.

“Kyle, watch your language if the kids are with you.”

“Sorry Mom,” I called back. “Don’t say those bad words guys. You’ll get me in trouble with Mom-Mom.”

“OK Unka Ky” “OK” the twins answered. “OK” Hunter parroted.

My mood and my team’s performance didn’t improve. My friends were playing flat and emotionless. The Spartans were fired up, hitting hard and making plays. Their coverage blanketed Christian. They played press coverage on Max, Tanner and Jared Cantrell. None of them could get off the line properly. With no deep threat Damian and Wyatt had little room to run productively. It was an exercise in frustration – for me and for my teammates out at Michigan State.

The score was 21-10 Michigan State when the teams went inside for halftime. It was so totally frustrating for me to watch. There wasn’t a damn thing I could do to change the game.

Tanner Riggs took the second half kickoff two yards into the end zone. Dave McCall waved for Tanner to return the ball instead of downing it. That was a bad decision. One of the gunners slipped though and tackled Tanner at our 16 yard line. Chip and our offense worked hard, moving the ball down the field.

Coach Burton tried Brian Henson in my position to get someone deep. Brian got caught up with the cornerback when he tried to get off the line of scrimmage. I needed to have a long talk with Brian next time we were on the practice field together. He needed to know my method for handling press coverage.

If a cornerback tried chucking me then I would clobber him. I wouldn’t be able to catch the pass on that play but the cornerback tended to be much less enthusiastic about hitting me as I crossed the line of scrimmage. Brian is big enough to be able to dominate cornerbacks that same way I did.

The drive stalled near midfield. Mitch Jackson punted the ball back to the Spartans. Our return team forced their returner to call for a fair catch at their 17 yard line.

Once when the sideline camera panned across the sideline I caught sight of Anders manhandling Brian on the sideline. I recognized the lesson Anders had taught me two years earlier. It was a demonstration of how to beat press coverage. Hopefully Brian paid attention to the lesson.

Our defense managed to stop the Spartans at midfield. They punted the ball down to Christian at our 10 yard line. Christian ran forward, dodging, twisting and turning to gain yards. He made it out to the 24 yard line. Coach Burton sent Brian Henson out in my split end spot on the first play.

The next play was a pass. The cornerback covering Brian chucked him hard. Brian hit back driving the defender back three yards and knocking him over before he took off on his pass route. Brian was open twenty-five yards deep but the timing of the play was hopelessly compromised. Chip hit Max on a slant for seven yards.

Brian stayed on the field. Michigan State reacted by dropping their free safety deeper, letting Christian single covered. Damian gouged the Spartan's now looser defense for six yards off tackle.

Coach Burton sent our receivers deep on the next play, leaving the Spartan free safety a dilemma – cover Christian deep or Brian deep. He hesitated a moment before starting towards Christian as he broke away from the cornerback covering him. At the same time Brian got behind the other corner back and took off downfield. Chip spotted the opening and launched the ball for Brian. He caught it and sprinted for the end zone. The hesitant free safety sprinted over, badly out of position. He lunged desperately, catching Brian's heel around the 5 yard line. Brian sprawled to the ground, sliding into the end zone on his belly. The referee marked the ball down at the 3 yard line.

Damian and our offensive line pounded the ball in two plays later. Score: 21 MSU, 17 PSU

I could see on TV a thousand miles away that this score had lit a spark in my team. Our defense stopped Michigan State on the next series. Coach Burton continued playing Brian Henson in my place. Brian did well, getting behind the cornerback often enough to force the Spartans to bring the free safety over to help cover Brian.

This freed Christian more often. Chip drove our team down the field getting a touchdown and our first lead when he found Christian crossing the back of the end zone uncovered.

Michigan State rallied, making a long drive as the fourth quarter started to grab a 28-24 lead. Our team had twelve and a half minutes left. Chip and the offense went to work again. The Spartans hammered the ball carrier play after play. It took my team to move the ball the length of the field and regain the lead, 31-28.

The clock on the TV screen showed 5:32 remained in the game. Our defense was going to need to make a stand to hold our narrow lead. Coach C tried blitzes, stunts and most anything he could come up with to stop the Spartans. The defense couldn't. The Spartans quarterback lobbed the ball into the corner of the end zone overtop of Denzel Hunt. Touchdown Spartans! They made the point after to regain the lead 35-31.

0:48 remained on the clock. Brian Henson went in to return the kickoff. The kicker booted it deep into the end zone, forcing Brian to accept the touchback. The Spartans sent in seven d-backs covering the sidelines and deep threat. They blanketed Brian and Christian on deep routes, forcing Chip to check down to Amir Lee, Tanner or Damian on short outlet routes.

My team worked the ball downfield but much too slowly. We had to use up our timeouts to keep the clock from running out. Four plays later our team is up to midfield, the time

outs are gone and the clock is stopped at 0:34 thanks to Damian bulling his way out of bounds on the last catch.

Josh Strickler popped into the family room then. “Game over yet?” he asked.

“No, there’s 34 seconds left,’ I answered as I stared at the TV.

“I didn’t want to leave home, but I had to,” Josh explained. “Aren’t you and your parents supposed to leave soon to go to Andy’ game?”

Chip lobbed a deep ball to Brian Henson on the next play. Brian was triple covered. He got his hands on the ball but couldn’t hold on. 0:26 on the clock.

“Josh!” Noah squealed when he spotted his babysitter. “P’ay wit’ us p’ease?” Connor echoed his twin.

Chip launched another pass downfield to Christian who was forced to turn his route towards the middle of the field to get open. 22 yard completion, the ball was at the Spartans’ 34 yard line at 0:19 and the clock continued to run.

“In a minute guys,” Josh answered to my nephews.

“HURRY UP CHIP!” I shouted at the TV. “Clock it!”

My teammates scrambled into position, held still the required one second and then Greg snapped the ball back to Chip who immediately spiked it to the ground. 0:09 remained.

“Kyle, it’s time for us to leave for Andy’s game,” Mom yelled into the family room.

“In a minute Mom,” I yelled.

Penn State flooded the end zone with receivers. No one was open. Pressure forced Chip to throw the ball through the end zone. 0:03 remained on the clock.

Coach Burton flooded the end zone with receivers again. No one was open. Chip checked down to Damian at the 10 yard line. Damian ran over the linebacker trying to cover him and ran for the end zone. The d-backs converged on him. This first two couldn’t stop him. The third and fourth guys slowed him down and the fifth guy added enough weight to bring down my roommate. Damian went down on the 3 yard line. The clock read 0:00.

“Wow, that was some finish,” Josh said. “Sorry you guys lost.”

“Hmmph,” I sniffed. “There goes any shot of me going out to California for Christmas.”

“Where do you think you’ll go this year?” Josh asked.

“I’m Florida bound,” I answered. “Probably the Outback Bowl in Tampa or maybe the Capital One Bowl in Orlando if we’re lucky.”

“December isn’t a bad time to visit Florida,” Josh said. “Orlando would be nice – Disney World and Universal.”

“We could have gone to the Rose Bowl if we had won and Ohio State beat Michigan today,’ I replied. “That would have been better.”

“It certainly beats going to your aunt and uncle’s place for Christmas the way I am,” Josh said.

“I guess I should be grateful for a trip to a nice sunny place next month,” I agreed. “Still, I KNOW I could have made a difference if I had been there. I know how to beat press coverage. I could have opened things up for my team. We would have been watching the Spartans in the rear view mirror as they chased us in the second half.”

“I don’t doubt that you would have made a difference Kyle,” Josh agreed. “Wish Andy luck for me.”

“Will do,” I agreed. I gave Hunter, Noah and Connor kisses and hurried to the door. Mom and Dad were in the car waiting on me. Mom and Dad didn’t ask how Penn State did. They knew from the groans from the family room that my team had lost. They left me to my frustration and misery as we headed south on Route 896 for Delaware.

I put on my headphones and cranked up my MP3 player. Music relaxes me. It gave me time to think about myself, Kelly, the game I missed and where I saw myself going. It was totally frustrating to sit and watch my football team play, knowing I could be on the field and wasn’t allowed to be.

It had been hard back in eleventh grade when I blew out my knee to sit on the sidelines and watch my friends go to the state championship. Back then I could barely walk much less run, jump and do the things a football player had to do. This time was much worse because I could play.

I made the right decision when I decided to breakup with Kelly. The breakup hurt and I missed her terribly but it was the proper thing to do. If I was going to be a football player I needed to be more careful with what I did and what the persons close to me did so I didn’t get in this kind of mess again.

I knew I would have made a difference in the game if I had played. It took Brian Henson half the game to figure out how to beat press coverage. I would have clocked the d-back on the first pass play and made him back off immediately. With the deep threat established my teammates and I could have had twice as much time to score on Michigan State. We would have won.

I checked the score of the Ohio State/Michigan game on my phone. Ohio State was ahead 7-0. I knew we had missed an opportunity to sneak into the Rose Bowl this afternoon. Damn! I had to clean up my act so this didn't happen again.

I calmed down after a little while. I rarely traveled south of Strasburg, so the sights were new. It was very pretty farmland with some hills and one little village after another – Georgetown, Nine Points, Andrew's Bridge and after crossing the Octoraro Creek into Chester County – Homeville, Russellville, Jennersville, New London and Kemblesville. It was beautiful countryside and pretty little villages. Development picked up when we crossed over Route 1 at Jennersville. There were a lot of newer homes but it still felt like a rural area.

We nicked the northeast corner of Maryland for two seconds and then we were in Delaware. The scene changed from rural to suburban as soon as we crossed the state line into Delaware. We were in the middle of Newark in a few minutes. Dad turned south and headed down College Boulevard to Tubby Raymond Field.

I checked the Ohio State/Michigan score again. It was close to halftime and Ohio State led 21-13. I couldn't shake the feeling that my team had missed a grand opportunity to sneak into the Rose Bowl ahead of Michigan today.

Mom, Dad and I stopped off at the ticket office to pick up the ticket Andy left for me before heading inside the stadium. Tubby Raymond Field at Delaware Stadium had high rows of bleachers on each side of the field. Lower rows of bleachers rose at either end of the field. The program said it held 23,000 fans – quite small by the size I was used to now.

Andy's team was playing Villanova to close their regular season. I was looking forward to seeing Kenny Weaver; the outside linebacker from my school in my senior year; Trent Wilson, my good friend from camp; and of course seeing my brother in action in college.

Kenny had gone to Villanova for college. I hadn't talked to Kenny since last spring. I did not know if he was able to make it as a starter or not this year. A glance at the Villanova roster in the program told me Kenny was the Wildcats' starting weak side linebacker.

We found seats part way up the stands near midfield. Dad and I went to the refreshment stands and picked up drinks, hot dogs and fries for the three of us. The two teams came out soon after Dad and I returned with our snacks. Evidently Mom and Dad usually sat in the same place in the stadium. Andy spotted us almost immediately after he scanned the stadium. We got a big smile and wave before he headed back inside to finish preparing for the game.

The game was important to both schools. Villanova and Delaware were tied in their conference with 8-3 records. The winner stood an excellent chance of taking one of the

twenty playoff spots in the FCS. The loser was probably done for the season after the day's game. Both Delaware and Villanova trailed CAA leading Maine, who was undefeated.

The game proved to be entertaining. Delaware and Villanova were closely matched in abilities. Each defense made some good stops. The offenses made a few plays too. Andy had a great kick return after the Wildcats' first score. He picked 52 yards before the next to last guy shoved him out of bounds.

The Blue Hens led 14-10 at halftime. Andy had played wide receiver on four plays, catching two passes for 38 yards. My brother looked good returning punts and kicks. I was going to have to take a look at the NCAA records. I was leading the FBS in kick returns and #4 on the list of top punt returners. I wondered if Andy was leading the FCS.

Trent Wilson's play impressed me. Trent was small and slow for a defensive back. He made up for those deficiencies by playing smart football. He was almost never out of position in the first half. Coach Keeler, Delaware's head coach, was smart about how he used Trent too. Trent was assigned to cover Villanova's #2 receiver, the possession receiver that didn't have a lot of speed.

Trent had to cover his man without help the whole time. This allowed Delaware to double on Villanova's best receiver. The ball went to Trent's man seven times in the first half for only two completions. Trent tackled the guy both times for short gains.

Trent's cover ability along with the double on the other wide receiver limited the effectiveness of Villanova's passing game. The other eight defenders concentrated on shutting down the Wildcat running game. If the Blue Hens could sustain this in the second half, I thought they had a good shot at winning.

My brother took the second half kickoff, followed some good blocking, made a couple moves and jetted through the Wildcat coverage. Andy faked out the kicker and flew into the end zone. The Blue Hen fans cheered wildly for my brother.

The fan beside me, a college student about my age, was ecstatic. He clapped his friend on the back and cheered. He turned to me to exchange a high five. I slapped his upraised hand.

"Isn't that kid fantastic?" he exclaimed. "That's his third kick return for a touchdown this season."

"I know," I agreed as the fan calmed down. "He's my brother." He gave me a funny look for a second.

"Are you the..." he asked. I nodded yes before he finished the question. "... who plays at Penn State? Aren't you supposed to be playing in a game today?"

“I wasn’t able to travel with the team,” I explained. “I decided to come see Andy play instead.”

“We’re lucky to have your brother on our team,” the fan said.

“You are,” I agreed. “Andy is a very good player.”

Delaware kicker booted the PAT through the upright to give his team a 21-10 lead.

The Wildcats had made some adjustments over halftime. They came out and ran a play action pass on first down. The tight end caught the ball on a curl route. He cleared the linebacker covering him and picked up eighteen yards before the Blue Hens defense converged and brought him down. The Wildcats continued down the field, mixing in more play action passing than they did in the first half. They used a dozen plays to score a touchdown.

Villanova’s half time adjustments for the defense were good too. Delaware had trouble moving the ball on their next possession. They managed to get to midfield before ‘nova stuffed first and second down running plays. Coach Keeler sent Andy in on third and ten. Andy made a great fake of going on an out route, fooling the cornerback before turning back inside. Unfortunately his quarterback was expecting an out route too. The ball flew out of bounds inches from the cornerback’s outstretched hands. Delaware was forced to punt back to Villanova.

The Wildcats’ offense was on a roll. They moved the ball crisply down the field. The Blue Hen defense stiffened as the field shortened. Villanova pushed into the red zone but couldn’t convert first and goal at the eight yard line into a touchdown. They settled down for a field goal to narrow the score to 21-20, Delaware’s favor.

My brother’s team responded to the challenge by driving the ball down the field again. Andy was in for three plays. On the sixth play of the drive Andy was sent on another out route. This time he and the quarterback were on the same page of the playbook. Andy caught the ball fifteen yards downfield, broke the cornerback’s tackle and sprinted for the end zone. Villanova’s free safety pushed Andy out of bounds at their 22 yard line. Three plays later Delaware’s quarterback found the tight end in the back of the end zone for a touchdown. The score was 28-20 after the successful PAT.

Delaware stopped Villanova’s next drive after six plays. The Blue Hens tried to burn off the remaining time on the clock with hard running. The Wildcats stopped Delaware with four minutes left in the game. The Wildcats mixed up their play calling, keeping the Blue Hens off balance as the Wildcats drove for a score. It took nearly all the time remaining for them to get down inside the 10 yard line.

The Blue Hens defense held as the Wildcats tried to punch the ball into the end zone. They gained three yards on first and goal from the 8 yard line. They picked up 3 more

yards on second down. The middle linebacker sliced into the backfield on third down and dropped the running back for a one yard loss.

The Wildcats threw a curve at the Blue Hens on fourth down and three yards to go. They faked a run up the middle, rolled the quarterback to the right and hit the open tight end in the back of the end zone. Score: 28-26 Blue Hens

The Wildcats hurried a two point play in. They faked a run up the middle again. The quarterback tossed the ball into the corner of the end zone. Trent Wilson had perfect position and knocked the ball away from the wide receiver to preserve the Blue Hens' victory.

The 22,000 fans went wild at my friend's good play. Villanova kicked the ball off to Delaware. Andy fielded the ball carefully and advanced it about a dozen yards, until he met the Wildcats cover team. He dropped to the ground immediately, protecting the ball. Delaware took the field and did two kneel-down plays to finish the game.

Mom, Dad and I weren't in a hurry to leave the stadium. We went down to the rail to see if we could talk with Andy. We didn't find Andy but Kenny Weaver spotted me and my parents. I had a nice talk with him. He told me he'd see me next weekend at the Wolverines game. Villanova's season was over.

Mom, Dad and I were waiting outside the stadium when Andy called us. He would be ready to meet us for dinner in a few minutes. Andy wanted to invite Trent and his girlfriend to join us. I responded enthusiastically to the idea. Mom and Dad agreed. Andy and Trent met us outside the stadium a few minutes later. Trent called his girlfriend on his cell phone and talked her into a rendezvous with us.

It turned out after Trent introduced his girlfriend Jennifer Bennett to everyone that Andy was behind on the news. Trent had proposed to Jennifer ten days ago. She was his fiancée now. Everyone congratulated the happy couple.

Mom and Dad suggested dinner at Iron Hill Brewery. Andy, Trent and Jennifer agreed. Andy, Trent and Jennifer headed off to their cars. They would meet us at the restaurant. I checked some football scores while I rode with Mom and Dad to the restaurant.

Ohio State did beat Michigan earlier in the afternoon, 28-24. Our team should have been going to the Rose Bowl, if we hadn't screwed up that day. That was frustrating. I checked the Florida/Citadel score. Florida was ahead 28-7 near the end of the first half. My phone didn't show any stats for Fritz, only for Walker. Apparently Terrence Walker was starting this week.

Andy, Trent and Jennifer arrived a couple minutes after us. The restaurant wasn't real busy, unlike what I was used after a game in State College. I guess our extra 90,000 fans tended to fill the local restaurants a little more after games than the fans here in Newark did.

Dad ordered a couple sampler platters of appetizers and a plate of Buffalo wings for the crowd. I had an interesting item from the sampler – a salmon spring roll with spinach, onion, ginger and wasabi. It was delicious with the sesame-soy dipping sauce. The restaurant had numerous seafood entrees, so I decided to go that route. I ordered the jumbo crab cakes.

Trent filled me and my family in on how things were going for him and Jennifer. Trent was confident he would get offered a full time job at the company he interned with last summer. Jennifer was an education major like I was. She would be doing her student teaching after the New Year. The couple hadn't made firm plans yet for when they would get married. They were looking at a longer engagement so the two of them could get settled in their careers first.

I complimented Trent and Andy on their play during the game. Both guys were pleased that their team had at least one more game to play. I teased Andy about the one third quarter pass. I had guessed right. Andy misread the defense and was supposed to run an out route. I asked my brother how much of the playbook he had learned. The answer was around half – exactly what I expected for a freshman late in the fall.

The main courses arrived while we talked. Jennifer ordered the salmon. Trent and Andy both ordered the Steak Frites. Dad had crab cakes like me. Mom ordered garlic and herb roasted chicken. The food was quite tasty.

Andy and Trent quizzed me about the problems I had last weekend, the arrest and suspension from the team. They were glad that everything had come out all right for me. Andy was sorry that I had to break up with Kelly but he agreed with my decision.

All of us wished Trent and Jennifer the best luck with their future when we finished dinner. Andy had packed for the trip home before the football game, so he followed Dad back to Paradise. We got back home sometime after midnight. Josh Strickler was sacked out on our coach when we got home. Mom was pleased. It wouldn't do for the young boys to find Josh sharing Liz's bed in the morning.

I was up and showered in time to go to church with my family. I had to follow Dad to church since there wasn't enough room in the minivan for me, three child car seats, Liz, Andy, Mom and Dad. Reverend Hollinger had a nice sermon. The two of us got to talk after church. Rev was pleased when I explained that the police report of "lack of evidence" actually meant zero blood alcohol.

Over lunch I had a chance to catch up on yesterday's other games. Florida demolished the Citadel 62-10. Ed Fritz played in the fourth quarter of the game, going 5 for 8 passing for 102 yards and two touchdowns. I was surprised to see that Boston College

upset Notre Dame 28-27. The game stats were surprising. They listed Jeremy as having three tackles. Something had to be up with that.

Pittsburgh took out West Virginia 27-24. Syracuse lost to Louisville yesterday. Rutgers easily took care of Army 34-17. #2 ranked Georgia Tech easily beat Vanderbilt 45-20. The only change other than our team dropping out of the top ten and Ohio State replacing Michigan in the top ten, was with LSU. They lost 31-28 to Arkansas yesterday.

The Philadelphia Inquirer did not report that the police had dropped charges against me. I was pissed. I had instructed Mr. Allen to have the police issue a statemnt exonerating me of the charges in return for me not suing the department for false arrest. I talked with Dad at length in the afternoon about the situation. Dad agreed that it made sense to keep the threat of a suit alive until the police department cleared my name with the media. I would talk with Mr. Allen tomorrow morning to make that clear to the chief of police.

Andy and I spent part of the afternoon playing with the boys. The two of us watched football after the boys went for their afternoon nap. It was good for Andy and me to spend time together. I decided to stay for dinner with my family. Why not? I was still suspended from the team and couldn't eat at the Training Table tonight.

I headed back to campus after dinner. I arrived back at the apartment before the Trevor, Jay and Damian came back from the team meeting at the Lasch Building. Trevor and Damian were upset by the result of yesterday's game. They said Coach Burton had chewed out most everyone on the team thoroughly. Jay was livid about the loss. He blamed it almost entirely on Chip, a belief no one else involved with the team shared.

Word got around to members of the team that the police had cleared me. The team was anticipating seeing me on the practice field tomorrow. I had a message from Marie, the receptionist at the Lasch Building, that I had an appointment with Coach Burton at 9:30 am on Monday.

I made sure I was early for my appointment with Coach Burton on Monday morning. Marie had me wait in the reception area for about ten minutes before sending me in to see Coach. I was a little disappointed when Coach stayed seated behind his desk. "Have a seat Kyle," he said, pointing at the chair in front of his desk. At least I wasn't Mr. Martin like I was at our last meeting.

"I spoke with the chief of police earlier this morning," Coach began. "He indicated that the charges against have been dropped. He cited 'lack of evidence' as the reason."

"What?" I gasped. "They don't lack evidence. They told my lawyer that the blood test showed my blood alcohol content was zero. They have plenty of evidence. It says I am innocent of the charges."

“Really?” Coach Burton said. He seemed surprised by my claim. “That isn’t what the chief indicated to me. He implied that you were getting off on a technicality. He said the police officer who arrested you didn’t follow proper procedure and that was why you were let off.”

“That part is true,” I agreed. “Officer Vaughn did not follow proper procedure when he arrested me. The disorderly conduct charges come from me insisting that they do a blood test on me when he didn’t want to. The district attorney told my lawyer that the blood test showed I had not been drinking Saturday night. Did you ask the chief that question?”

“I didn’t,” Coach admitted. “I thought the chief was giving me the full story.”

“I don’t think so Coach,” I responded. “They don’t seem interested in telling the full story to anyone. My lawyer tells me I have grounds for suing the police department for false arrest.”

“Who can corroborate your version of events?” Coach Burton asked.

“My attorney Michael Allen, the Centre County District Attorney and the borough council member who supervises the police,” I answered. “I don’t know his name. My attorney says he is a big Penn State fan...”

“That would be Ralph Hayden,” coach said. “I know Ralph well.” Coach didn’t say more. He stared off into space a minute. Finally he said, “This isn’t the meeting I was expecting to have this morning. I thought I was meeting with a team member who managed to slip out of the charges on a lucky technicality. You still claim that you are innocent of the charges?”

“Absolutely Coach,” I replied quickly. “Please contact any of the others to confirm what I am saying.”

“I will Kyle,” Coach Burton replied. “I was planning to reinstate you on the team but put you on probation. I can’t do that if you are innocent. Come to practice today Kyle. You are reinstated on the team. I will verify what you are telling me.” Coach Burton gave me a hard stare. “If you are bullshitting me.... there will be hell to pay.”

“It’s all true Coach,” I reassured.

“I need to talk to you about a related matter,” Coach Burton said. “Apparently you weren’t drinking last Saturday night but I think you need to examine who you associate with. They put you in a terrible position where your arrest was a predictable result of your association with them.”

“I agree completely Coach,” I agreed. “I broke up with my girlfriend Kelly on Tuesday. The two of us have been fighting about how much she liked to party for a couple months. I know I don’t need to associate with her or her friends when they go out partying.”

“Well... that was easier than I expected,” Coach said. “People associated with the team need to be cleaner than the preacher’s wife. You need to make sure you don’t put yourself into position where this kind of thing can happen again.”

“I agree completely Coach,” I replied.

“The other thing we need to talk about is PR,” Coach Burton said.

“You need to know I talked with Mr. Montgomery, a reporter from the Lancaster newspaper on Friday night,” I explained. “I met him at the Wolverines’ playoff game.”

“The athletic department will put out a press release announcing your reinstatement,” Coach Burton said. “Expect phone calls from the press after the release goes out. I’m sure your situation will come up at my weekly press conference tomorrow too.”

“I’m sure it will,” I agreed. “I don’t mind as long as we get the true story out. I don’t want to see stories saying that charges were dropped due to lack of evidence.”

“I agree with you there Kyle,” Coach Burton said.

“I want you to know Coach,” I said. “When my attorney gave me the news about the police dropping the charges he told me that I had a case for suing the police department for false arrest. I said I wasn’t interested in doing that as long as the police department issued a press release announcing that I was innocent of all charges. They have not done that so I will be talking further with my lawyer about a suit.”

“Be careful with that Kyle,” coach cautioned. “I doubt anything good will come out of a pissing match with the local police department.”

“I don’t want to do that either,” I agreed. “Right now this is just a threat to get them to acknowledge my innocence. ‘Charges dropped due to lack of evidence’ is not an acceptable response from the department.”

“Thank you for coming in Kyle,” Coach Burton said. “Is there anything else you would like to discuss?”

Uh, just one thing Coach,” I added. “I ran into an old friend of yours over the weekend. Do you remember Jason Turner?”

“Jason?” Coach Burton said. “Jason Turner... he was a grad assistant my last year at Lehigh. How’s he doing?”

“He’s doing well,” I answered. “He is the Wolverines’ offensive coordinator now. Coach Caffrey hired him last summer.”

“Really?” Coach said. “Good for Jason. I’m sure he will do a good job for Walt. If you see him again, tell him I said hi.”

“I will Coach,” I replied. “I will see him at the Wolverines’ next playoff game on Saturday. I got to see your newest quarterback recruit in action last weekend. I see why you offered him a scholarship so soon. He played a tremendous game.”

“I think Matthew will be a good addition to our team,” Coach Burton agreed. “Thanks for coming in Kyle.”

Coach shook hands with me before I left. I was encouraged that Coach Burton’s attitude had warmed as our talk went on. Still, it was important that I get the police to clarify what they were telling press inquiries.

I called Mr. Allen on the way to my apartment. His receptionist connected me to him.

“What can I do for you today Kyle?” Mr. Allen asked pleasantly.

“You remember on Friday when I asked you to tell the police that I wanted them to do a press release stating that I was innocent and they were dropping charges?” I asked

“Certainly,” Mr. Allen agreed. “I conveyed that request to the police department.”

“Did you read today’s paper?” I asked.

“No,” he answered.

“There is a small article in the sports section stating that the police reported that the DUI and disorderly conduct charges were dropped due to lack of evidence,” I said. “That isn’t what I asked for. I....”

“They said that?” Mr. Allen inserted as he interrupted me. “I was very explicit with my instructions to them. I will get this fixed Kyle.”

“Please do,” I answered. “This makes me look guilty and it puts the football team in a bad position too. They look like they’re coddling a misbehaving player who got off on a technicality.”

“I understand,” Mr. Allen agreed. “The DA was quite cooperative on Thursday. I’m sure he can help the police department see the wisdom of full disclosure.”

“Thank you,” I replied. “I discussed it with my parents over the weekend and we are prepared to file suit against the department for false arrest if they do not put out that press release and clearly state to all inquiries that I am innocent. Please make that clear to the DA and the police chief.”

“I will make your intention abundantly clear to both Kyle,” Mr. Allen said. “I will call you back after I speak with the DA and the police chief.”

“Thank you Mr. Allen,” I said. “I appreciate your help with this.”

I headed back to my apartment, grabbed my gym bag and headed back to the Lasch Building. I hadn’t had a proper workout since Thursday and wanted to get that in before my Geography 30 class.

I did a light workout, cleaned up and stopped by the Mix to grab a sandwich on my way to class. The geo lecture and lab went well. I ate my sandwich on the way to history. I arrived a minute before Dr. Brennan was ready to start the lecture. Cameron and Kelly were sitting on the far side of the room, so I slipped into a seat near the door away from Kelly.

It hurt seeing her across the room and knowing that I shouldn’t even talk to her. I knew I had done the right thing breaking up with her but still cared and wanted the best for her. Hopefully the pain would lessen eventually. Kelly left after class without any acknowledgement of my existence.

I headed over to the Lasch Building to finish my workout. Half a dozen teammates were working out when I got back. Everyone took time to come over and welcome me back to the team. It was nice to know they cared.

When I finished my workout I went to one of the study rooms to begin preparing for our bowl game. The first question was where would our team go? The Ohio State Buckeyes were champions in the Big Ten and would go to the Rose Bowl. Michigan was the runner up and would normally take the Big Ten #2 spot at the Capital One Bowl. The blogs had a lot of speculation that Michigan would end up getting an at-large BCS invitation and leave us have the Capital One Bowl. If not, we would end up at the Outback Bowl. A trip to Florida was definitely in the works for our team. The only question was would we go to Orlando or Tampa?

Who we would face was simpler. #1 Florida and #3 Alabama were both locks to get BCS bowl bids. LSU’s loss on Saturday to Arkansas dropped them below Tennessee. If we went to the Capital One Bowl we were likely to see Tennessee. If we went to the Outback Bowl we would probably face LSU. Either team would be a good opponent for us. I spent some time on-line studying the statistics for each team, getting familiar with them and who their best players were. We wouldn’t have video of either team until next week after the bowl invitations were set.

Mr. Allen called while I was researching possible opponents. “Good afternoon Kyle,” Mr. Allen said after I answered the phone. “I have excellent news for you.”

“How did your phone calls go?” I asked.

“Very well,” Mr. Allen replied. “That is why I’m calling. Do you have access to a fax machine?”

“Yes, you can send something to me here at the Lasch Building,” I replied. I gave him the fax number for our front desk.

“Good, I’ll have Sue send this immediately,” Mr. Allen said. “The DA asked us to review the press release before it goes out to make sure it meets your needs. Call me back as soon as you have read the release.”

“I’ll do that,” I agreed. “I have about twenty minutes until football practice starts. I should have enough time.”

“I talked with Coach Burton this morning,” Mr. Allen added. “You should be squared away with him.”

“Thanks for helping with that,” I added. “I’ll talk to you in a couple minutes, as soon as I look over the fax.”

I went out to the reception area. Marie handed me the fax as soon. “I believe you are looking for this Kyle,” Marie said as she handed over the papers to me.

“Thanks Marie,” I answered. I read over the press release quickly. It was on the DA’s letterhead. It indicated that my blood alcohol level was zero on Saturday night at the time of my arrest. It said that I was innocent of all charges. All media inquiries were to be directed to the district attorney’s office. The press release was perfect for me.

I called Mr. Allen back. “This is perfect,” I said when he answered. “Thanks for everything you have done for me.”

“No problem Kyle,” Mr. Allen answered. “I am also arranging for the DA to send you a certified copy of your blood test. It might come in handy some day in case anyone asks about your arrest.”

“That’s a good idea,” I agreed. “Thanks for all your help.”

“It was my pleasure. Have a good game on New Year’s Day. I’ll be rooting for you.”

“Thanks, I’ll do my best,” I said before ending the call. I headed back to the locker room to get ready for practice.

I received a warm reception from my teammates when I got to the locker room. Nearly fifty guys came over to welcome me back. Chip Brinton was most effusive.

“Damn, I’m glad you’re back Coach,” he gushed. “Don’t you go doing any crazy shit like that again. I need you on the field with me!”

“I’ll do my best Chip,” I agreed.

I was surprised at some of the guys who welcomed me. Aidan Nagy, Alex Majerowicz and I had never gotten along well. Both Aidan and Alex welcomed me warmly. Max Rosen did too, though Max and I had gotten friendly over the last six weeks since he started filling in when Tanner got hurt.

Anders Voight came through the locker room and announced that Coach Burton was having all practices inside Holuba Hall until the end of the season. Wherever we went for our bowl game, it was going to be a lot warmer than the twenty-eight degrees outside that day.

The coaches emphasized fundamentals during practice. Not surprisingly the quarterbacks, wide receivers and defensive backs spent a lot of time reviewing how to deal with press coverage. Coach Adams had Shawn Byrd and I demonstrate it for the others before they practiced it.

I gave the other guys some tips I had learned. I showed them my personal favorite. I demonstrated the swim technique on Shawn to get his arms away from my body as I slipped by him.

“Now, watch my left elbow as I go by,” I instructed. I pulled my forearm up and started to dig the pointy end of my elbow into Shawn’s ribs.

“Easy Coach,” Shawn cautioned. “This is just practice.”

“Dig your elbow into his ribs here,” I continued. Shawn pulled away a little as I pretended to dig an elbow in his ribs. I chuckled and added, “Shawn is still careful around me a year after Anders taught me this technique.”

“Yeah, Coach got a little too enthusiastic last year,” Shawn added. “I was sore for a week.”

“Your timing may be off on the first play and someone else gets the ball,” I said. “The cornerback will be much less aggressive on the next play when he tries to chuck you.”

“Thank you Coach Martin,” Coach Adams said. Coach Adams followed Coach Burton’s lead in using my nickname but he always added my last name too to avoid confusion about which coach he was referring to.

“Go practice that guys,” Coach Adams exhorted. “I want to see aggressive hitting, but don’t hurt the d-backs. We need them healthy on New Year’s Day.”

We were paired up with defensive backs to practice. Shawn Byrd and I used the practice to come up with new ways to press the receiver and to beat the d-back. That was one of

the great things here at Penn State for us. Shawn was the best cornerback I played against and I did it every day. Shawn felt the same way working against me. The two of us made each other much better players than we might have been otherwise.

The coaches moved on to other drills. They kept practice light with no hitting. This was the time of the season for everyone to heal so we would arrive at our bowl game rested and ready to play our best football of the season. Chip, Damian, Christian, Tanner, Max and I did some after practice passing drills to keep our timing down.

Dinner at the Training Table with my friends beat the hell out of eating alone in my apartment the way I did last week. I felt at home here with my teammates. After dinner Coach Schroeder and Coach Czarwinski ran in depth reviews of the errors our team made against Michigan State for the offense and defense.

Coach Schroeder was pretty tough in his criticisms of the offense. I leaned in close to Damian who was sitting beside during one of the pauses, “I thought you guys reviewed this game last night?”

“Apparently we didn’t go into enough depth then,” Damian whispered back.

Coach Schroeder’s analysis of our faults didn’t differ much from my conclusions based on watching the game at home on TV. I learned a few things during the session that I couldn’t see watching the game on TV. The offensive line drew much of Coach Schroeder’s attention for their inability to open holes for the run game. The wide receiver corps was rebuked for their difficulties in getting open in the first half too.

Trevor, Jay, Damian and I walked back to our apartment together after the meeting was over. Not surprisingly Jay was upset at the analysis of why our team lost. Any conclusion other than it was all Chip’s fault and couldn’t be solved until Jay took his place wasn’t welcomed by Jay.

“Damn, I can’t believe Schroeder didn’t mention the most important problem tonight,” Jay said. “Brinton fucked up again. I could have helped us win on Saturday.”

“Were you planning on lead blocking for me?” Damian asked. “Were you going to open up a hole that wasn’t there otherwise?”

“No, of course not,” Jay replied.

“You got some magic to avoid sacks and interceptions?” Trevor asked. “Chip only took one sack and had one INT.”

“It’s about leadership,” Jay shot back. “The kid hasn’t got it. I can get the linemen fired up to open holes for Damian and to protect me so I can complete the passes Brinton couldn’t complete on Saturday.”

“I don’t know Jay,” I said. “The coaches didn’t identify the QB as one of the problem areas.”

“I don’t know why you guys can’t see the obvious,” Jay said. “We aren’t going to fix the problems on this team until Coach Burton fixes things at the quarterback spot. I have got to go in and talk with him.”

“Be careful Jay,” Damian cautioned. “Coach isn’t going to take unsolicited advice from you.”

“Damian’s right,” I added. “You’re treading on dangerous ground if you start telling Coach what to do.”

“I care too much about the program to sit and do nothing,” Jay countered. “I’m the best quarterback on the team and Coach has me riding the bench. It can’t go on.”

“Think things through Jay,” Trevor added. “Please promise me you will do that.”

“OK, I will,” Jay agreed.

That was probably all the assurance Jay would be able to give us. I understood his frustration with sitting on the bench and not playing. It would drive me crazy too. Still, I was happy our team had two top notch quarterbacks available. Strange things happen on the football field and there is no way to know when you’re going to need a good backup to take over.

Tuesday’s Centre Daily Times and the Daily Collegian had front page articles reporting that I was innocent of the charges from my arrest the previous weekend. I fielded half a dozen press calls during the day too. It was a relief that the true story behind my arrest was public.

Coach Burton kept practice easy on Tuesday afternoon. We did drills on fundamentals. Coach told all of us to go home after class on Wednesday. We weren’t required to be back on campus again until dinner time on Sunday night.

I spent most of my spare time editing and polishing my history term paper that was due on Wednesday. This was a place where I definitely missed Kelly. She was a better writer and editor than I was. When I finished it Tuesday night I thought it was decent, probably worthy of an A.

I received an e-mail from Jeremy North with unexpected news. Jeremy let me know he was coming home for Thanksgiving with Kathy. It turns out his low number of tackles last Saturday was because he hyper-extended his knee in the first quarter of the game. He wasn’t able to play against Boston College on Saturday. His coach sent him home to rest

and enjoy the holiday. Jeremy was lining up people to go out Saturday night to the Green Iguana in Lancaster. I e-mailed back and told him to count me in.

I attended my Geography 30 lecture Wednesday morning, grabbed some lunch and then headed for History 163. Unexpectedly Dr. Brennan wasn't there. One of her grad students met us and collected our term papers. I was free from school an hour early. I hurried back to my apartment, grabbed my bag and headed for home.

The traffic was light at mid-afternoon as I zoomed around Harrisburg on the way home. I was home by 3:30 in the afternoon. I thought I might run into Liz if she didn't meet up somewhere else with her girlfriends. I was wrong. The sounds of two teens having sex echoed down the stairway as I came in the house. Josh Strickler should be at football practice now. My sister was seventeen so it wasn't my business.

I ignored the couple upstairs and carried my things down to my bedroom in the basement. I went back upstairs, flipped on the TV and hung out in the family room until more of my family came home. I got hungry a half hour later so I headed back to the kitchen to scrounge up a pre-dinner snack.

I was relieved to find Josh Strickler sitting at the kitchen table with Liz eating ice cream. "Hey Liz. Hi Josh," I said greeting the happy couple as I headed for the freezer. Ice cream would fill that void in my stomach until supper time.

"Hey big brother," Liz replied. "I didn't think you would be home until supper time."

"My last class was canceled," I answered. "I beat the traffic around Harrisburg and got here early."

"Hey Coach," Josh added.

"Aren't you supposed to be at football practice now?" I asked. "You have a fairly important playoff game on Friday."

"Coach Caffrey told us on Monday that we could have today off if we practiced hard the first two days of the week," Josh explained. "He teased us, 'This is your fourth game against Central in fourteen months. If you guys don't know how to play them now another 90 minutes of practice isn't going to help. Go home Wednesday and relax.' That's what Liz and I were doing today."

"I'm sure you're very relaxed after spending an afternoon in my sister's bedroom," I teased. Neither Josh nor Liz blushed in the slightest at my reference to them having just finished sex.

"Joshie is very good to me," Liz said as she gave her boyfriend a hug. Josh blushed at me hearing his girlfriend use the affectionate diminutive. The things teens found embarrassing was strange.

I helped myself to a bowl full of ice cream and headed back to continue watching my movie. Half an hour later I heard Mom and the kids come home. The little ones fussed about their coats and hats before Mom turned them loose. The three ran for the family room yelling "Izzy, Izzy!" as they came.

Noah came through the doorway first, spotted me and stopped short. "Unka Ky!" he screamed. Conner, half a step behind his brother ploughed into him, knocking both boys down. Hunter, a step behind his nephews, toppled onto the pile too. The boys unscrambled themselves and dashed over to the couch and clambered aboard. They smothered me with hugs and kisses while yelling my name.

I gave each boy a plane ride when things calmed down. I was amazed at how much bigger the twins were than Hunter. Noah and Conner had about six inches in height and a good ten pounds on weight on their younger uncle. I played with the three boys and watched TV until Mom called all of us for dinner.

I helped Liz get the little kids ready for dinner. Noah and Connor cooperated. Hunter fussed about getting his hands washed and didn't want to sit in his high chair. Liz explained that Hunter was expecting to be treated the same as his older nephews in nearly every way.

Mom didn't have anything fancy for us that night. That would wait for Thanksgiving dinner tomorrow. We had hamburgers, macaroni and cheese, and green beans. Dad, Mom, Liz, the little kids and I were the only ones home for supper. By the kids' bedtime we expected the whole family to be reassembled.

Andy had permission from Coach Keeler to come home after the team dinner tonight and wasn't expected back until he met the team Friday morning at the airport. Will and Abby were coming out from Philly this evening. They were staying with Abby's parents but promised to visit their nephews and little brother before they went to bed.

Will and Abby arrived a half hour after we finished dinner. The family gathered in the family room to talk and catch up with the little ones. Noah, Connor and Hunter enjoyed all the extra attention from their aunts, uncles, brothers and sister. There was no question Abby was in the advanced stages of her pregnancy. My little niece was due in ten and a half weeks.

Will and I had to work on one thing with Hunter. He insisted on calling us Unka Ky and Unka Wi', the same as his nephews. Someday he would be old enough to understand the difference between brothers and uncles.

It was nice to catch up on everyone's lives. Abby was doing well in medical school. Her professors were making small accommodations to her pregnancy. Will had started his master's thesis. He was hoping to have it wrapped by the end of the school year. He needed to start thinking about which schools he would apply to for his doctorate.

Lehigh, Temple, Princeton and University of Delaware were in commuting range of his apartment. He and Abby wanted something close enough to there so Abby's medical education wouldn't be disrupted. Will hoped to get into Princeton's program but one of the others would do if he wasn't accepted by Princeton.

Andy arrived home from school in the middle of the discussion of Will's future. The twins greeted their father with gleeful cheers of "Daddy!" when they heard him call out as he came in the front door. Andy joined the rest of us with the twins cuddled to him, one on each side.

I got a phone call from Hal Long asking if I wanted to work out together later in the evening. I invited him over to join me. Hal let me know that Jeremy and Kathy wouldn't arrive home until late that night. Their plane was landing in Baltimore at 9:37 pm.

I gave Coach Caffrey a call to let him know I was home. I asked if there was anything I could do to help the team prepare for their game against Central on Friday night. He invited me to attend their walk through practice Friday afternoon and then come to the team dinner before they headed to Hershey for the game. I accepted my coach's invitation.

Andy joined Hal and me working out in the basement after he put his boys to bed. The three of us caught up on each other's lives over the last few months.

I enjoyed a nice long morning's sleep on Thanksgiving morning. It felt great to be a bum. I got up around 11:30, grabbed some breakfast and then joined the rest of the males in the Martin clan in the family room. It was football time. The noon game featured the Eagles traveling out to Detroit to take on Matt Stafford's Lions. The former Georgia quarterback had improved the Lions' fortunes but they had a long way to go. They were competing with Zack Hayes' Packers for the bottom of the NFC Central Division.

Dad, Will, Andy, and I watched the game while Noah, Connor and Hunter played and occasionally watched. The Eagles were 8-2 coming into this game while the Lions were 3-7. The Eagles were sitting pretty with the lead in their division. If they went on their normal tear in November and December they could lock up home field advantage through the playoffs.

Dominic "Cuch" Cuchiella had gone from the practice squad to a valued member of the Eagles' special teams. Cuch seemed to be in on almost every tackle on returns. I was pleased for my friend. I thought he would have a good chance to stick with the Eagles beyond this season.

The younger kids were sent upstairs for their naps before the first game ended. The Eagles easily beat Detroit 38-20. DeSean Jackson and Jeremy Maclin played outstanding

games. These young receivers made the wily old thirteen year veteran quarterback Donovan McNabb look great. No one talked about McNabb being too old anymore. Maybe this year would be the year they went to and finally won a Super bowl.

The Dallas Cowboys played the Patriots in the second game. Mr. Hendricks, Abby's father, joined us before that game started. His wife joined the other women in the kitchen getting our dinner ready. The Cowboys put up a good fight but were behind 21-14 near half time when we were called for dinner.

Mom, Abby, Liz and Mrs. Hendricks made an outstanding meal for our combined families. Mrs. Hendricks' pies were delicious, as they always were. I had to try a slice of the pumpkin and a slice of the cherry. No one in the world made better pies than Abby's mother.

By the time the men got the tables cleared for the women and had the dishwasher loaded, the Patriots led the Cowboys 38-23. Romo and his friends were unable to rally before time ran out. An Eagles victory, a Cowboys loss and a wonderful holiday with family and friends – it doesn't get any better than that.

Jeremy and Hal came over later in the evening to work out with Andy and me. We went down to the basement to work the weights first. Jeremy and Hal questioned me about my run-in with the police and how I managed to get things resolved. They were pleased that things seemed to have worked out for me.

The four of us were talking about happenings in our lives when Jeremy commented, "Have you heard the news about Harrison and Penny?"

"What?" the three of us responded.

"Harrison took Penny out to a fancy restaurant last Saturday night," Jeremy explained. "He literally went down on his knees between dinner and dessert to pop the question. Penny accepted his proposal. They are engaged now."

"That's super," Andy said. Hal seconded the feelings.

I didn't respond immediately. Penny was my first serious girlfriend. She would always have a special place in my heart. Her engagement reminded me that I had been far less successful than her at finding a life partner. It reminded me of the many talks Kelly had regarding our future together and my utter failure to get my love life in order.

"That's good," I managed finally. "I'm happy for her. When do they plan to get married?"

"Penny told Kathy that she and Harrison planned a long engagement," Jeremy related. "They have no plans to marry before they graduate from Penn."

“That’s good news,” I said without conviction. Thankfully the conversation moved on to less painful topics.

Hal, Andy and I went out for our three mile run after we finished with the weights. Jeremy headed for home since his knee wasn’t up to running. It was almost ten o’clock when Andy and I got back to our house. I wished Andy luck for his playoff game against Maine on Saturday. He needed to meet his team at the Philadelphia Airport at 8:30 am tomorrow. I did not plan to get up at 5:00 am to see him off.

Dad and I had to babysit the three boys on Friday. Mom and Liz headed off to the outlets to take advantage of the Black Friday sales. Dad looked after the boys in the morning until I woke up. I fed the boys lunch. Both of us looked after them in the afternoon until it was nap time.

Mom and Liz returned home before the kids got up from their nap. I left for football practice at the high school. I had a distinct feeling of déjà vu as I walked into the locker room I had known so well in high school. The guys on the team were dressing when I came in. I checked in with Coach Caffrey. He sent me to see Justin, who briefed me on our game plan against Central.

Coach Caffrey had the players go outside and review the likely offensive and defensive formations and plays the team could expect to see that evening. The coaches reviewed everyone’s assignments to make sure everyone was prepared. We spent an hour outside practicing. The kids went back inside, showered and headed over to the cafeteria.

The football boosters put on a nice spread of food for the team. The kids had a choice of chicken cacciatore or a tuna steak with a loaded baked potato. The players had a choice of carrot cake or oatmeal cookies for dessert. Everyone was encouraged to hydrate themselves well with Gatorade. I sat with the coaches. I went with the tuna, baked potato and the delicious carrot cake.

Coach Caffrey presented me with a red and white Wolverines hoodie to thank me for helping the team out during the playoffs. Coach teased me after he sat down again that it wouldn’t do to have me dressed in blue on the sideline during the game. I thanked Coach for his generosity.

The players loaded their equipment on the buses after the meal, boarded and rode off for Hershey. I followed the buses to the stadium. I was impressed with the changes in my high school team in the last three years. Coach Caffrey was putting more emphasis on proper nutrition now than he had done when I played for him. That had to help our team continue our winning tradition.

Central’s school buses pulled onto I-283 as we passed the Mount Joy exit. They followed us into Hershey. As the higher seed, our team took the home locker room. The kids

dressed and prepared for the game. I hung out with Coach Caffrey, Jason Turner, Justin and Coach Rodgers, our offensive line coach.

One by one past stars of the Wolverines showed up as the kids continued to get ready. Jeremy North and Hal Long came in together. Kenny Weaver came soon after them. Mike Wagner, Stan Humphries, Rick Winters, Jerry Morton, George Reynolds, Seth Vogel and Jim Griffin all made it. The first five guys all played with me when I was a freshman and sophomore on the Wolverine team. Seth graduated with me. Jim graduated with my brother Andy.

Jeremy drew a lot of attention from our more senior former teammates. This was the first time he was back to a Wolverines game since we graduated from high school. Jeremy's profile was just as high as mine nationally. He was recognized as one of the top linebackers in the country. Jeremy seemed to enjoy talking about his experiences at Notre Dame.

I was surprised by a late arriving former player – quarterback Bill Simpson, Class of 1986. Bill was the father of Julie Simpson, my sophomore year girlfriend. Bill was accompanied by a good sized teenager who looked to be sixteen or seventeen. It took me about thirty seconds to recognize the 6'-2" teen as Bill's son W. J.

I went over immediately to greet them, "Hi Bill, I didn't expect to see you here at the game," I said as I shook Bill Simpson's hand. "Hi W. J."

"The family came in for Thanksgiving to be with our folks," Bill explained as I shook hands with his son.

"Is Julie here?" I asked hopefully. It had been over a year since I saw her and I would love to spend a little time talking with her again.

"No, Nebraska has a game tomorrow," Bill explained. "She spent Thanksgiving with her boyfriend's family."

"Oh, I see," I answered. I turned my attention to W. J. "How have you been W. J.? Are you still in scouts?"

W. J. beamed with pride as I answered, "I got my Eagle last month. I was lucky. I found an excellent scout troop in Grand Island. Other than that, I'm in high school – tenth grade. I play football too, though I'm just a backup."

"My son is being modest," Bill added. "He beat out two others, including a junior, to be the backup quarterback."

"Daaaaad!" W. J. whined. I suppressed a laugh at how embarrassed the teen became at his dad's bragging.

“Congratulations on beating out your competition,” I said. “Getting to the top is part of football. If Matt Sauder hadn’t blown away Coach Caffrey with his ability we wouldn’t be standing here in this locker room tonight. It wasn’t his turn yet. I would still be standing on the sidelines at Penn State if I waited until it was my turn to start at receiver.”

“I know you do more than start at Penn State Kyle,” W. J. replied. “We have heard about you even in the boonies where I live. Every time SI does an article on top collegiate players your name shows up on the list of the best wide receivers in the country. The other guys on our team, the Islanders, can’t believe that I know you and that you used to date my sister.”

The tenth graders on the football team finally realized who W. J. was. They hadn’t seen him since they were all little fifth graders finishing elementary school. They gathered around their old friend and talked, quickly losing the awkwardness from the long separation.

I introduced Bill around the crowd of team alumni and filled him in on our team’s fate over the past four seasons. Bill marveled that our high school team was twice the state champions.

One more extremely tardy alumnus showed up just before Coach Caffrey gathered the team for the traditional alumni fight speech. Andy Groff slipped into the locker room but stayed in the back. He was wearing a New York Giants sweatshirt. I slipped over to greet him while Jeremy North hobbled to the center of the locker room. Coach Caffrey asked Jeremy to give the talk to the team this year.

“I didn’t expect to see you tonight,” I said after exchanged greetings and handshakes. “Aren’t you supposed to be preparing to play the Redskins on Sunday?”

“Not anymore,” Andy answered. “Coach cut me on Tuesday. He needed a roster spot for another cornerback and I was expendable.”

“I’m sorry to hear that Andy,” I answered. “Are you going to try to hook up with another team?”

“No, I’m not,” Andy answered. “Playing professional football was always a lark. I enjoyed my year and a half in the NFL but it is time for me to head to pharmacy school so I am ready for a real job in a few years.”

“Good luck with that Andy,” I responded.

“I’m sure you will have a much longer career when you get to the NFL,” Andy added. “... more like our friend in Wisconsin’s career than mine.”

“I’m not counting on it yet,” I answered. “Right now I’m enjoying playing football for Penn State.”

“That’s a good attitude to have Kyle,” Andy agreed. “Time in the NFL is fleeting. Twenty-one free agents and draft picks signed with the Giants a year and a half ago. Six of us made the team last year. When I got cut there were only three left from fifteen months ago.”

“I understand,” I agreed. “My plan is to become a football coach and teacher. Any time I get in the NFL is a bonus. It isn’t my life’s goal.”

“It’s good to have a plan for the rest of your life,” Andy agreed. “Enjoy football while you can. It is over sooner than you expect.”

Coach Caffrey called for quiet in the locker room and then introduced Jeremy to the team. Jeremy did a good talk about the importance of teamwork to being successful. He drew on his experience playing on the national champion Notre Dame team two years ago. He predicted that the Wolverines could go all the way to the state championship if they continued working the way they had so far this season.

Justin Baer showed the guests the back way out of the locker room as the team and on-field coaching staff headed out to the field. Jeremy tapped my on the shoulder as I headed for the field with the rest of the coaching staff.

“Where are you going?” he asked. “Aren’t you going to sit with Hal and me?”

“No, Coach Caffrey, Coach Turner and Justin asked me to help on the sidelines tonight,” I explained. “I’ll catch up to you guys after the game.”

“Help on the sidelines?” Jeremy said, chuckling. “You go to work Coach. I’ll see you later.”

I followed the team out to the home sidelines and watched the pre-game ceremonies. The captains met at midfield. Central called the coin toss wrong. We elected to receive the ball. Kevin Peachey accepted the deep kick and brought it out to our 24 yard line. Central had excellent coverage on the kick. No one expected less from a team that dominated Lancaster-Lebanon League Division 2 for thirty years.

Coach Caffrey sent in the first play with the offense. I was standing beside Jason observing, waiting to help where I could. I couldn’t believe it when our guys broke the huddle and lined up. Central only had three down linemen with four linebackers. I rarely saw them in this kind of defensive formation. Matt Sauder coolly adjusted the blocking to fit the defense.

“3-4 defense...” Jason commented. “We can handle that.”

Matt barked out the first “Hut!” The Central linemen each sprang about three feet to their left, switching gaps. The linebackers shifted with them. The change destroyed our

blocking scheme. Matt barked “Hut!” again as they finished the shift. He spun around to his right and stuffed the ball in Cody’s belly as he ran by. Cody took one step towards the planned hole. All he found was chaos. One of Central’s linebackers blew through our blocking and grabbed for Cody. Cody spun away and sprinted to the left side of our formation. He managed to squeak through a gap off tackle and scoot for six yards before Central’s defense put him down.

Jason and Coach Turner decided to test Central deep on the second play. Dave Mitchell would run a post route and be the primary receiver. Garrett Houseman would run a slant to draw some defensive attention while Taylor Ranck ran a flag route on the opposite side of the field.

Central lined up in a 3-4 defense again. Jason checked the coverage on Dave. “What the hell is 82 doing?” he muttered. “He’s never played d-back before.”

“Hunsecker,” I replied, chuckling. “Central is taking a page from our play book. Josh Hunsecker is probably the only guy on their team fast enough to cover Dave. I played d-back against Josh’s older brother Christian when I was here.”

Central’s linemen jumped three feet right as soon as Matt barked out the first “Hut!” Our guys would have to adjust their pass blocking on the fly. Cody stayed in the backfield to help stop the pass rush as Matt dropped back seven steps. Gary chipped a blitzing linebacker before drifting out into the flat to provide Matt an extra outlet.

The free safety dropped deep at the snap. Josh stayed step for step with Dave the whole way down the field. Central had another d-back deep perfectly positioned to cover Taylor. Garrett’s slant hadn’t drawn coverage from the center of the field as we intended. He had a cornerback covering him deep and a linebacker that dropped back to help cover Garrett short. Another linebacker shadowed Gary in the flat. Matt recognized that he had no one open and tossed the ball high and out of bounds towards Garrett and the two defenders.

“Jason, call plays for a bit,” Coach Caffrey said as the ball sailed out of bounds. Into his headset he added, “Kurt, get down here. I need you to give me a hand with the blocking. We’ve got a lot of adjustments to make thanks to the way Central is lining up.”

Jason called for a play where Dave would sprint a deep route again while Gary, Taylor and Garrett ran shorter routes to pick up the four yards we needed for a first down. Central bounced their linemen again at Matt’s first cadence, messing up blocking assignments.

Dave sprinted down the field on his flag route at the snap. Central only rushed three linemen this time. Josh Hunsecker shadowed Dave while another d-back dropped back deep to help cover him too. To my shock, two more d-backs fell back deep too but paid no attention to Dave’s route.

Three linebackers and the strong safety covered short. I realized what was going on as the four defenders spread themselves across the short zone as Garrett, Taylor and Gary tried to get open.

“Jason, they’re playing zone defense,” I exclaimed.

“It’s high school,” Jason answered. “Almost no one plays zone around here.” The two of us watched as the play unfolded. There was no question as we watched the defensive backs that we faced a team playing zone. “Damn!” Jason growled. Matt pulled the ball down as our blocking broke down. He scrambled and managed to pick up two yards before the he was tackled.

Jason said into the head set “Justin, what do you know about zone coverage?”

He listened for a few seconds. “OK, you never played against it.” Jason turned to me. “Have you played against zone coverage?” he asked. “Do you know how to beat it?”

“Of course I know how to beat zone,” I answered. “I play against it all the time.”

“Good, I expected that you had,” Jason said. Jason motioned for me to follow him. We headed over to Coach Caffrey. “Walt, we have another challenge.” Jason outlined what he and I had observed.

“O-Kay....” Coach Caffrey replied as he pondered the difficulty. “Kurt and I need to continue working on the blocking. Nothing is going to work if we don’t get that fixed PDQ. Jason, continue calling plays. Remember the option package we rarely use. Use Logan and go that route with double tight ends.”

Coach Caffrey turned to me and looked me square in the eye. “Can you teach Matt and the receivers how to beat zone coverage in about ten minutes?”

“I think so,” I agreed. “Matt and Dave already saw some of this last summer at football camp. I can get them ready.”

Jason yelled for Logan Mitchell and began briefing him on his role on the next drive. Coach Caffrey got Matt, Dave, Taylor and Garrett rounded up for me. We headed back away from the crowd on the sideline.

Central scored a touchdown just as we started to work on zone coverage. I went over the basics of how a defense did zone coverage and then talked about where the holes were. I guessed that Central would vary the zones. I figured they would put three in the deep zones and use three or four guys in the short zones.

Josh Husecker was the wild card in this. I doubted Josh was in there to play zone. He didn’t have enough experience to try something that sophisticated. I guessed he was in to

shadow Dave throughout the game to make sure Dave was always double covered wherever he went.

A big cheer from the Wolverine fans behind us stopped my lecture momentarily. The five of us looked up in time to see the referees signal that the field goal was good. Logan must have done well to move our second team down the field for a score against Central's top-notch defense.

I went over where the holes were along the seams of each zone. I also talked about how to recognize the type of pass defense as the play unfolded. I expected Central to stay in zone coverage until our guys showed they could beat it. After that we needed to be prepared in case they switched back to man to man coverage. Central was the best coached, smartest team we faced, year in and year out.

Coach Wyndham made some adjustments to our defense when Central got the ball back. They were forced to punt back to us after six plays. Jason yelled over to me, "Are these guys ready to go?"

"I think so," I replied. "Let's find out."

"We're ready Coach," Matt added. "We can do this."

Coach Caffrey had Jason continue calling plays as Matt and our first team receivers took the field with the rest of the offense. Jason had me brief him on what I told the first group. He rounded up Logan Mitchell, Gary Harrison, Cody Stevens, and the second string receivers. I spent about fifteen minutes reviewing zone defense and how to find the holes in the zone.

Matt and offense must have done well while I was instructing my group. I was nearly done with my tutoring when a big cheer from the Wolverines fans behind us that directed our attention to the field. Dave Mitchell was holding the football aloft in the end zone while the referees signaled touchdown. The score was 10-7 our favor after our kicker made the PAT.

Jason and I reviewed the plays from the previous drive with Matt, Dave, Taylor and Garrett while our defense tried to hold off Central. It was a struggle but they held. On the ninth play of the drive Nate Trimble got good penetration through the line and dropped the tailback for a four yard loss. Chris Zimmerman picked off the third down and eight yards to go pass. Chris ran the interception back five yards before he was tackled.

Coach Caffrey and Coach Rodgers had the offensive line's blocking scheme stabilized by then. Coach Caffrey took over play calling again, allowing Jason and I to concentrate on how Central was defending us and how our guys were working the zone coverage. Coach kept the run/pass mix balanced as we worked our way down the field. Jason and I noted things to discuss with Matt and company when the drive was completed.

Unfortunately on the eighth play we picked up a BIG item to discuss with Matt. He tried to force the ball into Dave. Josh Hunsecker batted it away. The Central free safety made a great play, catching the ball by his fingertips before he fell down. It wasn't a fatal error – we had driven down to their 32 yard line when Matt threw the INT. Matt, Dave, Garrett, Taylor, Cody and Gary huddled with Jason and me as we debriefed them on their performance.

Who would have expected a defensive struggle to break out between the two most prolific offenses in south central Pennsylvania? That's what happened. Using Josh Hunsecker to neutralize Dave Mitchell came with a price. Josh looked like he was getting worn out chasing after Dave on defense and then going in to run deep routes for his offense.

I understood completely how Josh felt. I experienced the same thing when I covered Christian back in high school. I suggested Jason keep sending Dave deep nearly every play to keep the strain on Josh. The score stayed 10-7 almost to halftime.

Central made a good play with a minute and a half to go. They sent Josh Hunsecker in motion. Our defense didn't react fast enough. Josh Strickler was still responsible for Josh Hunsecker when they snapped the ball. Josh Strickler started backpedalling before the snap but it didn't make up for the speed difference between the two guys. Our free safety, Kevin Peachey, came over to help deep but he was too late. Central's QB hit Josh Hunsecker when he had a couple steps on Josh Strickler.

Kevin and Josh Strickler hit Josh Hunsecker hard after he gained a few more yards. Central had the ball on our 22 yard line. Our defense made it difficult, but Central managed to punch the ball into the end zone to take a 14-10 lead at halftime.

Jason, Coach Caffrey and I huddled with the offense during halftime. We reviewed the basics of zone coverage again and discussed what worked and what didn't work in the first half. Coach Caffrey praised the team for their response to the surprises Central sprang on us in the first half. He predicted that we would win if everyone stayed patient in the second half.

Coach had me speak with the special teams. I emphasized that championship teams step up and make big plays. The kick off to Central was the time for that big play. I took Nate Trimble aside after my talk.

“Special teams is all attitude Nate,” I said. “Go down the field KNOWING that no one can block you. Bust the wedge, take down the returner and cause HAVOC!”

Nate laughed and said, “That's the same advice Jeremy gave me Coach.”

“It's good advice,” I replied. “Go show Coach Caffrey why he made a tenth grader his starting middle linebacker. Go make that play. Show them who you are.”

“I’ll do it Coach,” Nate agreed.

Our kicker boomed the ball a couple yards into the end zone. The returner decided to take the ball out of the end zone. As I scanned the field I saw Nate beat the first blocker to take him on. Nate beat a hasty block by another blocker before he faced off against the returner. The returner hesitated momentarily before trying to fake out Nate with a move. The moment’s hesitation was fatal.

Nate drove his shoulder right into the gut of the returner, wrapped his arms around him and dropped him backwards into the ground. The violent hit popped the ball loose as Nate drove the returner into the ground. Garrett Houseman, one of our gunners, dove on the ball before any Central player could reach it. It was the Wolverines’ ball on Central’s 23 yard line.

Our team needed six plays to stuff the ball into the end zone. Dave Mitchell out-jumped Josh Hunsecker and a safety in the corner of the end zone for the touchdown. Our kicker made the PAT to give us a 17-14 lead.

The two defenses dominated in the third quarter. Central managed to get a drive going as the third quarter ended. Our guys held them to a field goal. The score was now tied 17-17.

I gave Dave Mitchell a move I had worked out back a Penn State a few weeks ago. I knew Josh wouldn’t be ready for it. When Dave tried the move on the next series, Josh not only didn’t bite on the move, he countered it exactly the same way Shawn Byrd did when I tried it on him. I knew exactly where Josh had gotten some of his coaching on playing cornerback – from Shawn through his brother Christian.

Matt put together a good drive to answer Central’s score. He moved our team 69 yards in ten plays almost into their red zone. Three excellent defensive plays forced us to try a field goal. Normally a 39 yard field goal is pretty sure with our kicker – except when he never gets the ball. Logan Mitchell, our holder, bobbed the ball and couldn’t get it in place for the kick. Logan tried to run for a first down but only picked up five of the needed eight yards.

Ten minutes remained so Central went into ball control mode. They used every second available each play and made damn sure the ball carrier did not go out of bounds. They used seven minutes to move down the field. Our defense kept them out of the end zone but couldn’t stop them from making a field goal. That put them ahead 20-17. 3:04 remained on the clock.

Coach Caffrey and Jason called an excellent series of plays. Our guys executed the plays like the experienced veterans that they were. Matt moved our team from our 22 yard line down to Central’s 42 yard line in seven plays.

I suggested to Jason that we try a pump fake when Dave Mitchell made a move to fool Josh Hunsecker. The coaches agreed with my suggestion. The play worked just as I expected. Dave's route was aimed at the seam between deep left and the deep center zone. Dave turned back towards Matt when he got into the seam between the short and deep zones. Matt pump faked. Josh Hunsecker bit, stopping and turning to bat the ball away. Dave sprinted down the field in the seam between the deep zones. Matt re-cocked his arm and launched a deep ball to Dave. Dave caught the over the shoulder pass in stride and raced into the end zone. Our kicker made the PAT to give us a 24-20 lead over Central.

0:32 remained on the clock when we kicked the ball back to Central. Our defense held them to 8-10 yard gains per play. Time ran out as they completed a pass to cross midfield into our territory. The Wolverine side of the stands broke into sustained cheering and applause to celebrate our victory.

I had seen or played in eight of the eleven games our two teams had played in the last six years. The only one that came close to the excitement of this one was our first victory six years ago to break the jinx Central had held over us before then.

Jason turned to me and exchanged a high five. "That was damn good work you did," Jason exclaimed. "Thanks for helping out Kyle."

"I enjoyed it Jason," I replied. Jason headed along the sideline to celebrate with the other coaches. I headed out on the field to join the students and fans who swarmed onto the field. I found Kathy, Jeremy, Hal and Tammy congratulating Kathy's little brother Nate first. I congratulated Nate on the excellent game he had.

Jeremy invited me to come over tomorrow afternoon and watch Notre Dame's game against USC. He planned to order some pizza for dinner. We could head out to the club after the game. I agreed.

I found Matt, Cody, Dave and Gary near midfield. They were talking with Josh Hunsecker. They were comparing notes on their play that evening. I congratulated Matt, Dave, Gary and Cody on their win. I also congratulated Josh for his excellent play during the game.

Christian and Bev joined us while I was talking with the boys. I teased Christian, "You gave your brother quite a bit of help, didn't you?"

"Of course I did," Christian answered. "I live with three defensive backs. They helped me with advice too."

"I suspected that," I replied. "Josh used a counter Shawn worked out for a move I came up with a few weeks ago." I turned to Josh. "You had a hell of a game Josh. You did very well for your first game as a defensive back."

“Thanks Coach,” Josh answered. “I wish I had done better.”

“You’ll come back and get them next year Josh,” I replied. “The way things have gone the last few years it is your team’s turn to advance further in the payoffs next year.” I gave him a wink. “...but my guys will do everything they can to stop you.”

“We count on it,” Josh agreed. “I’ll see you later Coach.”

I mingled with other players, congratulating them for their excellent efforts that evening. I bumped into Coach Caffrey as the guys started heading into the locker room.

“That was an outstanding game Coach,” I said when I caught up with Coach Caffrey.

“Thank you for all your help today Kyle,” Coach replied.

“This isn’t a knock on Coach Graham,” I said. “I think Coach Graham was a very good coach but we are lucky to have Jason Turner on staff tonight. I don’t think we would have won this game without him. The way he handled things when we realized Central was playing zone defense was fantastic.”

Coach Caffrey chuckled. “I just had this conversation a couple minutes ago,” Coach explained. “... but it was Jason talking about how lucky we were that you were here tonight. Jason said we wouldn’t have won this game without your help.”

“I just did what I could,” I replied.

“I happen to agree with both of you,” Coach replied. “We could not have pulled this game out without both of you here. It sure is fun while it lasts.”

“Why do you say it like that?” I asked.

“You’re on very temporary loan from the Lions,” Coach Caffrey replied. “I also don’t expect Jason to stay longer than another year or two.”

“Why is that?” I asked.

“He’s much too good to stay an offensive coordinator very long,” Coach Caffrey answered. “I expect some high school trying to restore its football program is going to make him their head coach. He’s ready for the responsibility.”

“I can’t disagree with you there,” I said. “He would make a team a fine head coach.”

Coach Caffrey asked me to join the team in the locker room. When he gathered the team together he gave game balls to Matt Sauder and Chris Zimmerman. Coach thanked me for my assistance during the game. Quite a few guys on the offense seconded his thanks before they showered and changed to street clothes.

I was heading for the door when Jason asked, “Are you available to help out next weekend?”

“I’ll try,” I promised. “It depends on what Coach Burton has planned for our team. I’ll join you if I can.”

“Good!” Jason declared. “I enjoyed working with you Kyle. I can see you’re going to be a hell of a football coach when you’re done playing football.”

“Thanks Jason,” I replied. “I’ll try to get free for next weekend’s game if I can.”

I headed back to Paradise, arriving a little after eleven o’clock. I filled my parents in on the game while I had a bedtime snack. I headed to bed after that.

I couldn’t get to sleep for awhile. I developed a raging hard-on that wouldn’t go away. I stroked myself off to get relief. The last time Kelly and I made love was the day of the Ohio State game back in the middle of October. That seemed like a lifetime ago.

I slept late on Saturday, made brunch for myself, Noah, Connor and Hunter and then relaxed for a couple hours. I used the time to study my anthropology and geography courses. Finals would start in two weeks. I showered and dressed for my night out before heading over to the Norths.

Our friends gathered at Jeremy’s house to watch his team play against USC. The game was being played in South Bend at Notre Dame Stadium. Hal and Tammy came over. Kathy’s brother Nate brought two of his friends to watch the game. Kenny Weaver dropped by. Jeremy invited George Reynolds and Jim Griffin to come over too. Kenny, George and Jim all played linebacker with Jeremy one or more seasons in high school.

It was interesting to watch USC again after playing them early in the season. I could see changes in the team since the middle of September. They had replaced four defenders on the team due to injuries. The promoted backups were not as good as the players they replaced.

Notre Dame took the ball first, moved smartly down the field and scored a touchdown. USC found once they had the ball that the Fighting Irish’s defense was soft in the middle. That wasn’t totally surprising. Their nationally acclaimed middle linebacker had an injured knee and was sitting beside me screaming at the TV while his backup struggled to overcome the Trojans blocking. The Trojans scored a touchdown to tie the score.

The game proved to be an offensive oriented, back and forth contest. The lead changed three more times as we watched. Jeremy ordered plenty of pizza for the group, set to arrive around half time.

ABC had a news crawler along the bottom listing scores for the other games that day. I watched, hoping to see the results of the Delaware/Maine game. I got my answer in the second half. The crawler reported Delaware lost 31-27 to Maine. My brother's season was over.

Jeremy was frustrated at how USC could consistently gain ground smashing their way up into the middle of the Irish defense. The commentators repeatedly noted Jeremy's injury that kept him from the lineup that afternoon. I sympathized. The commentators did the same thing to me the previous Saturday.

The Trojans were down 28-27 halfway through the fourth quarter. They put together a good drive like they did against my team earlier in the year, steamrolling their way down the field and taking time off the clock. Jeremy's teammates managed to hold USC to a field goal. Notre Dame took the ball back trailing 30-28 to the Trojans with 1:29 left on the clock.

Jeremy's close friend and the second year starter at quarterback, Dylan Harris, played brilliantly. He moved his team crisply down the field. USC slowed but couldn't stop the Irish's progress. When they got the ball down into the red zone, the Irish sent two running plays straight up the middle to line up for an easy field goal. Dylan called a time out with 0:07 left and trotted off the field for his field goal team. The kicker drilled the ball through the center of the uprights. Score: 31-30 Notre Dame

The kicker dribbled the kickoff down the middle of the field. A USC linebacker ended up with it. He ran forward a couple yards, was caught and lateraled the ball backwards to a teammate. USC didn't manage to imitate "The Play" from the Cal/Stanford game where they made five laterals, ran through the Stanford Band and over the trombonist to score. Jeremy's roommate Carson Galloway tackled the third ball carrier to finish the game.

The rest of us celebrated the victory with Kathy and Jeremy. I kind of wished my team could have played USC at the end of the year instead of the beginning. We could have beaten these guys if we played them this afternoon.

Everyone helped Jeremy clean up from the get-together. A number of us got on our phones and let the rest of our group know we were heading for Lancaster and the club. Kenny Weaver and Jim Griffin got a ride to the club with me. George Reynolds called his girlfriend to discuss going to the club with us. They originally planned to catch a movie after the game was over. She agreed.

Penny and Harrison joined our caravan as we passed Penny's house. The four cars headed west for Lancaster and an evening of fun. We parked in the downtown parking garage and walked the block to the Green Iguana Club. George Reynolds caught up with us before we went inside. George introduced us to his girlfriend Alexandra Mendenhall.

There was a brief debate at the door. Some of the group who were twenty-one suggested we go downstairs to the drinking section. More of us were under twenty-one so the whole group went upstairs to the non-alcoholic section of the club. We found a couple tables, ordered drinks and snacks and settled in for the evening.

Penny showed off her engagement ring when we got seated. Kathy and Tammy ogled it and talked excitedly about her plans with Harrison. Harrison sat back and enjoyed his fiancée's excitement. Hal, Jeremy and I all congratulated the happy couple.

Harrison wasn't a close friend but he seemed like a decent guy. If he made Penny happy that was good enough for me. I was happy my ex found herself someone to share her life with.

Brandon McCafferty, Holly Cox and her friend Kelsey Werner joined us fifteen minutes later. The band started playing its first set around 9:30 that night. Brandon and Holly headed out to dance immediately. I asked Kelsey to dance with me.

I knew Kelsey from high school. We graduated the same year. Kelsey and Holly were friends from the cheerleading squad. Her parents were quite strict and forbade her from dating until she turned seventeen. I remembered her as pretty shy around boys in high school. That had changed after two and a half years at the University of Pittsburgh.

Kelsey was just as cute as she had been at graduation. She had become more open and talkative than I remembered from before. She told me all about her major. She was going for an architectural degree and planned to specialize in historic preservation.

Kelsey was as gorgeous as ever. She was friendly and seemed to enjoy talking with me but I didn't get any vibes that she was interested in anything more than an evening of music and talking with old friends from high school. Kelsey and I went back to our table to rejoin our friends.

We spent about ten minutes visiting and resting. Brandon invited Kelsey to dance with him before I got a chance to ask her again. Holly grabbed me, saying, "C'mon Kyle let's dance."

"Sure," I agreed as she dragged me out onto the floor.

The two of us talked a bit as we danced one song after another. Holly was an education major like me. She was surprised that I was doing my student teaching practicum next semester. At West Chester they didn't do that until fall of their senior year, the semester before they worked as student teachers full time. I explained that Penn State worked that way too. I needed special permission to do what I was doing. My fall football schedule wouldn't permit me to spend every morning observing at a high school and then do all my other classes in the afternoon and evening.

The band played a slow song and Holly cuddled with me as we danced. "You broke up with Kelly, didn't you?" Holly had met Kelly last January when Kelly came in to visit and got caught here for a week in the big snow storm.

"Yeah, we broke up a couple weeks ago," I agreed. "How about you? Do you have a boyfriend?"

"I'm dating a little but I don't have anyone special," Holly replied. She hugged herself tight to my body. We continued dancing. My cock started to swell as I inhaled the fragrance she was wearing. I thought about the dates we went on in high school and the time two years ago when the two of us went to bed together. Holly may have been sharing similar thoughts. As we danced she pressed her body against the hard bulge in my pants repeatedly.

Did I want to do a one night stand with Holly so soon after my breakup? I wasn't certain at first. Feeling Holly cuddle against me as we slow danced helped me make up my mind. I decided, 'Hell yeah! I'll take her to bed if she's interested.'

Holly and I headed back to our tables after dancing with a dozen songs in row. I hid my erection behind her as we walked back. We found seats together and ordered Cokes. I thought Holly was interested in going to bed with me that evening but I wasn't sure how to broach the topic. I hadn't sweet talked a girl into bed in almost two years.

Holly solved my dilemma – very directly. "You aren't with anyone right now Kyle," Holly said as she scooted close to me. "I'm not either. I had a lot of fun a couple years ago at the New Year's Eve party. Do you want to hook up tonight?"

I gulped and swallowed hard. "Yeah," I stammered. "That would be fun."

"Excellent Kyle," Holly responded.

The two of us tried to find an available place to go. Unfortunately Holly's parents and younger sister were home. My whole family was at my place. I couldn't really afford to rent a hotel room for the night. I didn't think that was the sort of thing my father would like financing for me. We briefly debated finding some privacy and having our fun in my car but it's the end of November and it is twenty-five degrees outside.

"Kyle, you said I couldn't stay the night at your house because of your little brother and nephews," Holly asked. "What if I didn't stay the night? Would that be OK?"

"You know, that could work," I agreed. "I could give you a ride home after we are finished."

"Deal!" Holly agreed. Before we could make further arrangements Kathy and Jeremy came back to the table to say good bye. They needed to split by midnight. They had to catch an 8:30 flight out of Baltimore in the morning.

I still had one dilemma. I brought Jim and Kenny to the club. They had found a couple girls to keep them company and weren't ready to leave this early. Brandon volunteered to give them a ride home. Holly and I wished everyone good luck with finals in a week or two and said good bye.

We headed over the parking garage for my car and headed out of Lancaster City. Holly asked an excellent question as we were leaving town.

"You do have protection at home, don't you?" she asked. She definitely remembered the time back when we were juniors in high school when our intention to couple was thwarted by my lack of condoms.

"Good catch Holly," I responded. "I think I have some condoms at home but they are probably two years old. Why don't I stop at the CVS we pass on the way home?"

"That would be good," Holly agreed.

"Aren't you on birth control?" I asked casually.

"I am," Holly said. "I doubt you have anything wrong but I always insist any guys I am with use protection."

"That's a good policy," I agreed. "I'm spoiled after two years in a monogamous relationship. I guess I need to get myself properly supplied now that I'm on the dating scene again."

"Definitely," Holly agreed. "Most definitely."

The CVS Pharmacy in Bridgeport (east end of Lancaster) was open. I ran in and grabbed a twelve pack of lubed ribbed condoms. The clerk stared at me for a few seconds when I set the box of condoms down on the counter.

"You're... you're Kyle Martin aren't you?" the clerk asked.

"Yes, I am," I agreed. I tried not to blush. This was NOT the best time to be recognized.

"I'm a huge Penn State fan," the clerk said as he rang up my purchase. "I love watching you play."

"Thanks," I said as I gave him money for my purchase.

"You have a good game at whichever bowl you guys get to," the clerk said with a wink. "Have fun with your girlfriend tonight too."

“Thanks,” I agreed as I took the bag and headed back to my car. I hurried back to Paradise and my house. We pulled up in front of the house. Everything was dark. I warned Holly to keep quiet so we didn’t wake anyone on the way to my basement bedroom.

Our coats, hats and gloves ended up on the floor as we stripped down and jumped on my bed. More clothing disappeared as we made out. Holly was an excellent kisser. She was also quite responsive to my kisses and caresses. Holly was down to her panties and I was in my boxers in a few minutes. I showed Holly my appreciation for her pert breasts.

I went down on Holly to her delight. Two orgasms later Holly was demanding that I fuck her immediately. Holly grabbed a condom from the box and rolled it over my big hard cock. Holly lay on her back, spread her legs open and summoned me. I crawled between her thighs, positioned my cock and gently slid it home into Holly’s sweet wet hole.

The feelings of joining yourself with another person were exquisite even though I had to cover my cock with latex. I thrust and withdrew – slowly at first but picking up speed as we became accustomed to each other. Holly cooed to me and stroked my sides and back as we shared our bodies with each other.

I leaned down to kiss Holly as we continued. I knew the angle of my body would grind on her clitoris. A couple minutes of pumping along with the rubbing sent Holly into spasm again. I continued pumping. I was approaching my own climax after a couple more minutes. I tried to get Holly off too before I shot off. She got close but I couldn’t quite manage to get her off before I went.

The climax welled up out of my groin and exploded as I spurted my seed into the condom. I collapsed in a euphoric trance, managing to roll off Holly before I crushed her. She smothered me with kisses while I recovered.

I insisted on giving Holly’s sweet, juicy pussy a tongue bath when I recovered. Less than a minute later Holly’s enjoyed another climax. I cuddled with Holly after she recovered from her ecstasy.

The two of us decided we had time for a repeat before I took her home. We spent about fifteen minutes shaking the bed our second time. Holly and I cuddled and exchanged kisses for a bit after our climaxes. It was after two am when we realized the time. Holly took a quick shower before heading for home. Thankfully her home wasn’t too far from mine. Twenty minutes after we left my house, I dropped her off and returned to my nice warm bed.

I slept through my alarm on Sunday morning. The house was empty when I went upstairs to find some breakfast. I had just finished my breakfast when my family

returned home from church. I packed my things while the family changed from their Sunday clothes to regular clothes. I read the Sunday News while my family had lunch.

Florida's victory over Florida State made the front of the sport section, most unusual for a Pennsylvania newspaper. The headline indicated why it was there. "Florida 34, Florida State 31 – Fritz keys Gators Win." Having a local boy quarterback a win was big news, even if both teams were in Florida. I read through the article eagerly.

Terrence Walker, Florida's starting quarterback struggled against Florida State. He threw three interceptions and left his team down 28-20 as the fourth quarter started. Coach Meyer sent Ed Fritz in. Ed rallied his team, leading two scoring drives for touchdowns. The Seminoles managed only a field goal. That was certainly going to give Coach Meyer something to think about. Ed seemed to be the best quarterback on the Gators in the last five or six weeks. Hopefully that would earn Ed a chance to become the starter of his team.

Georgia Tech beat Georgia 38-27 yesterday. Alabama easily handled Auburn yesterday. Next weekend Florida would take on Alabama for the SEC championship. Texas, Oklahoma and Boise State all won, maintaining their positions in the top ten.

Ohio State maintained its #8 ranking, followed by Notre Dame at #9, Michigan at #10 and us down at #13. Next Sunday evening we would find out our destinations for New Year's.

I played with Noah, Connor and Hunter for a little before leaving. I had promised Charlie Taylor a ride back to campus. I was due to pick him up around 1:30 in the afternoon.

Dad pulled me aside before I left for Charlie's house.

"I heard you get home around 12:30 last night," Dad commented.

"That sounds right," I agreed.

"I gather that you were entertaining?" Dad asked.

"Yeah, I was," I replied. "You remember how it is Dad. I'm sorry if we made too much noise. We tried to be quiet."

"It's OK," Dad answered. "I'm glad you were discreet. I wouldn't have known if I hadn't noticed your car was missing at three am when I went to the bathroom."

"I gave her a ride home," I explained. "I hope it isn't a problem. I thought it would be better if she wasn't here this morning."

“Exactly Kyle,” Dad said. “It was best that your girl was gone. I would like to maintain your nephews and little brother’s innocence for another decade or so.”

“I’ll do my best to help Dad,” I answered.

I said good bye to Mom, Dad, Liz and the boys before I left for Lancaster. I was on the road in plenty of time to pick up Charlie and then get the two of us back too campus in plenty of time for dinner.