

A FATHER'S LOVE

A Story of Redemption

By

Phillip Marks

*** CAUTION ***

This story is totally inappropriate for young children, and should be approached with caution by teens. The reader should be warned that while graphic sex and violence is avoided as much as telling this story allows, yet this is a gritty, hard-edged story. Many will find it distressing to read, but the story is also one of strength, morality, spirituality and eventual redemption.

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This is a work of fiction; all characters are fictional creations and any appearance or similarity to real persons is coincidental.

Chapter One

On the Road to Damascus

§ WILL

In 1969 he was gone, he was in the Marines, a Lieutenant Colonel, and I think he was in Vietnam, but I was too young to be sure.

I didn't see much of the old man growing up and was looking everywhere for my dad.

I was nine; it happened in the bathroom of the Fox theatre, in downtown. I was watching *2001: A Space Odyssey* that my older brother had dragged me to. I liked the special effects but it was weird and scary, and sometimes kind of boring and I had to go to the bathroom but he wouldn't go with me.

Which was OK, I sort of liked to go alone and look at guys.

So I went on my own and there was a man in there, he was nice looking as I recall, and right away I got very excited – when I saw how he looked at me. So I showed him my dick and he right away sucked it. And he had me suck him but he was pretty freaked out about getting caught, which I didn't really understand then. So we didn't get to the good part, but that was my first time.

I wanted to go home with him but he didn't want me.

It was two more years before I did go home with someone, well, home for more than a few hours that is. I went with Gary and lived with him for six months, I met him in a park bathroom.

The two years between I was very busy, I'd learned to hang out in bathrooms and lots of men liked me! I learned how to suck cock and swallow, and I was still nine when I got fucked the first time; by a boy who was fifteen. He hurt a lot but he lived close by and we went to his house a bunch of times and he got to do it better and I really liked that, but

he wasn't old enough for me. Just for sex, that's all, I didn't want to live with some teenager. He didn't like to kiss me either.

The best times were when we were on the base in North Carolina, because a lot of the guys I met were in uniform. I liked that. It was more risky and you had to find the right times to go and the right heads to check, but once I figured out a few places it was OK. I'd hitchhike sometimes but I was too young for people to pick me up much. When they did half of them wanted to take me home to my folks, and that sucked big time, but the other half, well, they were what I was looking for, they knew what to do when you pick up a ten year old boy.

Most of those guys were young Marines, I don't think any of them had apartments or houses and no one would keep me.

So I kept looking and then we were in Southern California and I found Gary. He was 26, he had a beard and a cool car, a Camaro. That first time we had sex in the bathroom he asked me if I would stay at his place with him and that was just what I was waiting for!

He had been in the Navy and sometimes he'd wear his uniform to bed for me.

Now I hate him, but then I loved him.

I hate him because he treated me kind of bad, he used to yell at me a lot and he almost never told me he loved me. Maybe twice in that whole six months.

Once in a while if I pissed him off enough he'd hit me. He didn't send me to school, which was not OK then, though later it was fine because I didn't like other kids later. But when I was just 11 I did want to have friends and all I had was Gary and he didn't really love me. He just liked to fuck me, which I liked too, of course. It was my favorite thing to do. He liked to tie me up which was fun except when he got his knife out and he never used it on me for real but it scared me so bad sometimes I'd almost pee myself.

I think he wanted to use it, when he got mad at me.

I also learned from him how to cook and clean house and shop. Well some of that I already knew, but he taught me more. He got a lot out of the deal, huh? A cook, a cleaner, a housekeeping whore. All he had to do was love me, but he didn't keep his end of the bargain.

I told my parents I had run away but I called them a bunch of times and I figured if they wanted me, if my dad wanted me, he'd come and find me. I did go home for a few visits, I made Gary drive me and drop me off a block from home then I'd call a few days later and meet him at the park where he picked me up.

My parents wanted to know what I was doing and where I was but I told them I'd met a friend and he was taking care of me and they didn't really want to know any more. My mom would always hug me and look at me funny and then I'd feel like shit. But she didn't come get me either so she deserved what she got.

I'm older now, I should be fair that I suppose my father probably didn't know what to do, well, what can you do with an eleven-year-old son who is not just a raging

homo but a catamite to boot? I learned that word from Paul. Not in the Marine Corps Field Procedure manual, for sure. So he let that asshole keep me.

One day Gary found out I was going to the park during the day and doing guys there, and he got mad at me again and hit me and gave me a black eye.

It wasn't that I was such a whore then, you know, I just wanted more love. Seemed I could never get to feel loved unless I had a cock in my mouth or my ass. And I never had any trouble finding a guy to love me, or at least fuck me. And I was bored, too, and there were so many guys who wanted to play with me.

Those men loved me more than Gary did near as I could see. Some of them gave me money but that wasn't what I wanted. I took it though, but I never asked for it, not once.

He tied me up and fucked me at both ends for two whole days where he didn't go to work, and I promised him I'd be a good boy. So he untied me. But I was afraid to stay and I left one day later when he was at work. I packed up my stuff and hitched home, got a blowjob on the way. Lots of men like eleven-year-old boys. You just gotta be sure the cops or some Good Samaritan don't get you first.

When I got home, nobody asked any questions. Guess they figured I deserved it.

I suppose it sounds real bad and violent and scary but most of the time it was OK, lots of sex and sperm and his hairy chest and balls and Gary had a nice body.

I lived with one other guy then. I answered an ad in the L.A. FREE PRESS, well, I answered about twenty ads, and two guys called me and I had sex with them, but only one of them wanted to keep a kid.

He was the best, his name was Walter and he was like 50, so the sex wasn't good at all, he was too pooped to pop most of the time, but he was nicest to me and was like a real dad most of the time. But then he got arrested and I got sent home and they wouldn't let me see him or write to him. I think he died. He didn't mind that I was having sex with other guys, he told me no one over 21 though and I kept that for five months while I lived with him. But I wanted men, not boys. I mean, boys can be fun and sexy, so I do them, but it's not the same. Kids can't make you feel safe, and they don't know shit about love. Men loved me, not kids . . .

I just was good for Walter because he was so nice. I liked it when he did fuck me, but it was only a couple times a week. He bought me a dildo but it wasn't the same. Walter loved to kiss me, though, and told me he loved me every day.

He had a little ranch near San Diego, and I was twelve, I used to get fucked by a Mexican kid who worked there, on the ranch, he was about eighteen or nineteen and had a nice dick, uncut, I'd only seen a few of those before. He didn't speak English but I just went down to where he was working on the fence one day and pulled my pants down in the back and wiggled my ass at him, and he followed me up to the house. That usually worked with anyone.

Anyway after Walter got arrested I got sent home and had to go back to the park. The cops wanted to ask me questions about Walter but I wouldn't talk, and then I told

them lies, they knew it too but they couldn't get me to tell them anything about Walter except he was always nice to me.

When I was thirteen, I got arrested because I tried to get an undercover cop to have sex with me in the restroom at the beach. That was when we lived in Oceanside and I got to the beach every day. I used to go in there, to change my clothes, about fifteen times a day, any time I saw a cute guy, I'd go in and change my clothes, and stand there naked for a while. It usually worked.

Well I had sucked first, so this guy was sucking me when the cop walked in, he was real foxy. The guy sucking me turned away real quick, and the cop was looking at me and I had my dick sticking out. I smiled at him and asked him if I could suck his cock. We both got arrested, and I did end up testifying against the guy who sucked me, so I could get out of trouble. I won't do that again, though.

My dad was real disappointed with me.

§ PAUL

It was a dusty drive, though the macadam of the highway was new, its darkness a relief in the desert glare; the fresh-painted yellow center line crisp against the new black surface. The road crossed the inland desert from the Marine Corps Base at Twentynine Palms to the Interstate near Palm Springs. On a day like this the dust blew into little whirlwinds, mini-tornadoes called dust devils.

I suppose if the traffic had been heavier, I'd never have met Will. He had walked over three miles with no one to pick him up. There isn't much traffic on a hot summer day, mid-afternoon, mid-week. No, not much moving on a Tuesday in late May.

I'm not one to pick up hitchhikers, though I do it now and then. But it was pushing 105, and there he was, a small backpack, no hat, cutoff Levi's, a tank top. A tangle of sweaty black hair. Young.

I wasn't all that old, just thirty, and yes his looks didn't hurt his chances for a ride with me, but I have never been the sort for quickies and one-night stands. So if my motives had a sexual element to them, it was only to enjoy looking a little while helping him out with a ride.

But mostly it was just a hot day and a long way and little traffic, and I have a hard time leaving someone to the mercies of the desert, much less to the mercies of the more predatory among the human race. And he looked ripe for picking either way; he needed some protection.

Even so, when you stop, before you unlock the door and let him in, you need to take a good look and make a snap judgment. It takes twelve seconds from the time you pull over to when he reaches the door handle, that's your decision window. You can't be afraid to say no.

Very innocent face, not a worry in the world this one. If it hadn't been for the long hair I'd have figured him for a Marine. Seeing his face, this one was younger than I

had thought. He was about my height, 5-9, I figured eighteen or nineteen, a sturdy young man, maybe 155 pounds, some muscle in his arms. I wondered what he was doing here.

Not all that many civilians ride that road. I was working as a contractor's representative on base, repairing communications systems and providing training and escalation support to the regular Marine staff. My work schedule was Friday through Tuesday most weeks, I had a room in Bachelor Officer's Quarters I could use while on base, and I was on my way back to my real apartment that afternoon. I had taken the apartment only a few months before, after I was sure the Arab oil embargo of last year was well and truly gone. It had been quite a problem to have to drive that much during the week, but now I felt confident, and had owned a smaller car for several years anyway.

I flipped the lock up, he dropped his pack in the back seat, and we were on our way.

"Where you headed?"

"Oh, I thought I'd go to L. A., how far can I ride?"

"You're in luck, I can drop you in town, I'm heading for North Hollywood."

"Wow, great!" There was something of a puppy dog demeanor to this one. "My name is Will."

"Paul, Will, good to meet you."

We had a few minutes of silence, and I flipped on the radio, but there isn't much to hear besides Mexican radio stations in that area. They use a lot higher power to broadcast, the signal manages to get over the mountains into that valley. I was reaching for the dial to run it up and down and see if I could get anything else, when I noticed that he had spread his legs wide and was playing with himself.

Well I was not entirely surprised, I'd picked up hitchhikers before, and sex is often on their agenda; or they expect it to be on yours. But this was a little unusual, he wanted a long ride and usually guys who are just out looking for sex don't have a destination. Guys who do want a long ride, if they start something it's usually near the end of the ride; in case they get tossed out. Most will at least wait for a hint from the driver.

Not my thing. I'm a romantic, I want to know someone before I have sex. Nobody, no matter how cute, is likely to tempt me in the first ten minutes. This one was too young anyway. I ignored it.

As he played with himself we talked just a little bit, and he asked me what I did, why was I there, that kind of thing. And he hinted around to find out if I was gay, and considering what he was doing I was of no mind to tell him. I mean, it could have cost me my job – one of the reasons I didn't actually say anything about my job. I just told him sometimes I had business on base.

Will, as it turns out, is not one to take no for answer; nor does he take to being ignored. After he saw that I wasn't responding he escalated in a manner I found quite unique. He pulled his cutoffs down and started to masturbate. He was naked under the cutoffs.

“You know, some people might think that’s rude.”

“Aren’t you gay?”

“I don’t think I’d be discussing it with you if I was, but I’d think you’d be old enough to know better than to do what you’re doing. It’s dangerous for one thing. There are guys who’d beat the crap out of you for it.”

He looked at me with black eyes, not stopping his busy activity. “But you aren’t,” he declared flatly.

“No, but if you don’t stop I will have to ask you to get out of the car. You’re way too old for this.”

“I’m too old to jack off?”

“I don’t think you’re too old to jack off, I think you’re too old to think it’s right to just get in a complete stranger’s car and pull your pants down, though. How old are you, anyway?”

“Fifteen, how old did you think I was?”

I almost shit a brick.

“You’re fifteen? Pull your pants up, boy or get out right here right now!”

He just sat there looking at me very puzzled, and then suddenly looked wounded, his mouth dropping in dismay, and reached down for his cutoffs, pulled them up and zipped them.

If I was straight he’d have expected it maybe, but he’d figured out from my stopping and my first looks at him that I was gay. A long time later I reflected on this and realized I was possibly the first man he’d ever propositioned who hadn’t accepted. At the least he didn’t get a lot of turn-downs. He was young and very cute. He had been just as puzzled by our encounter as I.

I pulled over to the side of the road, and he started to grab for his backpack, thinking I was dumping him off. I thought he was about to cry.

“You don’t have to get out.”

“Huh?”

“You don’t have to get out, but you do have to behave yourself. It’s not safe to leave you here, so you should not get out. And when we get to the Interstate, we’re going to stop and talk. When we do, I expect you to tell me the truth.”

I could see he just didn’t understand he sat there looking totally deflated, no pun intended.

“Do you understand what I said? Are you going to behave yourself?”

He nodded, just speechless, and let the backpack go.

I was pretty scared to have this kid in the car, if he really was fifteen – and he didn’t look it, though you could see it if you were inclined to, he really did look eighteen

– but if he was fifteen and given how he had behaved, I couldn't see leaving him on the highway either.

§ WILL

He wasn't all that hot looking, you know, not ugly or anything, just I'd seen lots of better looking guys, he was kinda average, really. But the way he treated me! Just like he was my dad or something!

We stopped at a coffee shop and he started asking me questions. I felt like such a little boy. He wouldn't let me tell him any shit either, he just looked at me, he had this look he would give me, like my third grade teacher Miss Dominguez, and I just couldn't lie to him.

Was I gay? Why wasn't I in school? Did my folks know where I was? What was I going to L.A. for, and where and who was I going to be with?

He didn't like any of my answers.

I fell in love with Paul right away.

§ PAUL

Will posed a serious quandary for me. For one thing, I didn't want this underage cock-hound in my car, I had to worry about myself. But I was almost equally worried about him, he seemed to have no common sense, and no place he could go that was safe.

At this moment he was heading off to Los Angeles to stay with any one of several men he knew; just figured one of them would be home when he got there and would let him stay. After I talked with him I knew well enough what the fare would be for that ride, these were all men he'd shacked up with when he was twelve, thirteen, fourteen or more recently.

He wouldn't consider going back home, said he'd go home in a week or two, but thought I was crazy to tell him he shouldn't go to these men.

Well, I believe in helping people, you can see that from my decision to pick him up in the first place, but I also know people need to want to be helped. This kid was on the highway to hell and didn't even want to pull in at the rest stop.

Though I shuddered to think about how well he might be acquainted with rest stops.

I told him he would have to find his own ride into L. A., that he should go home and stay there until he was older. I offered to drive him back to the base. I knew at this point that he'd not do that. I was leaving him at a major on ramp to an Interstate, he would have a ride in less than an hour, probably in less than ten minutes.

Life turns on the smallest things. It is moments where you have choices and your life turns on the choice. You don't understand the significance most of the time, you don't plan the action as if your whole future depended on it, you don't see the ultimate consequences, you just make a choice.

I gave him my business card, which had my pager number on it and my work and home phone.

“If you won’t go home now have your parents call me when you finally do. And if you want to talk some time you can call me. But we are not going to have sex, understand?”

Many a time I regretted the impulse that had me hand him that card.

§ WILL

I had a bad time in L.A. that week. I stayed with Kent, he’s a movie producer, and he’s OK, he usually takes me some nice places for dinner and we do some good drugs now and then. Once in a while he has another boy around, though I’m always the youngest, so we do three ways, which can be hot, but really not so much fun because I don’t like to share.

But Kent was busy and we didn’t do so much stuff and he isn’t the kind of guy I like all that much. He’s old enough but he acts like a rich spoiled kid.

Plus I couldn’t forget Paul.

So I went home and started trying to figure out how to get Paul.

His card had his number on it, and I figured I could just call him, but the way he was to me I didn’t know if I could get him to meet me. So I thought about it and I walked out the main gate to the highway in the afternoons for several days in a row about the same time, 3 p.m., to see if he would be driving by. One Tuesday I saw him again but I wasn’t ready and didn’t get to where he could see me.

Finally it happened by chance. I was at the Navy Exchange one day and saw him going into the little restaurant across the way at lunch time, so I went in and looked for him, he was sitting alone at a little table to the side of the room, reading a book and eating a burger.

§ PAUL

I am a big reader, I am never without a book and lunch times were a chance for me to retreat into myself, be alone a bit. I’m a loner. More than most people, though few realize it, because I’m very outgoing in my work life. But when that’s done I need to retreat and I do.

So I was absorbed and just starting to relax at lunch that day, when I heard him.

“Hi.”

Oh boy, this could be trouble. But as long as he was behaving appropriately I didn’t have the heart to brush him off. Truth is, I was scared of this kid and felt sorry for him at the same time. I’m a sucker for a sad story. And while I was really disgusted at the way life had used him, he was still not hard, not bitter, at least not yet. He was actually pretty vulnerable.

“Well, hello, Will.”

“You having lunch?”

“What do you think?” I kept my tone light; the sarcasm wasn’t intended to wound, yet it did.

“I’m sorry, I um,” he fumbled then recovered, “can I sit with you?”

I really had wanted my alone time, and half of me was screaming “Say NO! he’s nothing but trouble!” but the other half was “don’t hurt him, he’s being reasonable.” So I sighed and said, “suit yourself, are you hungry.”

He wasn’t. On the other hand, what fifteen-year-old boy isn’t hungry? I was just worried about what he was hungry for. I bought him lunch anyway

He sat and stared at me and then started to talk, at first he was just babbling about the food, the base, then switched gears and he started to talk about some sexual escapade. I think he thought it would turn me on. This kid just didn’t know how to relate to anyone without using sex, and I sure didn’t want to sit in that public place and have someone overhear that conversation.

“Will. That is not an appropriate topic of conversation for the lunch table. And it’s not an appropriate conversation between a teenager and an adult. If you insist on talking to me in that way I’ll have to leave.”

He stopped abruptly, wounded.

“I – I – I’m sorry! Don’t go!”

Shit.

After that day he began to haunt my lunches. I took to asking a coworker to have lunch with me, a departure from past habits, so that he could not have lunch with me every day; still, we ate together at least once a week.

One day he followed me somehow, and learned about my room in the BOQ. When he told me that, I told him he was never to visit me there.

That didn’t stop him from calling.

§ WILL

It was so hard to be good for him.

Everything I did he thought was bad.

It made me feel like such crap, but there was also something about it I liked. I think it was like, he was so strong. I didn’t actually meet any men who didn’t want me, but he didn’t and I wanted him so much.

The only good thing was he didn’t make me go away that day. And when he wasn’t having lunch with somebody else, he let me sit with him, but when I tried to hold

his hand under the table he set down the law again, I wasn't allowed to touch him. But he didn't send me away, not like that first time at the coffee shop.

I started calling him up sometimes, I figured he wouldn't hang up on me as long as I was nice. Some nights I would sneak out and go to the BOQ and sit outside in the bushes and watch his room.

Then I found out that he was only on base for work and lived in North Hollywood, and so one week I showed up at his apartment there.

I was feeling really bad then, because he wanted to send me away, then he decided to let me in and I couldn't believe it but he called my parents! Nobody who was gay had ever done that before and he put me in his car and drove me all the way home, back to the base and met my mom. The Colonel wasn't around.

They sat in the kitchen and had coffee and talked for hours, at first I was there but then he sent me out and told me that adults were talking and I needed to do something else. I hate when he treats me like a kid.

Funny thing is, my mom really liked him. I didn't think she'd have liked Walter, or Gary, or Kent, or any of the men I met, not that she ever met them except I think she saw Walter when he got arrested, and she was at the trial for that guy from the beach. Man that was embarrassing, I had to tell all about sucking his cock with my parents right there.

Paul was different; she knew it, too. Actually, I think there was something about Paul that was a lot like mom, but I couldn't say what it was.

Then he wouldn't even let me have lunch with him.

I started to cry a lot. I hitched around the base and got to blow some Marines, got fucked a few times here and there but nothing seemed to help much. He didn't really care about me, but he kept making me think he did.

I wanted him so much.

§ PAUL

I knew this was not going to have a happy ending. The boy tugged at my heartstrings, and I'm sure he knew it, but he was such trouble.

It overstates the case, but his mother basically offered him to me. Not that I wanted him.

She said they hadn't a clue how to deal with him, they had just thrown their hands up, would I, could I, please try to protect him somehow? She figured I was going to fuck him too, I'm sure.

I was a little surprised, she had no illusions about his sex life. It disgusted his father, terrified her, but she didn't think for a minute she could change it. She had me pegged as another of his men, but I set her to rights on that one. Didn't change her mind about things, just asked me – begged me in fact – to take him, to do for him what she could not.

She didn't care if I fucked him silly. Anything, as long he was safe. No, she didn't say that, but this woman had as I said no illusions about her boy by this time.

It took quite a bit to get the message across to her.

"Look, he's a nice looking boy, but he's a boy and he needs a dad, not a lover. And I'm not about to take him to my bed. I have too much to lose in life, and I'm not interested."

Remember, I had a defense job and even admitting I was gay jeopardized it.

"Please, Paul, he seems taken with you, just do what you can to take care of him? It's all I ask, just do what you can."

"I'm sorry, I feel very sad for your situation, and if there is a way I can help, I will. I just can't see what I could do for him."

She wouldn't take no, she just ended it with "Whatever you can do. Anything."

I knew I should just cut him off completely, and for a while I pretty much did, I was polite and very proper and quite cold. Lunches stopped, phone calls became perfunctory.

Then late one night all hell broke loose.

I was home in L. A. and my boyfriend and I had just gotten home from a movie. We had been seeing each other for about two years, though we didn't live together, and the relationship was a decent one as things went. We took good care of each other, respected each other's limits, enjoyed being together and being apart. The sex was OK, the spiritual match was not bad, we had come to a good understanding of each other, and though I didn't think Dennis was my life match, he'd do nicely until he came along.

We had a night to sleep together, my schedule made a lot of time together quite difficult as he worked a traditional week, we never had a night when he didn't have to work the next day.

It was Wednesday night, just about eleven and we had just poured a little wine and were having a late night snack on the couch, talking about the movie. One nice thing about where I lived was you got to see great movies in big theaters before the rest of the country, but I don't remember what movie it was. The phone rang.

"Hello?" I wondered who would be calling this late, fearful it might be a work emergency which would mean driving in to the base, several hours drive and an all-nighter that would make me sleep in the BOQ on my day off.

"Paul." His voice was low, urgent, slurred. My heart sank, I did not want to hear from him now.

"Will, it's late, and I'm with someone, tell you what, can you see me for lunch Friday?" I wanted to set a boundary that he was not to call me at home. A little carrot and stick.

“Paul.” His voice was choked and my antenna went up. This wasn’t his usual conversational tone. Was he drunk? In trouble? I shifted gears, at least until I knew what was happening.

“Will, where are you? What’s going on?” I was clear and patient.

“Help me. Please.” Something was wrong with his voice.

“Tell me where you are, what’s happened.”

“I...I’m...I don’t know where I am. It’s in L.A. someplace. I...” he sobbed.
“Please can you come get me. I’m afraid.”

We each act according to our own natures, and thus make our own lives. It was another of those moments you just make a choice. Your life turns on that moment, that choice. I’m never sure whether I believe in Karma as fate, though I do believe in “as you sow, so shall you reap; what goes around comes around; you get back what you give.”

Tonight I would make such a decision, and that decision was rooted in who I was.

“Try to tell me where you are.”

§ WILL

I was in pretty bad shape that night.

I’d hitched into town, but couldn’t find any of my usual guys, no worry. I just went to this club, Outer Limits, they let me in with a fake ID that I was eighteen. They didn’t serve alcohol, and so it was a hang out for a lot of young guys, lots of them weren’t really eighteen. Mostly really nelly young boys, the disco queens, they liked to dance there. But always older guys looking for some chicken, so I figured I’d either meet one of the men I knew or I’d meet a new one and have a place to sleep for the night.

This guy did pick me up, his name was Greg and he was pretty big. I thought I’d like him but he took me out into his van and raped me.

I’m not saying I didn’t want him to fuck me, you know, I did, but he was really mean and rough and he didn’t use lube, not even spit, and I started to hurt and bleed and told him stop but he wouldn’t and then he started hitting me and calling me names. I think he choked me. After a while I blacked out.

When I woke up I was in some place I didn’t recognize it was industrial like, and I was pretty hurt. It was very dark, and smelled bad. There were a few sparse streetlights, a lot of dark buildings, trashy streets with dumpsters and chain link fences and parking lots all along them. No people or cars at all.

When I tried to walk my ass and my face and my side all hurt too much, and I was naked, too, but my clothes were in a heap next to me. I guess I was lucky he let me have them back, and I had some money, my wallet, but it was really bad, I was really in trouble and I didn’t know what to do. Then I had the runs and nothing to clean up with, just did it by the road, and I’m pretty sure there was blood.

I limped a couple of blocks and saw a café, it was closed, but there was a phone booth beside it and I knew his number by heart. It took almost an hour for him to find me.

But I knew he'd come.

§ PAUL

I took him to an emergency room, fished out his fake ID and let the docs have at him. They didn't ask many questions. I had not had time to call her yet, but relied on his mother's "do what you can." I let him pose as eighteen because I knew if they knew his real age the cops would be there in minutes, and this way I didn't have to sign anything. I did end up paying the bill, almost \$300 for x-rays, painkillers, antibiotics, and treatment. A week's pay and then some.

Not that I thought the cops should not be involved, but it was L.A. and those cops are not known for their friendly attitude towards the gay community, including gay victims. I sure didn't need to have my name in a police report. God knows what they'd have made of the relationship between us. I might have ended up in jail.

The damage wasn't as bad as it looked, but it was bad enough. Two cracked ribs, a lot of facial bruising, a swollen jaw, marks on his neck; he'd not be sucking cocks for a week or two. No one was saying much about the torn anus. It didn't need stitches. The doctors were not friendly. I guessed they thought this was my doing; the kid wasn't telling them anything.

I put him to bed in my spare room, and Dennis, who had been patient through the whole thing, went on home, it was nearly four a.m.

I should not have been surprised to wake up at ten and find him in my bed next to me; but I was. Oh well, at least he was too banged up to make advances, he was just sleeping. Naked.

He looked much younger this morning, even with the bruises, or maybe because of them.

I got up and went back to bed in the spare room. But life had changed. I couldn't sleep.

Maybe I didn't want him, but he was mine.

It was my karma.

Chapter Two

Non Ministrari Sed Ministrare

§ ELEANOR

We met at a charity gala ball while Thomas was doing his final year at the Naval Academy, in '55. He was graduating that June, and my family was well connected to the charity groups in the Annapolis area; we summered there a number of years in my childhood. Father loved the sailing and Annapolis was far less crowded than the usual New England haunts. The ball invited the senior Middies to attend, and Thomas and I danced and you might say we were both pretty captivated by each other.

I don't know if I had ever met a man of such internal strength and determination. He was not much of a talker, though he could be on a subject close to his heart, which meant, of course, the Corps. It was evident to me that he was a career military man, as are most Annapolis graduates. There was never a doubt he would elect to serve in the Marines after he graduated. He was born to be the complete Marine Officer.

In our most private moments, Thomas would surprise me with his passionate and romantic nature. But to any outsider he was a very focused, driven, committed, and tough Marine. Duty came first, most of the time even above family. I did not mind, I had hitched my wagon to his star, I was young but not as naïve as my family thought when we married.

Most of my friends urged me to quit school and marry him right away. I suppose I was a bit of the modern woman, though. I would not permit myself to marry until I finished at Wellesley, which meant a year after his graduation.

I was born in Boston. Our family was quite well off, even in the depths of the depression. We were *of* a Boston Brahmin family, which may not mean much to people from out of the area but left no doubt to other Bostonians as to our high social status.

“*Of*” such a family. That's an important qualifier. To insiders my family was half Brahmin - half Irish. Mother came to Boston as an infant from Cork. On father's side, we were of old Quaker extraction, though long since converted to Episcopalian, we preserved a family dedication to service and acceptance of others.

Father's choice of a wife didn't sit well with the rest of his family, and though we were not officially outcast, we were divorced from much of the power and influence that might otherwise have been our lot. My own personal take on it now is that it was our good fortune to be allied but not too closely inculcated in that tradition, it gave us the best of both worlds. The good values we had in plenty, the elitism passed us by.

Nor did mother's family much approve of her marriage outside the church; but the result was an eclectic and loving approach to both religion and people. With three religious traditions it could have been much worse.

When I met my midshipman I was on summer break from Wellesley. I was majoring in History, but minoring in Chemistry, and always found science comfortable. Even at Wellesley, an all-woman's school, I stood out for that interest.

Wellesley's motto: *Non Ministrari sed Ministrare* – "not to be ministered unto but to minister" will tell you a lot of the values that permeated my early life.

Hooprolling is a tradition at Wellesley. Senior girls roll wooden hoops in a race on Tupelo Lane. The winner gets two prizes. The first is to be thrown into Lake Waban.

I did not get thrown into the lake that May Day, 1956, but I was tied for the second prize the winner "gets"— tradition says she'll be the first in class to marry. Not a requirement, of course, just a tradition.

Our commencement speaker was McGeorge Bundy, then a Dean at Harvard, but a few years later to be President Kennedy's national security affairs advisor. It presaged the world in which I was to live. It was not a time of war, and it was surely not a time of peace.

The day after commencement, I was wed in the chapel at Annapolis, an extraordinary event since Thomas had graduated a year before and the chapel is quite busy in June. Midshipmen are not allowed to marry until they graduate, so there is quite some pent-up demand as you might imagine. Still, since we had met at Annapolis, it seemed to us both only fitting that we marry there.

It was quite some transition, to graduate and marry and become a military spouse in the space of two days. It was good preparation; the life of a career military officer and his family is all about being flexible and accepting change without complaint.

Thomas Junior, our first son was born April 1, 1957. At that time my husband was a first lieutenant in the Marines, and we were serving a tour in San Diego, though he was at sea a considerable part of the time. It was our first assignment, we'd been married less than a year.

Tom was a curious delight to his father, who doted on him, and in this lay the source of some of our pain in this life. He expended the time he could on his first-born.

If a first son is a miracle, a second is mere novelty.

William Anthony Hogan, named after my father, was born October 22, 1960, in Boston, where I was staying with my family. His father had just taken up an assignment

in a place where dependents were not welcomed, and was able to make only a short visit. Even from the start Thomas could not find much time for his second son.

He had the same assignment when Will's second birthday became a tense event. President Kennedy addressed the nation that evening and announced the blockade of Cuba. My husband, by then a Captain, was in the worst possible place: he was one of the officers of the Marine detachment at Guantanamo Bay. Of course, he was not in Boston for the birthday party.

This too set a pattern for our family— his absence in the life of our son. It is not that he did not love his sons, he did, fiercely, but between his reticence and his duty, they got precious little of his time. For Tom, it did not seem to matter so much, but for Will, it was quite different.

Thomas raised his children with the sort of discipline you might expect from a Marine. Oh, he was never anything but gentle physically, never in any way cruel for that matter. But he expected unbending compliance, order and self-control, and rarely would he demonstrate affection other than in a back-slapping sort of way.

Up until the time he was three, Will and his father saw little of each other but when they were together the boy toddled along after his father, pursuing him relentlessly. Tom had ever been the independent sort, able to accept attention when it was available, and profiting from it, but Will was much more needy, even at this early age, and his father never understood that, found the clinging distasteful. I think he took it for a sign of weakness.

And both boys were raised with very high expectations. Thomas, as I said, was quite able to meet them, had that intense and driven nature of his father.

Will was very different.

We did our tour in the Philippines when Will was four. By that time the estrangement between boy and father had solidified. While Tom seemed to fit into the niches of his father's life, Will could not find any place where he fit. He tried mightily to please his father, now a Major on the military fast track, but unlike Tom he did not take to sports, or any of the other things his father valued. Well, perhaps not valued so much as understood.

It saddened me, of course, but I always found him a delight, and perhaps he was more like his mother than his father, but that happens with children.

Over the next three years the separations and estrangement deepened, and I myself became troubled by things I was seeing in Will.

He was not effeminate, I want to say that, but his interests were more intellectual and softer in so many aspects. And sometimes I just saw something in him, in his posture, his inflections, and eventually though I didn't want to see it, in the way he looked at men.

We had a houseboy, but do not interpret the term too literally, he was a middle-aged man, a grandfather, named Felipe. Will could not stay away from him, and he was a warm and caring man, very loving with children, and he had nine of his own.

Will would follow him all around the house every day, trying to help him with his daily chores, asking endless questions. Felipe bore it patiently, and would often pick him up and toss him in the air, evoking squeals of delight. It was from Felipe that Will learned many housekeeping skills, and he practiced them diligently. This did not meet his father's approval, and he was eventually told not bother Felipe and not to engage in his beloved cleaning and arranging.

That was the first time he rebelled. His father relegated him to his room for hours at a time, then every day for two weeks. The boy would not give in, insisted he would keep doing it. As soon as he was released from his restrictions, no matter the warnings, he would be back to his domestic hobbies. My husband considered firing Felipe but I pointed out it would be unfair to him, and would not really change Will's behavior anyway.

There was nothing inappropriate in that relationship. But it was in its own way very sad, I could not help but think that it should be his father doing this, swinging him in the air, spending time with him. It was not to be.

When we left the Philippines Will cried inconsolably at the loss of his friend.

I didn't really want to think this, no mother wants that heartache for her son, but I had that uncomfortable feeling about him that was all too soon to prove true. And though he might not recognize it explicitly, I have to say I think his father saw it too, sensed it, wouldn't articulate it, but felt it.

For a brief time he spent more of himself on the boy, trying in vain to interest him in baseball, football, shooting, hunting. But in order to do this he had also to have Tom with them, and the contrast between the two and the frustrations Will and the Major both suffered became focused and sharp. Will eventually came, I think, to feel that he could not please his father, and I must say it was a mutual perception.

The discomfort and alienation between the two was beyond bridging by the time his father took his second tour in Vietnam, in 1968. It was around that time that Will began to see his men.

Of course, I didn't know what was happening at first, only that my younger son seemed to be drifting further from me as well, was never around, took to playing at the park alone, and of course his brother now being twelve, wasn't around to watch him. They had never been close, had not had the intensity of sibling rivalry you might expect, had not had a lot of fighting or squabbles. But Tom was almost a teen, wanted to be off with his own friends.

Will on the other hand, seemed to have no friends, and that worried me a great deal.

However his days at the park seemed to leave him feeling happier than I'd seen him. There was something that had changed about Will, he was in many ways mature beyond his very tender years, and yet I knew he was hiding himself, his innermost self, from me as much as his father.

I feared I knew his secret, though I did not dream that early on that he was actually aware of his own nature. I finally realized that things in his life had progressed very much further and faster than I had ever imagined.

Most mothers don't find semen in their nine-year-old's clothing.

Discreetly I began to monitor and check and put an end to what I thought was an affair with a neighbor boy, a teenager, who should have known better. I ensured the two were kept apart but then realized that it made no difference. There were others.

The following year my husband was back, but I had still not shared with him my concerns. I don't believe in keeping secrets in a marriage, especially not secrets about children, but a mother has to think about more than her husband. For the moment, I thought it better to keep this to myself.

I did try to talk to Will about what he was doing, but he just froze and didn't acknowledge anything. So what could I do?

I tried to keep him from pursuing his exploits, but even at this young age, it became nearly impossible. He would simply ignore us.

Things came to a head when he was ten, and we were in North Carolina. On a half-dozen occasions strangers brought him home, or called us to come retrieve him, he had been hitchhiking on base. Twice it was the Shore Patrol that had picked him up.

What became apparent was that others weren't calling us, and we both told him he could not do this. He was grounded weeks at a time, but he would sneak out of the house.

The Colonel was not averse to a strapping, and that only made things worse, he began to disappear longer, and refuse to discuss anything with us when he returned. He wasn't a belligerent child, not rebellious, was sweet, in fact. He just determined to do what he would do.

The Colonel never acknowledged Will's motives for his wandering and risk taking, though he and I had finally had an explicit airing of the issue. At first he did not want to believe it, but I told him I was certain beyond doubt, and that it was not like him to try to deal with a situation divorced from the facts. I won't bore you with all the efforts we made, the Colonel tried whatever he thought might make "a man of him."

Finally he decided the solution was to send him to a military school. I pointed out the futility. Locking him up with a bunch of other boys wouldn't stop the behavior, it might facilitate it, and unless we told the school in advance it wasn't conscionable. And of course, if we did tell them, they would not take him.

We tried psychologists, but the first told us he was a "delightful boy" and we should send him more often. That pretty well made me settle on a woman instead, but she couldn't get him to acknowledge or discuss anything. Will had already set his course, and wasn't going to let adults interfere. At least, not his parents and their allies.

Over the next year things spiraled out of control, and my husband withdrew emotionally and finally physically, leaving me to deal with this problem on my own.

I can't say I blame him, he was surely out of his depth with this, not that I knew any better what to do. At least Will began talking to me about what he did, at first hesitantly and then later explicitly.

When he ran away for the first time he was 11. We were terrified, but as was so often the case, we felt powerless. He called, he came by to visit, but it was so strange, it was like having an alien in our living room when he was there.

Who was this child, this small being who was not really a child, not any child I had ever seen, anyway?

Chapter Three

A Child in The Temple

§ PAUL

It was almost two p.m. before he woke up.

“Will, have something to eat.”

He sat, bleary-eyed and obviously very sore; he couldn’t really eat anything solid. I gave him a glass of Instant Breakfast and made some French toast, which he softened with a quart of maple syrup and sips of coffee, half milk, ten sugars.

Since he couldn’t talk, I thought it would be a good time for serious discussion.

“Will, I’m very concerned about you. Don’t try to say anything just listen.”

Like a sullen child, he scowled and looked at his plate, pushing his food around with his fork, but I was pretty sure he was listening.

“I don’t know why you are doing the things you are doing, but you need to make a change in your life, or it’s going to be a very short one. I mean that, young man; you could have easily been killed last night. It has to stop.”

He glanced up, then back to his food. His fork scraped noisily along the bottom of his plate. Back and forth.

“I need to call your parents, and we have to figure out what to say to them. I don’t want to tell them this whole story, to be frank. Not because I want to hide anything from them but because I think they’ll be frightened to death if they hear it all. But I’m not sure they shouldn’t be told anyway.”

“Vey don’ care,” he mumbled.

“I am very sure they do care. And you are hurting them very much by this behavior. What’s more, you are making things very complicated for me.”

I saw a tear start down his cheek.

“So what do we do from here? Where do you go, what are you going to do?”

He was silent and looked down, stopped trying to eat altogether.

“Wan’ . . . I wan’ . . .,” he groped for words. He took a deep breath. “Can’ stay here with you?”

Not that I hadn’t been expecting it. I would be gentle.

“Will. You belong with your mother and your father.” I knew it wasn’t enough. “I understand you want me to be part of your life too. I would like that, but we have to find a way that is proper to do it, I’m not going to be fucking you and I’m not your father. I’m not sure what I can be for you, but I will do what I can, be a friend.”

I expected him to cry but he didn’t he just got up and walked out and locked himself in the bathroom.

§ WILL

How can he be so mean to me?

Let’s just be friends?

I turned on the shower so he couldn’t hear me cry; then I decided to get in the shower anyway.

That afternoon he called my folks had me sit there while he told them. He didn’t tell them everything, he just said that I had been beaten up, was not too badly hurt, was OK. I don’t think he was talking to the Colonel, though, just mom.

He let me stay until he went back on Friday, then he drove us back to the base and took me in to mom, early about 0600 because he had to get to work.

That meant at least I got to stay one more night. It was pretty quiet.

I just can’t figure him out. I got into bed with him both nights and he wouldn’t sleep with me. Just more of that “not appropriate” shit. Fuck that. I want him to be my husband, why won’t he sleep with me? He won’t even let me jack him off.

Everything I do with him is wrong.

§ ELEANOR

My appreciation for Paul grew. I had at first thought him perhaps a notch above what Will had been involved with. A pederast, perhaps, but I was rather desperate; a protective pederast didn’t seem especially bad to me at that point. You can see just how far I had moved over the years. It isn’t as if I thought I had any say in the matter anyway.

My husband was loath to admit it but even he had come to the realization, perhaps only the year before, perhaps a little earlier, with the court case, when it was thrown in his face in the most uncompromising way, that Will was simply beyond our control.

The Colonel could not understand his son, and his feelings for the men who preyed upon him were beyond description. I often thought it a good thing that he had so

divorced himself from the situation, steeled himself, insulated himself from the feelings. If he ever unleashed himself I thought he might kill one of them.

Thomas wasn't the only one who had quite insulated himself from the pain. In the immediate situation, Paul's call showed me that I could still be shocked. It was a relief to me and a painful realization all the same.

So the more I came to understand Paul and his integrity, the better I felt. I admit, in retrospect, I threw the boy at him, I was grasping at straws. I hoped against all hope that he could be saved, and I pinned all my hopes at this point on Paul. It made little difference to me if he was having sex with the boy; by this time it seemed a small price to pay for protecting him. No price at all, really. He was going to be having sex with some man; it might as well be this one.

It was not so easy to move the Colonel to that position.

A military line officer, a Marine, is not a man who likes to feel helpless, and action is a first consideration, prime instinct. It takes a lot for someone like that to come to accept they simply have no course of effective action open to them. At least, no course that I could accept, and my husband was not prepared – at least not yet – to cross my lines. I admit to wondering if I should not have given him free reign altogether. But in looking back I am certain it would have been futile and counterproductive.

We might lock him up, but short of that we could not control him. If he was not mentally ill, I would not allow them to lock him up in a mental hospital. It was tempting. But I thought locking him up would only make things worse. We wouldn't have him at all, he'd blame us and we'd be separated anyway. He always came home, so I thought we should count our blessings. If we locked him up and he then got away, I was afraid he'd never trust us.

Never return.

Will hurt Thomas in ways beyond reckoning. And he struck deeply when he gave his father no line of action to pursue. Perhaps that was Will's intention, conscious or not.

Paul had a relationship with his son, and he so clearly did not. Paul could affect the boy, and he could not. The boy ran to Paul, not to him. It was galling. And of course, he was not unreasonable for holding the opinion that Paul's interest in the boy was unhealthy.

It made our own relationship quite difficult when he realized I was advocating for Paul.

When we met together with Paul, and the reality of the situation hit us, I was quite surprised the Colonel didn't take it out on Paul. I was shocked when he went so far as to thank him. A grudging thanks, to be sure.

I think he liked that Paul had stood up to him, and hated what he had said. But the Colonel is a courageous man, and he often displayed it in simple ways. Nothing is more courageous than facing facts you desperately don't want to face.

§ PAUL

When I finally met up with his parents, his mother took it better than I expected; his father was pretty silent, I thought he was appraising me and found me distasteful. I'd met more than a few Marine officers in my days; I wasn't surprised.

I told them it would not surprise them to learn he had a run in with an older man, was "abused" some, and of his obvious injuries; I left the mention of his anal tear out – ribs, jaw, face "and some other injuries," handing them the doctor's report.

They insisted on repaying me for the hospital costs, and his father softened a bit when he realized that I'd kept the police out of it and paid for the care.

As I was leaving, his father, back almost turned to me, grunted a "Thanks."

I turned back to him, pulled my courage up into my chest, and said, "You know, Colonel, he wants most of all to have a father; for you to pay attention to him."

The older man stiffened.

"Don't overstep your bounds, mister." He kept his back to me.

"No sir, I apologize if that sounded critical, I merely wanted to be helpful. He's headed in a very scary direction. I'm sure it's been difficult for you both. I'll take my leave now."

I walked out and was halfway to the curb when his mother came out.

"Paul. Thank you. Thank you for helping him."

I don't know why I sent him home, really.

I mean, I didn't want to take him on, didn't want to have to deal with him, but I knew sending him home wasn't going to change things. I suppose I needed some time to figure out what God wanted me to do; see if there wasn't some alternative. I think I knew my fate but I was not yet reconciled to it.

I didn't know how quickly it would fall apart, to be sure, but when it did I could not honestly say I was surprised. It was only two weeks later when my pager went off. I called the answering service to get the message; it was his mother.

He was in the navy hospital. He'd attempted suicide.

§ WILL

They made me stay in the hospital for weeks.

They wouldn't let Paul come visit me, but my mom said he wanted to come. I figured he was just saying it though. I was pretty sure he didn't want me, I was too much trouble.

I kind of liked it, they moved me to another hospital, locked me up on the psych ward which had only adults. They were afraid to have me around kids, they were so stupid, it would have been much safer with kids. No matter. They watched us pretty

close. Normally I'd have wanted to get fucked, but I didn't want anyone to fuck me right then. No more fucking around, time to get serious.

I had to concentrate on getting better, getting out so I could kill myself.

§ PAUL

I didn't want to do this. I truly didn't.

I believe in fate of a sort, and this boy was, for the passing moments at least, part of mine. I bowed to the inevitable. As soon as they let him go home, I agreed to see him there with his folks.

Predictably his mother was alone. We sat, the three of us, in that painfully clean, elegant, and formal living room. Everything was so very ordered. But it was not a sterile or cold place. Military and domestic, an awkward mix carried off better than you'd expect.

She and I sat in flowered chintz wing chairs and he slouched on the matching sofa.

"Your mom tells me that you have been talking to her about me."

"Hm. Yeah, I guess." He was still pretty out of it. I wondered if they had let him out too soon.

"We've been talking about how to help you." That got his attention. "Your mother—your parents—," I lied, "and I have an idea." He was focused now.

"Since you aren't doing real well as things stand, and you want to spend time with me, on a trial basis I'm going to visit with you sometimes here at your home; and IF things go well, I'll let you come to my place on my days off sometimes." I had his full attention.

He looked ready to jump up off the couch and hug me, and I was afraid he might, so I crossed my arms and sat back in my chair.

"But this all depends on you behaving yourself," I cautioned. "If you can't keep your end of it, then we can't do it. There are conditions, Will. I can't have you just running around in the ways you have been."

"What?"

I took a deep breath, and spoke sternly.

"No more men. And that's not all. No making passes at me. No going places without permission. From Friday through Tuesday you are at home, and you obey your parents and the same rules – no men, no hitchhiking, no running around without your parents knowing where you are and who you are with."

He looked warily. I knew he would agree, I didn't know if he would conform to the rules.

“And you need to enroll in school. It’s not legal for you not to be in school. Given the schedule, with you not at home during the week all the time, you need to be in continuation school.”

“I don’t need that.” He was sullen.

I leaned back in the armchair, fixed his eyes with mine.

“Not negotiable. Take it or leave it.”

I sort of hoped he left it, to be honest. But I knew him better than that.

We slipped into an uneasy routine.

I would come by at the end of my day, early afternoon, usually before his father got off duty, and sit with him and his mother around the kitchen table. We had the most amazing conversations.

Sometimes his mother sat there, mute, sitting in stolidity. Other times she left us to our own devices. Eleanor was a remarkable woman, she intrigued me.

She was an attractive woman, thin, regal, reserved, her hair done up in a modest bun, a few wisps of gray. Not pretentious at all, but elegant, she just had an air about her. He took after her, there was not much of his father about him. I saw in the boy, the fine features, even, surprisingly I could see he had her strength, raw, he didn’t know how to access it, but it underlay him. He alternated between puppy dog and patrician.

He must have been a torture to her.

He ignored his mother’s sporadic presence and told me in hitherto unimagined detail of his sex life and experiences; rendered in the most graphic ways. He didn’t hear the anger and bitterness in his own voice, the undercurrent of feeling he denied; the pain and worthlessness and exploitation that underlay these episodes; the abandonment and indifference; the violence, spiritual and physical.

He thought they were amusing anecdotes, perhaps he was trying to titillate me, likely he hoped to hook me in with his story.

After all this, why shouldn’t you have sex with me too?

It worked to a degree. The stories made me understand the need that had drawn him to me, and the different need that had drawn me to him. I could not be indifferent to his tales, but whenever I commented on them he seemed to take it as rejection of him, as criticism, as finding him unworthy.

I tried vainly to turn the conversations into something more mainstream, but he had determined to unburden himself to me in this way. I did insist that at least a part of our conversations had to deal with the why’s of his behavior, but he displayed no insight, was unwilling to look at his motivations. Why did he live with these men? He liked them, he loved them. He wanted to get fucked by them. It was fun, it felt good. He never admitted the real need that underlay his passions.

I insisted he find at least something else to discuss for the end of our twice or thrice weekly conversations.

I made him show me his schoolwork, discuss his reading, focus on something other than sex and the hole in his soul he kept trying to fill with men and their cocks.

Now and then I would be invited to dinner.

It was often a forced, tense affair. Eleanor was a wonderful cook; five of us would sit in oh so very correct silence around the polished mahogany table, imported from some overseas tour. The boy's table manners were impeccable.

His older brother Tom, was almost eighteen, ready to enlist. As much as Will took after his mother, Tom was the image of his father. Not much bigger than Will, but with that lean and hard look you'd expect from a Marine. He was if anything, even more silent and enigmatic, hardly a word passed from him, he sat, he ate, he left. Tom knew enough about his brother's peculiar life to understand that I had something to do with it, yet he obviously had no idea what I was doing there; and I often felt the same way myself.

Will told me that they had had sex, nothing but a few episodes of mutual masturbation, one blowjob, many years past now.

His brother was not attractive to him, he said. His brother didn't understand his interest in men. His brother was straight, he said. His brother didn't hate him or put him down. His brother was nice to him, he said.

What he didn't say was, his brother had a father. He was not consciously aware of his resentment for the attention and approval Tom garnered. For the time and love of his father that Tom deserved and he didn't. Tom was the Marine in the family, the successor, the favorite. The only. Not that he didn't deserve it; I found no fault with Tom.

The Colonel was not happy to have me there, but one evening after dinner we were alone for a moment and he actually told me he was grateful.

"Sir, I just . . . Well, I am obliged to apologize to you. And to thank you."

"I'm sorry, sir, I don't understand. You don't owe me any apologies. Nor really any thanks, either."

He often spoke with his back to me.

"I misjudged you. I," he was obviously forcing himself to find the words, "I, thank you for what you have done for William." He left the room.

He was what he was. I could see he cared for the boy but was just repulsed by him at the same time. This was not an open or warm man. Well, you don't get to be a Marine light Colonel by kissing boys.

His father could not give him what he wanted, needed; and no one else could. We each have our limitation, Will was beyond his abilities to cope. Had, I think, been so from very early on.

§ ELEANOR

It was nothing short of a miracle.

That he had allowed Paul not just into the boy's life but into our home as well made me swell with love for him. I had never doubted my love for that man but in all the years we'd been married, I'd never felt good about how he related to Will. And now, he was doing the most difficult things imaginable.

Perhaps it doesn't look so courageous, but it wasn't just thanking Paul, it was conceding to him the right to take his own, rightful place in his son's life. I had never been more proud of my man. I suspect I had always doubted whether he really loved Will, and now in the moment of greatest pain and stress, I saw what he would do. All to save his son. He would bear any sacrifice or pain, I realized.

It was no small thing for a man like the Colonel. It was a mark of surrender. And Marines don't surrender.

§ PAUL

After a month he asked when he could come to stay at my place.

"Not stay, visit." I reminded him.

"Whatever."

"I'll talk with your mother and see if she thinks you are ready."

But for myself, I was worried about how to handle this. It meant juggling a lot of things.

First, I prize my privacy and my moments of isolation, and was loath to give up even a part of my precious time off.

Then there were practical issues, how did I explain him to the landlord, the neighbors? We had not discussed it, but they probably knew I was gay, it was a big city, it wasn't a huge issue, but this child, well, that was a more complex matter.

And then Dennis. I wasn't sure how he would take to having the boy around. It would certainly complicate things for us.

§ WILL

It was pretty weird all these days but at least he was coming to see me.

I didn't tell him but I wasn't behaving all that nice.

I was still going to the heads to find Marines, but I didn't hitch much. I also went one day a week to continuation school, so I figured that evened it out some. School wasn't so bad since I mostly got to do my work at home, and it was kind of nice to have him to show it to when I was done, and one night he helped me study for Algebra and it really did help.

I decided to wait to kill myself, to see if I wanted to do it later instead.

At continuation I got to hang out with older kids, most of them were at least 17, some were almost twenty. I blew a few of them, just because. When we took breaks, we smoked cigarettes, sometimes we'd hit on some J's after but only on days when Paul wasn't coming over.

But I went to the high school early afternoons a lot of the time and played basketball alone in the yard on days when Paul wasn't visiting. That's how I met Jesse. Those courts were usually empty in the afternoons, the wind was blowing sand and dirt a lot and it was hard to dribble and it got in your eyes sometimes, the desert is really a bitch.

He was just a kid, he was younger than me, 14, but he was kinda funny. He had a good sense of humor, and he was absolutely shitty at basketball, couldn't hit the backboard half the time. He was a little shrimp, like five-two and maybe a hundred ten pounds. But sometimes he'd just throw a body block at me when I was dribbling, though he wasn't big enough to knock me down. He was pretty determined for a shrimp.

But I met him there a few times, and we got sort of used to it, and he didn't ask too many damn questions. Just told jokes, and repeated lines from *Six Million Dollar Man* and *Baretta* and *All In The Family*.

I thought he was a doof. But he wasn't asking questions, or pressuring me, and I didn't have to work hard to behave around him. I taught him how to shoot a basket. One afternoon he had me come over to his house, we played Monopoly and then Risk.

He called me "meathead" and I told him he was right, I had more meat and got more head than he could imagine. He thought that was funny. He thought it was a joke.

I called him Edith.

I told Paul I had a friend, and he asked me all about it.

First thing I ever did that he liked.

§ PAUL

I finally agreed that he had earned a visit to my place, though I certainly had many reservations. I took him home with me one Tuesday.

I figured this boy was pretty jaded, but I determined not to change my basic lifestyle for him. I could not take him to the few bars I frequented, but thought it would do him well to see a relationship between two men that didn't involve underage boys.

So I asked Dennis to spend the evenings at my place, and tried to show him a more mature idea of gay relationships. Plus, I figured it would keep him out of my bed.

He just got jealous. He was rude to Dennis, ignored him, cut him off, inserted himself between us. Made fun of Dennis.

Now Dennis is a very smart man, one of the main points of our attraction, a computer programmer with a degree in chemistry, and a Master's in Chemical Engineering. He's a very sweet and patient fellow, the other point. But Dennis' patience knew its limits, and Will tried those limits severely.

We went for dinner and a movie, and Will did a decent job of keeping his hands off me in theater. Except for his problems with Dennis, I could not have asked for much better behavior out of him.

But I could sense the venom in him when we went to bed and left him to his own room, alone. This did not sit well.

It set a pattern, we did this every other week for several months, his behavior at home was more even. I began to think we had turned a corner with this very troubled boy-chick.

God laughed at my naivete.

Chapter Four

Sleeping Arrangements in the Garden of Gethsemane

§ WILL

He kept saying this thing to me, “Be a kid, Will.” Well, I was trying but it seemed to me he didn’t want a kid, didn’t know what to do with one.

Anyway he told me Jesse sounded like a good person to hang out with. So I did.

We played basketball a few times a week and I’d go over to his place and we’d goof around. He wanted me to sleep over but my mom said no.

So I was pissed off that day, and I went to the heads, and I found this guy, he was a little older than most of the other Marines, and he had a room of his own at NCO Quarters. He snuck me in and fucked me all night right there in the barracks. It was hot.

And then I figured I was in for it anyway, I wouldn’t get to see Paul again so I took off for L. A. I was gone for a long time.

§ PAUL

It did not look good. In the past when he was gone, he had at least called his parents. This time after a week with no word they decided to file a missing persons report on him.

I was surprised at my own reaction. I expected to be a little relieved at not having so much direct obligation, but instead I was much more concerned; he wasn’t quite the child he had been, he was more likely to get into serious situations.

I began making rounds of some of the more likely places for him to be, though I didn’t expect much. There were several chicken bars, notorious places most of them, and I was very uncomfortable going into them and looking for him, but I did and showed his photo around. I got some very strange looks, and no one was quite sure of my motives; perhaps they wouldn’t tell me anything as result. One was a more respectable place, a hang out for teens, but the vultures were there too. I talked to the management, which

was surprisingly sympathetic and they put his photo up at the card check booth by the door.

But L. A. is a big place, and I couldn't begin to count the tearooms and parks and beaches that I'd need to visit to even have a chance of seeing him.

It was more than a month before I heard from him again. He called me at home. He was very high on drugs, and not really coherent. But in lucid moments he asked difficult questions.

"Do you love me?"

I didn't know what to say that wouldn't hurt him.

"I have a lot of love for you, and I'm very concerned about your situation."

"But do you love me?"

"Why don't you come home, then we can talk about it."

He hung up.

It was discouraging but encouraging at the same time. At least he had called, and I expected he would call again.

His father had orders for overseas, Spain. He got them delayed on compassionate grounds.

Another night, another call, his voice hollow, his thoughts impenetrable, he was on LSD, was calling me from someone's bedroom while he was getting fucked.

"Will, please go home. Your family loves you, we all miss you, and this is not good for you."

"I'm not such a kid anymore am I?"

"You are in way over your head, Will, please do this for me, go home."

There was a sudden change in his voice. "*For you? For you?*"

"Yes, for me. Because I want to see you again." That was the truth, anyway.

"Nah, if I go home they won't let me see you."

"Yes, I'm sure they will."

"No." A long pause with sexual sounds in the background. "I'll come see you if you won't rat me out."

I had to think about it, but I figured that nothing would be lost if I agreed.

"All right, come and see me, when can you come? Can I pick you up?"

"You won't rat me out? I'm not going home."

"You have my word."

"Maybe I'll come. I dunno. Oh, wow . . ." and he hung up.

I heard nothing from him then one Wednesday evening there he was, at my front door. He was dressed well, had a leather jacket, very fashionable clothing, but his cheeks were hollow, his eyes were glazed and sunken. He staggered when he stepped back for me to open the screen door.

“Hey Paul, I told you I’d come. I’m looking good, huh?”

“Nice clothes, Will. Come on in, sit down.”

He sat on the couch, he was drunk and on something, I couldn’t tell what. He babbled on and on not making much sense, but I gathered he was turning tricks as well as living with some guy. Mostly he wanted to talk about drugs, then he just nodded off on the couch while I was getting him some food.

I pulled off his shoes, tucked a blanket around him, and called Dennis. I wanted someone else there just in case. That night as we lay together, the boy still out cold on the couch, I cried a little. It was such a waste; I didn’t see how to save him. That didn’t make it not hurt.

When I got up in the morning he was still there, fast asleep, curled up like a baby. He slept for eighteen hours. He stayed for two days and I took a chance, let him stay in the apartment while I went off to work but when I called Friday evening he was gone, Dennis had checked, he told me the apartment was spotless. Will had cleaned up and bought food and put it in the refrigerator, but there was no further sign of the boy.

He came by again every week or two, almost always stoned sometimes so wired he couldn’t sit still, sometimes so wasted he slumped into oblivion within minutes of arrival.

Finally we had a real argument. The innocence was fading fast, the hard edge was taking root. I told him he was killing himself, that I hated seeing what was happening to him.

And he flared back.

How dare I criticize? He was worth \$100 an hour and I wasn’t even smart enough to take it for free! He’d had a thousand cocks, why did I think mine so fucking special? He had everything he wanted, everything he needed: men, money, clothes, sex, attention. He was too old to be treated like a kid.

And I was ready to reply and realized he had stopped me cold. He was not a kid. Whatever he was, he was no child any more.

At one point I actually thought whether I should take him to bed, to give him what he wanted from me, to see if he wanted it enough to save his soul. Perhaps I could make a bargain with him.

But I realized that it would be just another soul-deadening experience for him, that he wanted what I was giving him now, despite his protests. Once he had that from me, he would not value the relationship, I would just be another man who had used him, albeit with his cooperation.

Finally he ended up in an emergency room, unconscious from drugs and general bad health, and his parents were called. He was arrested as incorrigible, and spent a

month in custody before he was released to home. It was a good thing, it got the drugs out of him. But I had no illusions that he would stay.

I found myself at a crossroads. By rights I should walk away. People shape their lives, make their choices, he was making his; I needed to make mine. He was a hopeless case.

Karma is karma, I had no good reason for it, but he was in my life, I was obligated to him, bound to him by no definable cause, no real reason; it just was. I asked his parents to meet with me.

§ WILL

I don't really want to talk about what happened while I was gone that time. It wasn't hard to find a place to stay, but I guess things were just different this time. Before I always knew I could go home, but now I knew I couldn't. So I had to grow up and that was OK.

I got a lot of good drugs, I tried pretty much everything. Acid, reds, black beauties, poppers, coke, shrooms, speedballs, goofballs, lighter fluid, peyote, horse. I liked the psychedelics best. You can't get bored tripping. Lots of stuff. I was drunk a lot but then after a while I had too much in me and I couldn't get hard and that got some of my customers pissed off, so I had to cut back.

I met some more guys who were pretty mean, learned how to handle that better though. I stayed with about five different guys in this time, they were buying me clothes and stuff, giving me money and drugs, and all I had to do was suck their cocks or get fucked, or put out for their friends, which is what I wanted to do anyway. I didn't even have to clean house for them.

Then one night I passed out in this guy's car and I guess he freaked, he should of just let me sleep it off, maybe he was afraid I'd puke in his car or something, any way he dropped me off at an emergency room and scrambled out of there. So I got put in jail for a while.

I was OK, I got almost as much sex from the other kids as I did on the outside, and I didn't need money for anything. And I was tired of the drugs.

§ PAUL

We were all surprised at how simple this decision was. He was going to live with me; or rather I was going to live with him.

During the workweek I'd move out of the BOQ and into his brother's room, as Tom was now off to Camp LeJeune. On my weekends, he'd come with me to my place in the city. It took some doing to get him in line, but he loved the idea.

"Will, I've been thinking about this a lot. You are right that you aren't a kid anymore. You are a young man, and you have to learn to behave like one."

"What? Is this the same shit as before?"

“Yes and no. There have to be rules, Will, people who live together have to treat each other with respect, and you have to realize that the things you’ve been doing have hurt your parents a lot.”

I’d picked the timing just right, that one got through to him, he hung his head instead of arguing.

“And it’s hurt me too. Hurts me to see how you are being hurt and used.” I continued, “so I’m going to try to be very flexible with you about rules, and give you as much freedom as possible. But you have to be willing to do your part too. You have to try to stay away from things that are dangerous and not do things that will hurt your parents or me.”

“I know you care about me, Will. I know you want more from me than I think I can give you. But even so, I hope you will respect me enough to try to make this work. Can I count on you?”

Suddenly he was a little kid again, tears in his eyes, sobbing, he said yes.

I held him a bit, wiped his eyes, asked him if he could tell me what had happened to make him run away, when he had been doing so well.

“I fucked up. I went out all night with a guy then I knew I’d be in trouble and you wouldn’t want to see me any more.”

I was in silent thought for a moment.

“Will. I’m sorry if you thought that. I would not have been happy about what you did, but I would still want to see you.”

“It’s just – just that it’s so hard to do what you want me to. I don’t think I can do it. And I hate when you get disappointed in me.” He was bawling again.

“OK, guy. Listen up. I may be disappointed at times, and I’m sorry because I underestimated how difficult all this was for you. It’s just that you are doing things that would be very scary even for an adult. I’ll try to make some allowances. I don’t want you to run away, no matter what.”

“But I want you to start thinking about being adult, because you are getting there pretty quickly. And I want to talk with you as we go along about what kinds of adults you know and what kind of adult you want to be.”

“Adults get education. You may not think you need it now, but you do need it, and you will feel better about yourself. You need friends, friends your own age, who don’t use you for sex. You need to be away from drugs.”

Once more we had an uneasy start.

The Colonel had the toughest role. He had to let me live in his house and mentor his own son. I wasn’t surprised that he was a rare sight.

He went back to school. He had a fairly quick mind, picked up things quickly and made progress.

After two weeks, he came into my bed one night.

I suppose I should have expected it.

I woke up about two a.m. and he was sliding under the sheet.

“Will, you should not be here.”

Silence.

“Please talk to me about this, Will, I’m not comfortable with this.”

“I just don’t want to be alone.” A long pause. “Can’t I just sleep here?”

“What would your mother say if she found you here, Will? Would I still be able to live here?”

“She’d say she was glad.” He said it with conviction, and I wasn’t sure he was wrong.

Another difficult decision.

“Rules. You just sleep, you don’t touch me. Do you have any clothes on?”

“Yes, I got boxers on.”

“Tomorrow we tell your mom about this. Go to sleep.”

When I woke at six he was curled up against me, his arm over my chest.

I must say that I was more than a little confused myself. I eventually accepted that the conventional rules just could not completely apply to this very unconventional situation. If we were to save his life, his heart, his innocence, his soul, we had to bend too.

His mother just smiled and said, “Whatever you can do for him, Paul, do it. If he isn’t with you he’s going to go out and find some other man to do it with.”

“Eleanor, I’m not absolutely NOT going to have sex with that boy.”

“Whatever you can do for him. I trust you to find the right way.”

“What about the Colonel? I should tell him.”

“Leave the Colonel to me, Paul. He won’t be a problem.”

Night after night he crawled in with me. I insisted that he wear clothes, that he not touch me. Some nights I would wake up as he climbed in, sometimes I just woke up and he was there. Once or twice he was waiting in my bed when I came to my room.

There were times when he strayed into forbidden territory, I overlooked one night when he was nude, but sent him to his own bed when he tried it the second night. I woke up at three a.m. to find him fondling me, reminded him of the rule, he reluctantly stopped.

I should have known that progress would be slow. There was a lot of backtracking.

I surmised that he was sneaking out to be with men, God knows how he found them. But if he was down to one or two a week I considered it a big improvement.

§ ELEANOR

Despite all that preceded, the first time I was entirely sure about Paul was when he came to me about Will getting into his bed. Our prejudices so rule us. I didn't realize it consciously, but I had assumed if he wasn't being sexual with the boy it was a matter of time, of convenience, or of fear of consequences.

This convinced me otherwise. I spoke to the Colonel about it, with quite some trepidation. I wondered just how far his newfound tolerance would stretch.

"Paul isn't having sex with Will, you know."

Lying beside me in bed. I couldn't quite see his eyes with the low lamplight behind him. He usually took his time answering anything I said – a characteristic he never displayed on duty where he was quite decisive and never at a loss for words. He certainly took his time for this, gazing thoughtfully, concentrating, measuring, weighing his thoughts and words.

"Yes, I know." He was no longer looking at me.

I was surprised and said so.

"I told you I had misjudged him. I realized it quite sometime ago."

"How did you know?"

He looked at me quizzically. "You mean to say you didn't know? Never mind." A long pause. "Two things."

"I asked Will, and chose to believe him."

Such a direct approach had not occurred to me. I was massively surprised in any event that the Colonel would have such a direct discussion on this topic with Will.

"More importantly, actions speak louder than words. He kept bringing him back to us. He kept shoving him into our arms. He only took him when he saw Will wouldn't stick to us."

The Colonel as a man of action, understood action. As a man of duty, he recognized a man doing his duty.

"So," I said carefully, judging this the moment, "Paul came to me last week and told me something." I paused. "I don't want you to overreact to it, though."

It was a sad smile but a smile. "They're sleeping together, I know. He told you, I am not surprised. I told you I had misjudged him."

"How did you know?" Again. Would wonders never cease?

He was very quiet, then turned to me and looked into my eyes.

"I love you." And he rolled over, turned off the light.

Moments passed in darkness.

"I look for him every night, to see if he's safe."

§ WILL

It was better now that he let me sleep with him. I thought he was really silly the way he kept preventing me from doing him. What difference could it make? But sleeping next to him felt so much better, I almost didn't need sex from him.

I was getting fucked a lot by one guy, a Marine who was 22, we just did it in bathrooms and some nights I would go out just after dark and meet him and we'd go in the bushes or something. He was hot, but he was too young to love. Still, I got fucked and sucked and it helped me to not run away.

I was smoking a lot more pot, but I decided I didn't want the other drugs so much anymore.

Jesse and I started to play basketball again. He asked me where I had been, I told him I was on a Top Secret mission in Russia. He shut up. He's too fuckin' smart sometimes, but this time he was smart enough.

I was almost sixteen and I wanted to get my license. Something funny happened, the Colonel started to teach me to drive. Well that was bound to be a disaster. I could never do things the way he wanted. He finally paid for Driver's Ed for me.

Those were funny days, I felt like a fly in amber. Everything was suspended around me. Even the seasons seemed frozen; well they do in Twentynine Palms anyway. It felt kind of nice, but I couldn't move at all.

Paul started giving me books to read. One I liked a lot, it was *A Separate Peace*. I thought the two guys in it, Gene and Finny, really wanted to have sex, at least Gene wanted to do Finny. And he said maybe I was right but that there was a lot more to look for in the book. He said his sister gave him that book when he was fifteen. He said the book was about growing up and facing the fact that you can hurt people. I liked it anyway.

Then he gave me another book called *The Chosen*, I wasn't sure why he gave me that one. It's about being Jewish. He told me it was about different ways fathers could raise their sons; a person could be like his father and be different; and about how everyone had to both break away from his father at some time, and be like his father as an adult. And he said it was about a father who showed silent love for his son.

"Oh, *subtle*." I said and he laughed.

"Maybe not, you're getting smarter as you get older. But read the book anyway. It's also about God sending you friends to teach you things; about relationships that are holy."

I liked that.

I started calling Jesse "Reuven" after the kid in the book who had a nice father.

§ PAUL

My relationship with Dennis suffered mightily. We never had time when we could be alone. The boy still wasn't happy with Dennis around, but even setting that aside, it was difficult to sustain the gentle, pleasant tone we had developed and sustained over time.

Late at night we would talk, but whispered to keep the boy from overhearing.

Thing is, Dennis did understand what I was doing and why, but he eventually said, "I don't want to be a parent, Paul."

I didn't listen well enough to pick that out until he broke up with me.

Will was delighted of course, and promptly moved into my bed at the apartment.

Chapter Five

Fisher of Men

§ PAUL

I was not meeting his needs all that well, but it was the best I could do, the best my own moral compass would allow. It was confusing, and I felt torn.

It isn't that he wasn't attractive, he was, although younger than I liked. It was that we had a relationship in which I knew my role would not allow sex without destroying the positive value I could provide.

And this boy so needed someone to love him without using a dick to do it.

On the other hand, I was not getting the things I most needed in life. No boyfriend, no partner, no adult companionship. Even more importantly no alone time, no opportunity to retreat and be by myself, to restore myself.

I began to treasure the scant time he gave his little friend Jesse, who had finally come over to the house for a visit. At least I had a few hours in the afternoons alone. I encouraged him to spend more time with Jesse both because a peer relationship was something to encourage, and because I enjoyed the time away from Will.

He asked me for permission to sleep over at Jesse's and I said I'd have to discuss it with his mother.

The whole transaction brought me up short.

We had put two and two together, realizing that this was the very event that had ended up with his disappearance the previous time. So though I had a lot of reservations about it, we both decided to agree, first cautioning him that Jesse should be treated as a friend, not a sex partner.

But he wasn't asking his father, or his mother for that matter. He asked me.

And the conversation the three of us had about how he should behave, or rather, shouldn't behave, on a sleepover threw the warped nature of this boy and the level to which Eleanor and I had adapted to it right in my face.

How many mothers have to tell their sons not to suck their friends' cocks during a sleepover?

"No oral sex, no anal sex, no sex at all, Will."

§ WILL

Sleeping over with Jesse was kind of cool. Kind of strange too. I mean, I had to wear pajamas! Paul had to take me to buy them and made me take them and we almost forgot to unwrap them first, so there we were, pulling pins and pieces of cardboard out so I could stuff them back in my pack. I don't know when the last time was I wore pajamas, not since I was eleven for sure. I sleep naked when I can.

But we had a lot of fun, we listened to music, his folks had a cool stereo, almost as nice as Kent's and lots of records, and didn't mind letting us use the living room for a while. His room was dorky, like a little kid's, he had two twin beds and checkered bedspreads, like I had when I was young. Posters of JAWS on the walls, he liked that, and some Rolling Stones shit. Model airplanes, he must have twenty of them, his dad was Marine pilot. They were all painted up and looked good, and we played with them some but careful because I didn't want to break one.

We went to bed and the lights were out but we were talking. We talked about school though he went to regular classes and I didn't really know what that was like, then we talked about girls, but I didn't have much to say, never thought about them much. Well one guy had got me to have sex with a girl when I was twelve, and she was maybe fourteen, and it was fun for a while, he watched us and jacked off but I was pretty sure it wasn't my thing.

I didn't tell that story to Jesse. I didn't tell him any of my good stories.

Then we talked about TV and half of me was thinking "Jesse is such a little kid," and half of me was thinking it felt kind of good. Then he asked about Paul.

"Who is that guy?"

"Paul?"

"Yeah. Is he your uncle?"

"Umm, I dunno. Maybe." I wasn't sure I wanted to talk about Paul to him.

I mean, I never had to talk to another kid about what my life was like. I wasn't worried about the kids at continuation who called me a fag and then had me meet them for BJ's. I didn't care what they thought about me, we weren't friends. But Jesse was – well I dunno it was different. I never had a friend before.

"MAYBE he's your uncle? You don't know?"

"Well, no he's not my uncle, he's my friend, but he's sorta like my uncle."

"How old is he? Where did you meet him? Why does he live with your folks?"

"Man, you ask too many questions, go to sleep."

Then it was funny because he fell asleep but I was awake and I can't figure out why but I was crying, real quietly. But I was crying, the water was running out of my eyes and down my cheeks and running onto the pillow for a long time before I turned onto my side and closed my eyes.

§ PAUL

You always had to be on your toes. You had to look for the changes in this boy, to be ready to anticipate the next blow up. So I realized right away that something had happened on the sleepover.

He came home a few days later with a stack of coloring books, and a model aircraft carrier, locked himself in his room for hours working on them.

Coloring books?

I didn't know what to make of that. One afternoon I came home and he was sprawled like a little boy on the carpet under the dining room table, coloring away. He put them away and set the table when his mother asked, without comment.

Over the next two weeks he spent more time with Jesse, brought him home to work on the model with him. Then he asked if I would take them both to Disneyland. I took the weekend off, went on a Saturday. They left me on my own most of the day, having fun running around the place like any other pair of typical teenagers. Jesse slept over at the Colonel's house that night because we didn't get back until well after midnight.

About three a.m., Will came in and got in bed with me and pulled my arm around him, snuggling up to me. As long as it wasn't sexual, I'd decided I'd let it happen. He fell asleep quickly.

The next morning Jesse asked him where he went, rather deliberately doing it in front of me, I thought. We were at the breakfast table, Sunday morning, Eleanor had made pancakes but only three of us were in the kitchen at that moment, Jesse, Will, and myself.

"Where did you go last night?"

"You ask too many questions, Reuven."

Reuven?

"You keep too many secrets, David."

David?

I thought back to *The Chosen* and realized where the names came from if not how they had been assigned.

"I couldn't sleep, I just needed to get away from your stinky feet, so I left. And you snore."

Jesse just looked at him. "Yeah, but where *did* you sleep?"

Will had to handle his own relationships, answer his own questions.

He turned suddenly to Jesse, spoke too loudly. “You really want to know? Do you? I’ll tell you if you do.”

Jesse looked at his plate, looked at Will, then said, “Open your mouth.”

When Will looked at him puzzled he repeated it, “Open your mouth, David. And close your eyes.” And to my surprise Will did it.

Jesse used his fingers to push half of a pancake into Will’s mouth, got up, and went to the bathroom, while Will chewed silently, eyes still closed.

§ WILL

Paul asked me to talk about what was going on with Jesse. Thing is, I didn’t know what was going on. I mean, nothing was going on.

I wanted to tell Jesse all about Paul that morning, but I was afraid if I did then Jesse would leave me and I wouldn’t have a friend anymore.

He told me it was up to me to figure out what I wanted to tell Jesse, how much he could handle, what kind of friendship we were going to have. He said the books didn’t cover this situation, I was an unusual young man, I had to blaze my own trail.

“You’ve grown up way too fast, it’s going to cause you some difficulties at times. Looks like this is one of them. Don’t worry too much and don’t let things bother you too much. Have fun...”

I didn’t want to blaze any trails.

“I thought you told me you wanted me to be a kid.”

“Yes, but you didn’t pay attention, did you?”

That felt kind of crappy.

§ PAUL

Halloween came and Will decided to dress and go out as a hobo. He pressured Jesse into going too. I’m sure they got a lot of very strange reactions, as they were both at least two years older than any other kids. Neither Eleanor nor I made any comments.

Will dug into the storage room, rummaged through boxes all day. When I came home, his bed was covered with stuffed animals.

He brought a teddy bear with him when he came to my bed that night, I didn’t say anything, suddenly it made a lot of sense to me, I saw it as hopeful. Even more hopeful, he slept in his own bed about once a week.

After a bit it all fell into place, and I figured a little regression was a great thing; a chance for him to become a little boy and do it over, better. Of course I didn’t think going to bed with me was necessarily the completely authentic experience for a healthy child. But going to bed with a man and not having sex with him was a step.

I realized then that Will would never be a completely normal person; he was indeed too abused and warped to get himself completely back. But we all are the product of our lives, however they may be, and he could still make his life a lot more reasonable.

Then of course, we had a little setback. I had crabs. Not much question about where they came from.

§ ELEANOR

I suppose the surprising thing was that it had not come to our attention before, happened before. Perhaps it had, but had been treated without our knowledge. There was a lot of detail we never knew; a lot of our son's life we never discovered.

Paul handled it adeptly. It would have been difficult to explain at the base Clinic, and Paul suggested that might not be a good place for Will in any event.

I had learned to lessen my expectations and look at the positives. I had had many opportunities to learn.

He had a friend, he had Paul, he was safe in his bed at home most of the time. In terms of what I was capable of reaching for, my expectations by that time, this was as good as I expected it would get.

§ PAUL

After talking with Eleanor I decided to take him to a free V. D. clinic in town. Of course the clinic on base knew what to do about it, they had plenty of experience with V. D. with all those young Marines. As a dependent he could get free treatment there.

The base clinic just wasn't the place for this boy, who had casually told me of getting a doctor there to blow him during one of his previous exams. And I was afraid there'd just be a lot questions that would be difficult to answer.

In the meantime she starting washing all the bedding and towels and all of his clothes and mine.

The clinic I knew provided anonymous treatment, and catered to the Gay community. You just had a chart number and a password. Still, we had to wait in line for several hours, and it was like sitting on the African plains with a load of fresh raw meat. The flies were buzzing, the buzzards circling. The only thing I could do was to point out that these people all probably had V. D.

His checkup wasn't all that promising either, he had an inflammation in his throat, which a call a few days later confirmed was gonorrhea. Amazingly the anal swabs showed nothing, but they had given him sufficient antibiotics on this visit, anticipating the results of the swabs, to handle things; along with instructions on how to beat the crabs.

He tried to tell me we should shower together when I used the pediculicide shampoo from the drugstore. When I rejected that he suggested I shave him as an effective way to eliminate all the eggs.

None of this seemed to phase him at all, but when I had a repeat bout of crabs a week later, I was pretty angry. Told him that was not adult behavior, and if he was going to have sex with adults at least he could take care not to go back to a person who he knows is infested.

He disappeared for two days.

Bend, Paul. Bend like a willow.

I was sitting at the desk in my room, Tom's room, paying my bills. I heard the door open, turned around and saw him there, disheveled, wearing the same clothes he had worn when he left. He was looking at me sheepishly, sadly.

I observed him closely for the first time in weeks. He'd grown, he was taller, filled out since the drugs, and added some new muscle too. He was probably up to 175 pounds now; he looked, if not a man, like he was getting close.

He was pleading with his eyes.

I spoke first. "Will, I am sorry that I lost my temper. I apologize."

He looked at me miserably, "You were right to get mad at me. It sucked what I did."

"OK, well, we were both wrong. So I won't give you a lecture, but I want to understand what your thinking is now about this."

"What do you mean?"

"What did you do, what should you have done, what will you do – any of those things."

"I dunno."

"Do you know who gave you the crabs?"

"Yes." Well, that was good. It meant he didn't have so many sex partners he couldn't figure out who did it.

"Have you talked to him?"

"Yeah. I did that after the second time. I told him. And I won't have sex with him again until he gets rid of them."

"OK, what about running away again?"

"I didn't run away! I just needed some time alone, to think about things."

"Where did you go?"

"Nowhere. I slept in Jesse's garage, he didn't know it, and I got out before his dad got up in the mornings. I slept on a table some in the picnic area. I washed in the head at the Bowling Alley. I stayed the day in the base library."

"Better than before, Will. But –" I paused.

"I know," he looked down at his feet, started to tear up. "I let you down by not telling you what I was doing."

“Yes, it scared me and your parents. Please promise me you won’t run away again, Will. If you need a place to run to, to get away for a little bit, we’ll see if there isn’t someone or someplace you can go where you’ll be safe.”

“And I am not going to tell you to stop, because you won’t, but you are still out having sex with men, and it’s wrong and dangerous.”

“I’m sorry, I am sorry.” A long pause. “I won’t promise, but I promise I’ll try not to do that again. But I need to ask you something.”

“What?”

“If you won’t have sex with me and I’m not supposed to find other men for sex, what am I supposed to do?”

Good question.

“Well, it’s another one of those things, Will, where your situation doesn’t match the usual answers. For another fifteen year old, I’d have an answer, but what would work for most teens just doesn’t fit you.”

“I don’t know what to say, maybe the right answer is that you need to think harder about what kind of person to be, and what kind of person would be at least safe as a sex partner. Most teenagers don’t have sex, and if they do it’s with other teens. But that isn’t what you are looking for.”

“So, you think about that and talk to me about what thoughts you get. In the meantime, I would like you to think about promising you won’t run away again. And how you are going to make it up to your mother for scaring her.”

He cried, and I consoled him for a while.

“Now go into the bathroom and clean up, use the special shampoo to get rid of the crabs, and put your clothes in a plastic bag so your mom can wash them. Your room is clean at least, she washed everything again yesterday.

§ WILL

I just don’t know what’s happening to me. I don’t know who I am, how to act, what to do.

Paul says it’s normal. Teenagers are half kids, half adults and it’s confusing because sometimes you’re one and sometimes the other but never know which one is going to pop out next.

I dumped that Marine, and for a while I was just doing one or two of the older guys at continuation.

I went almost a week without getting fucked. It felt sort of good.

§ PAUL

Thanksgiving was fast approaching and I made plans to visit my family in Chicago. Will woke me up at five a.m. one morning and asked if he could come along.

I surprised myself by saying yes.

The Colonel wasn't too pleased, and Eleanor was a little sad, Thanksgiving with an empty nest, but they made plans for a weekend away.

§ ELEANOR

The Colonel had indeed learned to bend. I certainly had mixed feelings about all this, but I took the tack that we had to face facts, and that was talking the Colonel's language.

"Thomas, I'm sorry, but he isn't our boy any more."

He bristled. I know he knew it already, but it's different when it's spoken aloud.

"How can you say that?"

"He's Paul's. We must face the facts. We cannot parent him, we don't; he will not allow it. Paul is able to, he does. And it's better that he has one good parent than no parents at all."

I may have only imagined that his voice broke just a tiny bit.

"You may have a point."

§ PAUL

Of all the things God has blessed me with, my family is at the very top of the list.

I grew up in East Dundee, Illinois, a little town about fifty miles out of Chicago, a typical nice Midwest small town. The biggest thing around East Dundee was Santa's Village, now I think it's a year-round thing, an amusement park in summers. Then it was seasonal only. It was a backwater, too far out to even be a bedroom community in my youth.

Dad owned a grocery and gas station on the state highway, but when the interstate came he closed it up and retired. He could probably have run it still and made some money, but it would have been much more a struggle, and mother had worked, she taught Art in the junior high. They'd saved and invested well, and retirement was a just reward for a lifetime of labor and love.

I never doubted that love, though I was acutely, painfully aware at points in growing up that I was going to disappoint them.

We all worked in the store or the station as we grew up. Even today, just filling the car up reminds me of Dad; the pungent sharp smell of gasoline is sweet to me. I suppose most kids would not think so fondly of those hot, muggy summer days or the hours spent cleaning windshields, pumping gas, checking the oil, handing out green stamps, but sometimes I think those were the very best parts of my life. I suppose you filter out the bad parts as you grow. It was expected of us but also we expected to do it, it was right. Then I felt protected, close to my folks and Dad in particular, contributing to the family. Warm.

All the things that Will didn't seem to ever feel.

My older sister Kate, ambitious and smart, ended up going to Cornell Law. She had a rivalry going with me and Danny for many years, but never realized that I wasn't competing. Not until she was much older, anyway. Even so I had never doubted her love either, I knew I could count on Kate. The last time she let me down I was seven and she lied to me about how deep the water was in the community pool. It took a long time to forgive her, but she really took the experience to heart and never did anything like that again.

Danny came along four years after me. He was the apple of everyone's eye. Even mine. You hear about families where the youngest is spoiled or resented, but Danny was such a sweet, easygoing, likeable child, you could not resent him. Kate got her hooks in him. He ended up in law school too.

I was a middle child, and I had that middle child talent for hiding in plain sight, able to melt into my surroundings. Still, my sister and brother never overlooked me; and it was to them that I had first come out, just three years earlier.

I knew in those difficult days that my parents would eventually come to terms with me and we would be a family. But I dreaded it. And when I talked to my siblings I shared my dread. It was Danny who solved the problem for me.

"Paul, you don't have to tell them. We can do it. Kate and I can do it."

At first I thought it was impossible to allow them to, a blatant caving in to my own cowardice. But as I thought it through, I saw real positives. Many of my friends had shared their parents' reactions with me, and I knew that first reactions were often extreme, and not representative of where things eventually stood. And I thought about the prospects that one of them might say something to me that we would both regret, even if it was only a spontaneous, first reaction.

Or maybe I really was a coward.

But within six months my parents were able to see their child in me, and the reserve, the wall of alien-ness that so many gay people experience in their families was gone. God had blessed me to give me these people.

I said that to mom, and her reply was "God blessed us with you, Paul, and don't you ever forget it."

High school was not the torture for me that it is for many gay kids, because in the early sixties you didn't have any expectation of acceptance at all. It was simply never spoken of, I never even considered coming out. For myself, I did struggle a bit, but never really to question who I was. I knew who I was, I didn't know what to do about it, and the only fear I recall was of how it would affect my family.

I was a good but not stellar student and was in the Band and Drama. And of course, later at my reunion people professed to be surprised to learn that I was gay. The reception was cool, but not hostile

I graduated from high school in 1964 and promptly enlisted in the Navy. It was an expectation, since I had decided I was not inclined to go to college just yet. It was the first disappointment I handed my parents, but this one I could pose as patriotism. And that was an acceptable motive in my family.

In the Navy I got the training I needed for my job, and when my enlistment ended I had a ready position with the equipment manufacturer. I liked the work, it was technical and it felt important.

Thanksgiving was at my sister's place in Chicago. It would have been a lot more complicated had we gone to Mom and Dad's. It was still pretty complicated to explain to Kate what to expect. And while she knew she could trust me I could tell she was a little shocked when I told her what the sleeping arrangements would be. But I didn't see that it made any sense to inconvenience everyone with separate quarters when space would be tight, and then have to deal with the awkwardness anyway when he ended up in my bed.

It went pretty well, he was taken by Danny, who is a very funny guy, formed an amazingly fierce attachment to Danny's girlfriend. Mom and Dad came over Thanksgiving day, met him as my "foster son."

I had explained it as best I could in advance, and my parents trust me a lot too; still I had been concerned.

But as soon as she saw Will, the instincts kicked in and Mom decided to be a mother. Soon Will was eating up her attention and care, sitting in the kitchen cutting up vegetables with my sister under Mom's watchful eye. He was at that moment at least, a kid again. Mom gave me some grief when Will wasn't around, telling me I'd picked up another stray, and better be careful I didn't get stuck with him. But she didn't mean anything by it, just concerned. I could tell she liked Will, though of course I had not really shared the background with her; she didn't know about all the other men in his life, and I had felt compelled to be really clear with her about what his relationship was with me. Or at least what it wasn't.

You probably couldn't find a greater contrast between my dad's casual affection and relaxed ways and the Colonel. Dad could always be counted on to be a Dad, and Will watched the two of us in amazement. We've not been one of the more touchy families I've ever seen, but we weren't distant. Dad hugged me fiercely, slapped me on the back and started asking me when I was going to get back to college, and get a real career. It was an old tune and he knew he couldn't budge me, so it was more an in joke than anything else. Dad knew I was at ease with my career choices, he accepted them, he needled me with it now and then. Will caught on.

Dad and Danny and I spent a few hours catching up on man talk, Will sat with us soaking it up, not speaking even when Dad tried to draw him out. But he looked at Dad with an intensity that made me feel a little alarm. Then I decided simply not to worry. The boy would get nowhere with Dad if that was where he was headed, and we'd deal with the aftermath if need be.

The weather was warmer than usual, so the four men went out to the basketball court and we had a two on two in which Will and Danny beat the crap out of Dad and me.

"No respect of age," I told him. He laughed.

Friday I drove him out to the folks' place, and we drove around and then walked around. I showed him the schools I'd gone to, the places I'd played as a boy. He was very quiet and thoughtful, almost pensive.

That night in bed he whispered into my ear, "Thank you for bringing me here." And he kissed my cheek, then grabbed me in a hug and wouldn't let go.

§ WILL

It was the best in Chicago.

His dad talked to me, didn't seem too freaked out by me, put his arm around my shoulders and then squeezed. Ann, his brother's girlfriend was so cool. Well, everyone was.

I remembered why I was in love with him during this visit. He had everything I needed.

Someday he'll make love to me, too. We'll go back there for our honeymoon.

I went for a walk with Danny on Friday, he lives in New York, which is cool.

"What was Paul like when he was a kid?"

"Hmm, well I could tell you he was a jerk of an older brother."

"He was? I don't think he's a jerk"

"Well, I could tell you that, but it's not really true, he was once in a while but usually he was just the opposite."

"In fact, my brother was – well is – one of the nicest people I've ever known. Do you know about his pets?"

"Pets? Huh uh. He doesn't have any pets."

"Yes, he said with his schedule it wouldn't work. But when he was a kid, younger than you, he used to pick up every stray cat and dog in town. He must have had at least five of them, and rabbits and now and then some bird that had been injured. My mom used to swear she'd disown him if he brought another one home, but he'd do it and she would just sigh and help him. I always expected him to be a veterinarian or something."

"It's just his nature, he takes after Dad a lot. Dad was in training to be a minister when he was young, decided to go into business later. Very soft-hearted, both of them."

I thought about that, and wondered if Paul thought I was a stray like that.

—

When we got back, Jesse was being a pain in the ass. I thought he'd grow up some but he was still like a little kid, though he claimed it was the other way around.

Next time we had a sleepover at his place, he started in asking about Paul again. I guess because he knew I went to Chicago with him.

"I told you, don't ask questions if you can't handle the answers."

“What’s your secret? Is he some kind of homo, does he queer you? Is that it? Is that why you sleep with him?”

I was sitting on the edge of the other bed in his room, in my pajamas. When he said that I looked at him, it was so weird, and I started laughing.

“Man have you EVER got it wrong!” I just laughed so hard I fell over on my side.

“I don’t think so, I think that’s just what it’s all about!”

I laughed some more, and then after a bit I stopped laughing and sat up and said, “Well, you asked for it. You gonna keep your trap shut if I tell you? No ratting on anybody?”

“I’m no rat!” He sounded mad.

“Okay, you asked. Remember that.”

And I started to tell him.

I told him about Gary and Walter and Kent and the beach and the other stuff. At first he tried to interrupt and ask questions but I told him to shut up and listen since he asked. So he sat and stared after about the first five minutes, I took almost a half-hour. Just stared at me with his mouth all wide open.

“So you’re a homo? And you get fucked in the ASS?”

“I guess. Yes, I definitely am, want me to go home?”

“No,” he seemed hesitant, “but I don’t want to hear any more.”

“OK, but you asked. And I still have to tell you about Paul.”

And I did, about meeting him, about going to his place in North Hollywood and the rape.

“And Paul,” I said, “Paul is the only guy I know who *doesn’t* want to do me. He won’t let me touch him, he won’t let me do anything with him. He lets me sleep with him because he’s afraid if he don’t I’ll run away again. And he’s the one guy I want the most on this whole earth, and I can’t have him.”

I’m not going to tell the rest because I’m not a rat either.

I still had a friend.

§ ELEANOR

In early December came a new problem. The Colonel once again had orders, and with Will at home, it would be a lot more difficult to get them postponed.

There are always choices. The Colonel could take retirement instead, he had his twenty in that year, but he had planned to stay at least another five, and possibly ten years. We expected promotion to full Colonel after his next assignment, and the economics of retirement alone would be greatly improved.

Plus he was a man of his duty.

He could ask for a cancellation on compassionate grounds anyway, but that would have meant airing the laundry with a vengeance, little prospect of working, and probably would have seriously impaired his career and chances for promotion.

He could ask for assignment in the US, but that too would have required explaining the reasons and would likely not be granted anyway.

He was ready to do it, would have done anything. This time I was the one that needed to face facts.

“He isn’t our boy now, Eleanor. And it will be a disaster if we try to take him with us. I’ll stay here if it will make *you* feel better, I’ll do anything you want me to, but it won’t solve any problems.”

We kept the orders secret and discussed the options in detail, each choice being assessed carefully for its impact on Will.

In time I knew what my husband needed, and what my son needed. I was not at all sure what I needed. I was afraid I could not bear it, was not ready to lose him.

With a little more time to think, I knew Will had *two* parents who would do anything, literally, for him.

But what of Paul?

I thought I knew, I thought the Colonel was right, Will had one father now, it was Paul, and though I could not think of one single reason he should or would take that burden, I was sure he would do it. I knew it in my heart. I knew Paul’s heart by this time.

The Colonel left the talking to me.

“Paul, we don’t have the right to ask this, but we are going to ask anyway.”

“If Will comes overseas with us, we think it will be a disaster, he’ll run away to God knows where and what in no time. Or he’ll get himself in so much trouble, well, we are afraid of what he might do.”

“The only thing that has got him settled down is being with you here. So we are going to ask you if you can possibly consider taking him on. We’ll understand if you can’t do this, it’s not your obligation. You’ve already done so much more than we could ever have asked.”

§ PAUL

She was being disingenuous. She knew before she asked and she wasn’t taking no for an answer. Because she knew I would do it. Because she was his mother and she thought it would save his life.

Much as I hated it, I thought she might be right about that, which left me no choice.

There were some problems that weren’t going to be easy to solve, though.

I couldn't keep him with me in the BOQ; I couldn't leave him alone for five days a week in North Hollywood. I couldn't stay in their home, they lived in base housing, and I wasn't entitled; they'd vacate when they moved. So that meant I had to find a place to live nearby, and pay for two apartments. They would help financially but even so, that wouldn't work.

I didn't want to give up my attachment in the city. I had friends there, though most of them didn't have room in their lives for a "couple" one of whom was sixteen. And friends or no a few had been more than a little interested in Will.

It came down to either look for a new job, live in North Hollywood full time or give up my place there and live here full time.

What finally decided me was Jesse. If I left the area, Will would lose Jesse, and I thought it too cruel a blow. I figured I could always move into the city later when Will was gone.

So with everything planned, we broke the news to Will.

Chapter Six

Dogma and Prophecy

§ WILL

I should have known my parents didn't want to keep me.

I mean, they told me I could come with them, they said it was my choice, but I could tell they wanted me to stay with Paul, didn't want me. So I figured fuck 'em, I can do without them, I can do without Paul if I have to, I'm old enough to take care of myself.

I didn't say anything, just "yeah, OK" and then I went out and got some cock. Christmas was coming and I wanted a lot of cock up my ass for a present. A couple days hitching around base and checking out the heads and I felt way better. But I cancelled a sleepover with Jesse, told Paul I was going anyway and split for the weekend.

I had a blast too. I went to Kent's and he had a friend George who had a boy too, a boy my age, and we did the whole weekend together, I got fucked by all three of them about a dozen times each. I snorted about a pound of coke, and went dancing all night Friday and Saturday.

I called Paul Sunday and told him I'd be home Monday or Tuesday. He started to give me his "what are you doing, are you being smart, where are you" shit but I just hung up.

Kent said I could go with George and his boy for a few days, and we took off and went to San Francisco, got loaded all the way up there in his car, and saw the sights. We stayed in a big suite at the Hyatt, the one with the big atrium in the middle. That was so bitchin'. George's friends came over and I did about five guys, once I was doing four or all five at once. It was OK, some of them were hot. But I still prefer guys one at a time. It was good to get my holes all filled up though. They gave me a lot of money too. I like being a whore sometimes, and I'm good at it.

Well, another kid who was whoring once told me you should enjoy your work.

And I even got tied up once, but it didn't scare me at all, not like with that asshole motherfucker Gary. If he was there I'd have killed him, no shit.

I'm not real sure what happened then, I was pretty fucked up, I think I fell someplace. My arm hurt like hell the next morning but George didn't want to take me to the hospital, so we put it up in an Ace bandage and I iced it and partied some more for another day, but it kept hurting a lot. He gave me some ludes and Valium and some other shit and the pain went away; but it kept coming back so I just did some more shit when it did.

I tried driving George's car but I almost hit a post and he made me get out. I gotta admit I was way too fucked up to drive.

After about four days we went back to L. A. again, I was kind of fucked up because I had to keep taking stuff and my arm was still swollen up pretty bad, and I didn't feel too good. So I had them drop me off near my house, George bitched about having to go all that far out of his way.

I can't remember what that boy's name was, but he had a nice dick.

So I went home, I was pretty high, not really feeling anything. It was great. I got home and nobody was there so I crashed in Paul's bed.

Then he got home or maybe mom did first, but I woke up and they were both there and they were talking to me but I really couldn't make out what they were saying because I was still flying pretty good.

§ ELEANOR

Again I was surprised at my capacity to feel pain. Perhaps I just gotten my hopes up so much with Paul being there and how positively Will had been responding.

They took one look at him in the Emergency Room and rushed him off to x-ray and then surgery. The doctors didn't say much to me, they were talking in that round-about way they have, not wanting to tell you the bad news.

We realized from that how bad it was.

§ WILL

They took me to the hospital about my arm, it was fractured and I ended up with an infection and some internal bleeding, so they had to do surgery; screws and pins or something and fix a vein or something; but I don't remember it, I just remember riding to the hospital.

When I came up after the surgery my arm hurt like a motherfucker, it was all in a cast with a big brace, and my head was pounding and Paul was there in a chair and

whaddaya know, so was my old man. It was like three a.m. and Paul was asleep but the Colonel had a lot of practice standing watch, he was awake.

He just looked at me, like I don't know, I don't remember him looking that way before, then he saw I was awake, and he changed he got all stern and sergeant major on me again. But he didn't yell, just asked me how I was. I asked him to get a nurse so I could get some shit for my pain, maybe Vicodan, which I think is what I got in San Francisco. They gave me a shot of morphine and valium or something and I started to go out again, but I was just kinda drifting, not yet all out of it. And then he did it again, the Colonel, he looked at me. Like he cared.

I woke up again and I still felt like a load of old crap and mom was there but Paul and the Colonel were gone. And I was confused because I was on a respirator. It didn't make sense since I had a problem with my arm. I was kinda dizzy for some reason and it didn't really make a lot of sense. I had a pretty bad fever and mom was looking really sad.

So I tried to talk but it didn't come out you can't with a respirator in your fuckin' throat. So she came over and hugged me, and when I did try to talk again, like sign things, she just shushed me, and hugged me again and sang to me like when I was a little boy. She was crying, so I didn't like it that much. I'm not a little kid anyway.

I sort of lost track of time for a while when I had the fever, I was kind of delirious sometimes, but Paul came and saw me then, and he didn't get mad at me, I was going to tell him to fuck off if he did, who needs him? But he was nice and he held me some too. When he thought I wasn't too fucked up to listen he told me some shit.

He said if I didn't want to come live with him I didn't have to, that my parents wanted me to go with them, that I didn't understand they were just trying to find the right thing for me. He said we could just take it slow again and do it all over if I wanted, figure out what I wanted to do, and they'd try to make it happen that way.

Sometimes when I was drifting off, I'd think about how the old man had been looking at me.

So it was like a week later before I got out of the hospital and you won't believe how weak I was. I could hardly move I had to ride in a wheelchair just to the car, and the Colonel carried me into the car and later into my room and put me in bed. That was weird, I felt like I was eight again with him carrying me. I don't like to say it, but that felt really good, he's a lot stronger than I realized, he didn't have any trouble carrying me. He smelled good too.

Then it turned out I was having trouble getting along without some pain killers, but Paul was a real shithead and kept them locked up in his room and would only give me one every once in a while. So I was hurting a lot of the time, but he said I needed to get used to using less, and then I did after a while, it didn't matter so much.

So Christmas time I was in the cast and was still kind of weak, they were still giving me a lot of antibiotics and Paul told me, he got his real serious voice, and told me I had to listen with my adult brains. As if.

Then he said that I could of died from the infection, it got in my blood and I could of died from it, or from bleeding too.

I don't know why he tells me stuff like that it just makes me feel bad and guilty. And I didn't care anyway.

Christmas wasn't so cool, but when I was a little stronger they all came in my room and asked me if they could talk about what I wanted to do. My dad said he'd retire if I wanted him to, we'd move to San Diego – they own a house there for when they retire – and take care of me.

But I didn't want that, I didn't care even if they really wanted me, I wanted to move out of home and live with Paul. Which is my way of showing you how stupid this all was, because I ended up telling them I wanted what they had planned in the first place.

Jesse came over to see me and I made everybody leave us alone. They told him what the adults had cooked up, basically that I fell somehow and was in the hospital, they left out all the other stuff, but I filled him in. They didn't know I'd told him all about the other stuff, so I told him all about this too.

I won't tell you the rest.

§ PAUL

I was feeling way over my head a lot of the time, and finally got in touch with a psychologist through a mutual friend, someone who wouldn't be shocked about men sleeping with boys and could give some good advice.

He had to consult some other colleagues, then got back to me and told me that if I was foolish enough to hang in with this kid I was asking for a wild ride. As if it hadn't already been wild enough.

"Paul, I cannot give you a diagnosis without examining the boy and testing him. But I've dealt with and talked to specialists who work with troubled kids enough to be able to give you a pretty good idea of what to expect."

"From everything you've said, the boy is very damaged, and to be honest with you, his prospects are not all that good. His age is working against him now, he's getting too established in his patterns of self destructive behavior. He's been running away for five or six years now; drug abuse almost as long, sexual acting out even longer."

"I expect you will see more episodes like this, he'll disappear for long periods and may only return when he has no alternative, Paul. That's if he survives. I think you can expect more suicidal gestures, too. He is at great risk for suicide."

"Is it inevitable? All that?"

He took a while to reflect.

"No, of course not, there's always the possibility of change, if he gets enough help and support, and finds reasons to change. But the chances are slim. He's very lost. I doubt if anyone can live up to his needs and expectations; and each time he's disappointed, his needs aren't met, he's getting a little worse, a little more hardened, a little more burned out."

“Some people do recover, heal in a way, as they get older, but he’s more likely to just go on to damage himself in more serious ways.”

“What is the best case scenario?”

“You’ve told me about his child-like regressions, and I think as you thought, those are a good sign. Awfully tentative, but about the only good sign I see. If he does those things, he is reliving his youth in a more positive way, reconnecting with his self. And if he can do it, he can become a saner person, more integrated. He might use it as a way to gain some impulse control, which he needs very badly.”

“If you can stick it out with him, that’s his best chance. A stable adult that he can relate to in any fashion would be his best chance. If he started to form relationships that were positive – and I doubt he’ll look for age mates but that would be best – it would help a lot.”

“But even if you begin to succeed and he sees you as a parental figure – and I think he does, though he keeps getting parenting and love and sex all confused – then his age is going to work against him as I said. He’ll push you away as he reaches the point where he wants to be independent. It’s just not a good situation.”

“What would you do if he were your patient?”

“Well, I don’t usually handle this kind of thing, but from my discussions with colleagues, I’d try putting him in intensive residential treatment. But he’d be hard to place with the running away and sexual acting out you’ve described. Not many places would take him. And it’s not all that likely that it would work, just a safer environment and maybe a chance to get inside him.”

“The truth is, we don’t have a lot of ways to deal with a kid like this, Paul. I’m sorry, but it’s true.”

“What if he were *your* child? What would you do?”

He was silent, then just shrugged his shoulders and spread his hands.

Well, what can you do? I asked myself over and over on the long drive back to the base.

I took Sunday off and went to church to see if God had any suggestions for me.

It took a little while, but I found I had no choice in the matter. He was mine, for better or worse. Once again, no explanation, I just knew it had to be.

He was recovering slowly, still very weak, it had been a close thing. He spent his days sleeping, eating, we got a physical therapist to come in and work with him for a few days and then he was well enough to go to the hospital clinic for therapy.

I told him I was going to have a serious conversation with him every day, and we were going to go over both the decision he’d made – to be sure it was what he wanted – and why he’d done such dangerous things when he ran away. And we did, covering the same ground many times, and not surprisingly he showed no insight, didn’t even recognize he was running away, just that he was bored and wanted to have some fun.

He got a smaller cast and as soon as he did he started to crawl into my bed again. He was too tired for trouble, though, and I decided to hold him as much as possible.

The holidays were past, he was getting stronger, and began doing schoolwork during his convalescence. He surprised me by attacking it with a vengeance, and despite years of school missed he was actually at sophomore level in most of his subjects. His mother and I took turns tutoring him.

He had changed though, he was a lot more silent. At first I took this as weakness, but as his strength grew he continued to be much less vocal, more pensive than I had seen him. I figure he was thinking, but didn't know if it was going to do him any good.

Then one night he got in bed with me and woke me up, in the dark, spooned up behind me and whispered in my ear. I could smell alcohol, he was not drunk but definitely loose. I was going to say something but he said "Shh...just listen, Paul."

"I don't know why I fuck up all the time, I really don't. I can't stop it. And I need to have a man sometimes, Paul, I know it makes you mad, but I need to do it." He teared up, "I know I hurt everybody, even the old man. I'm just a shit. I'm not good for anything except giving head."

"I love you, Paul. I know you don't love me, but I love you. I'm sorry I hurt you, I promise I won't run away again. If I ever do that again I'll kill myself, because I can't face you if I hurt you again."

Then he pulled up against my back, pulling himself against me, his arms wrapping tightly around me so I could not move. And laid his head on my shoulder and sighed as if to sleep.

So I spoke back in a whisper to him, facing away from him as I had no choice.

"Will, I do love you, I wouldn't be here if I didn't. You must be good for something more than sex, because I *never* have sex with you and I'm still here, right?" He didn't reply.

"And I want you to promise me that you will not try to hurt yourself, ever. That's the only thing you can do that would take you away from me, you know. Don't be afraid of coming back to me, whatever you do, I'll still love you.

"But if you kill yourself I'll be left with nothing. Think about that, please. Because I'm here 'till death do us part' – not as your husband, but I'm here anyway."

"And no parent wants to outlive their child, Will."

Hot tears ran across my shoulders.

§ WILL

I didn't ever thing of it this way before, but he finally explained why he didn't have sex with me so I could understand it.

In the middle of the night I woke up with my arms around Paul still, he was sound asleep. It was very dark, but I could see my dad standing there, looking at me, not

moving. I figured he'd be mad to see me in bed with Paul, but he was giving me that look again. He didn't know I was awake. And I don't think I was dreaming, I think he really did bend over me and kiss my forehead.

A long long time later on I learned that he'd been doing that for months, knew I slept with Paul, checked my bed every night, found me wherever I was and kissed me. I wouldn't have believed it if he told me then, though.

My dad's orders were for mid-February, so I helped to find our new apartment, in Twentynine Palms. It was a nice place, I had a room that was actually bigger than I'd had and Paul said I could have Jesse for a sleepover some time.

My parents left and I decided to say goodbye to them the right way and not make trouble for them. They didn't deserve all the shit I gave them.

And Paul asked me if I would want to go to regular high school, since he was around full time in the area. I thought about it but I didn't figure I'd fit in too good, I didn't belong there. Continuation works OK for me.

But my parents had told him he could get me a car when I was ready, I had my license now, and I drove Paul in on school days, but he wouldn't let me drive unless he was in the car. I snuck out once or twice and drove around the block when he was asleep, but I didn't really care that much.

I didn't have much to do during the days he worked. He did set me up with some stuff, I had a membership at a gym and he had me set up a workout schedule and I liked that a lot. I put on a lot of muscle.

There were a lot of guys at that gym, too. I got fucked a lot.

Paul knew. He asked me to tell him about each guy, what kind of person he was, why I was having sex with him, did I enjoy it really. That kind of took some of the fun out of it, and I got kind of more selective and didn't do so many guys. My heart wasn't in it so much, I guess. It was embarrassing because a lot of times I couldn't answer a single question about some of those guys. I didn't even know why I had sex with some of them.

Paul did some weird shit.

He asked me every single day if I was thinking about suicide, about hurting myself. He said he wanted the truth, so I told him, most days it was "yes."

If it was yes he'd ask me if I was planning to do it, and how, and when. At first that was just extremely weird, but after a while I got to like it, and he never got mad when I said "yes" to any of the questions. One day I was feeling really bad and thinking about it a lot and he just took the day off and sat with me.

Thing is, talking about it helped.

I decided after a while I was kind of bored and I started taking some classes in art at this little school. It wasn't like a credit thing or anything, you paid like \$15 and took a class for an hour or two each week; so I took a couple and was doing clay sculpture. And

I also did my continuation work really well, Paul told me I was going to graduate if I didn't watch out. Ha ha big joke.

When I could I slept over at Jesse's and we did that a lot more than we did before, because now I was around all the time, and it gave Paul a break where he didn't have to worry about me so much. Jesse's dad was starting to ask some questions about me living with Paul but I blew it off and Jesse played dumb. I think Jesse is cooler than he used to be, he got good at keeping secrets. We were getting to be real good friends.

But I didn't invite him to sleep over at our place because I thought his dad wouldn't like it, or would ask too many questions and have to get answers.

Funny though, his dad seemed to like me.

So a couple months went by and then Paul went and talked to Jesse's dad and took us for a camping trip.

My dad had a camper and he was thinking he'd sell it or store it but then he decided to let Paul use it, so it was pretty cool. Paul had his old boyfriend Dennis come out and we went to the Angel's Crest and camped in the national park for about a week. It was cool. I was glad Dennis was there again, I felt sort of bad that I made them break up. I didn't have any right to do that.

So I guess I want to tell about this one thing that happened on that trip, but it's got to stay secret. Paul would be mad at me.

On the way there, Jesse and me rode up in the space above the truck cab, in the double bed there, looking up the highway ahead. And he let me pull his pants down and fuck him. I mean, he didn't ask me to do it or anything, and I didn't ask him, I just started and he let it happen. That's the first time he ever got fucked, it was really tight. I used Cornhusker's Lotion for lube, Gary showed me that. Better than anything. After, he said it was fair considering how many times I'd sucked him and sat on his cock.

I think he liked it. He'd been calling me Homo Will so I started calling him Homo Reuven.

He laughed at that, he said "I'm not a homo like you, but you can do that again sometime."

Chapter Seven

Acts of the Apostle

§ WILL

So I was fucking around with Jesse some, but I didn't tell Paul.

I suppose he would say I should have told him, but I thought about all the things he had told me about having sex with men. I know he didn't think I listened, but you know I did, I really did. And I thought about all the questions he would ask me when I was fucking some other guy.

And I thought about Jesse and if that stuff fit.

First thing was 'age appropriate,' which means I didn't get off on it much, but Paul had no right to complain there after all the yelling about older guys. He must of told me a hundred thousand times, so – age appropriate.

Second he wasn't using me just to get off.

Well, maybe a little, because I know he's not gay, but it felt equal. Even though I was the one who got him off most of the time, he did whack me off pretty good sometimes. Now he lets me fuck him once in a while. He won't suck or kiss me, except he does kiss a little when we fuck face to face and I'm in him, but he thinks it's too nasty.

Actually, it was a rush because I got his cherry, which I never did with anybody before. About forty guys think they got mine, though I can't pull that off anymore, so come to think of it, maybe I didn't get his, maybe he just pretended. But I don't think so!

Anyway, it was an equal to equal thing, like Paul was always telling me it needs to be.

Next, Jesse is a nice person who treated me OK, he could be a little prick sometimes but he wasn't too bad mostly. He never made fun of me for being a homo, he'd joke sometimes but it was just goofing, not mean. He never tried to hurt me or say things to me like some guys did.

Next thing, we do a lot of healthy things instead of just sex and drugs and partying. We didn't do any drugs in fact. We didn't even do pot together. We play

basketball and now tennis a lot and do board games and models but he laughs at me when I want to do my coloring or pottery. But that's one of the things Paul told me I had to look for.

And then the last thing, I just feel good about doing it. It wasn't as much fun as some of the guys I've taken up my ass, he isn't strong and big and hairy, so that part like I said wasn't so good. But I think he is the first young person I could remember that I felt safe with. Not like he'd protect me, but like I didn't need protecting.

So after I thought all through it, I decided it was OK. I started seeing him after school most days and most days we'd get off.

And I decided Paul didn't need to know about that.

§ PAUL

That spring we went camping often. The camper was a real treat, and though my schedule meant we couldn't take Jesse along most of the time, it was a very good thing for Will and I to spend time out in nature. It really did have a calming effect.

We had some very long talks, he loosened up when we were out in the middle of the forest, or at some seacoast park; and midweek most campgrounds were not crowded. We spent many hours, talking or just experiencing the serenity together, bonding after a fashion in a place where he had much less distraction, less access to sex. I was never sure though, if there was an interested male within a mile, I thought he'd probably find him.

In April we went further up north, we were wearing windbreakers and wide-brimmed hats, walking through a Redwood forest, a fine mist falling about us, not a cold day though. We were in a surreal space, surrounded by mist and fog and old trees, so high you couldn't see the tops; we couldn't see more than fifty feet, could not hear another sound except a slow stream burbling a little somewhere in the fog. He leaned against me, clinging, and tears rolled slowly down his face.

"What's up, Will?"

"Nothin'. I'm just happy here with you."

I'd learned that when things seemed best, I could expect an eruption and trouble to quickly follow. I got back with my psychologist friend – who said that is a common pattern with disturbed kids, they don't feel comfortable when their environment is not chaotic – and I decided to get him into therapy.

Easier said than done. We had to find someone nearby, who would be comfortable with this kid and wouldn't overreact to his sex life or the peculiarities of, for example, our sleeping arrangements.

But with some networking we found a child psychiatrist in Palm Springs (yes, it cost an arm and a leg), and I went to meet with him. He wasn't willing to take Will on as a solo act though, he felt it would work much better if we did 'family' therapy together.

And he pointed out that it was unlikely that Will would open up for quite a while in individual therapy. And he was clear he wasn't going to be alone in a room with Will.

So I told him we were going to go to talk with a shrink once a week, the two of us, and he didn't really make a fuss, I was surprised.

What I discovered was, going to therapy hurts.

We'd be there, he'd dredge up a little shit – hardly anything it seemed to me given all the shit he had dumped on him over the years – and he'd be good and make some progress in the session, seem to get some insight or just say things he had not been able to articulate before. Then right afterward he'd throw some kind of a fit, yelling at me over something insignificant, getting loaded, disappearing for a night, breaking something, usually one of his clay sculptures.

I pointed this out in session, and he denied it, but the doc told him point blank that it was probably true, and understandable and OK if he could just find a different way to channel it, break something that didn't matter, work out the pain and energy. He sulked and said it was all bullshit.

The doc said to me on the phone that this was a predictable behavior for disturbed kids. They didn't recognize the pain but it was there and therapy brought it out. If he'd been ten or eleven, I'd have probably have had to put him into a restraint hold, but this 'boy' was bigger and probably stronger than me.

I scheduled a gym workout for right after each of our sessions, as soon as we could get back, and he went fast and furious most times, ending up so drained I had to help him out of the car and into bed.

The teddy bear was in bed with us pretty often, I thought that was good.

In fact all his workouts had definitely had an impact on his body; he'd had another growth spurt too. He was now about pushing six feet tall and one eighty-five or so, and all muscle.

He was looking almost twentyish now. He wasn't fashion model good looking; but he looked athletic and his body was taught, his features, fine and strong. A lot of heads turned when he went by.

One thing was missing – he did not project a sense of mature sexuality; he still came across as a wild child, exaggerated yet immature in his sexuality. You could have mistaken it for femininity, but it really wasn't, it was childlike.

I thought that this growth might help. The real chicken hawks were going to start to pass him by, and if he was getting involved with older men, at least they were men looking for men, albeit young ones. I don't think *he* saw the difference, didn't realize he was losing his boyish nature at least in some ways.

The flip side, it was funny to see him and little Jesse together, playing like colts. Whenever he was with Jesse he seemed so very much more like sixteen or even younger, though the physical contrast was comical; he had at least eight inches and fifty pounds on Jesse. Jesse was quite the little scrapper, more naturally aggressive than Will and I came to see he was the leader in their duo, size notwithstanding.

All through the spring he made a lot of progress, in therapy, in school, at the gym, with his art, with having a friend. Not that there weren't problems, moments of acting out. But it was the best and longest time we'd had without a crisis.

His school told me there was a new law that allowed him to take a test and get a "Certificate of Proficiency" that would be legally accepted as a high school diploma, much better than a GED. He would not have to go to school, or he could go to college with it. Or reenter high school. They said given his advances and intelligence it was an option to consider.

In retrospect it was probably a mistake, I should have really tried to delay his maturation, kept him a kid as long as possible to give him more time to heal, but hindsight is twenty-twenty. At the time we thought it would be a good thing for him. But he was not ready.

§ WILL

I was pretty bored a lot of the time though Paul was always finding something to keep me busy. I figured the least I could do was keep house for him; I had plenty of spare time, so I did the cooking, cleaning, laundry, and shopping. Sometimes I'd bring the bag boy home with me, though.

I was glad not to be using drugs so much, and I was having less sex but seemed to be enjoying it more. And I was getting to like Jesse a lot.

So then at continuation they told me I should take the High School Proficiency Test. The nearest Junior College was in Palm Desert, but there were some UC Extension courses in Yucca Valley, and I found out I could take some courses on base, through the education center there, so I took the test and passed it and I didn't have to go to school anymore. I kept up my art classes though.

Once I took the test though, I sort of thought what I really wanted to do was go to high school with Jesse. But I figured that was stupid, I wasn't a kid anymore, and I wouldn't fit in there.

Me and Jesse weren't having much sex anymore, he got tired of it and said he was into girls, but he did like to get fucked or blown once in a while. I could feel him slipping away though.

I needed a car so I could go to school in Yucca Valley, so Paul called up my parents and we went out and got me a car, not so cool, it was a '71 Maverick, but it was wheels, and I was free.

One weekend I talked Jesse into going into L. A. with me. His folks thought he'd be at Paul's but we didn't lie, told them he'd be sleeping over with me. And that was true. I left a note for Paul.

Kent liked Jesse, and I guess I was getting too old for him, he liked smaller kids. Jesse was a little bigger than when I first met him, but not much. We partied and we told Jesse it was his turn to sleep with Kent, and he did, but Kent paid him for it. I could hear them in there grunting away. Kent said the best thing was Jesse had red pubes, it was a turn on.

I figured Paul was going to be mad, but he told me that I could always come back to him so I gave him a chance and went back.

He was patient until I told him Jesse was with me. I didn't tell him about Kent fucking Jesse or anything, though. I'm not a rat, besides he would just have gotten mad at me.

So he went and talked to Jesse, but Jesse was cool he wouldn't rat me out and we kept things quiet, but Paul said if that ever happened again he'd have to tell Jesse's dad about it.

A few days later I talked to Paul and I asked him why a straight guy would get fucked, or why he would like it.

He told me the body parts were all the same, did it feel good physically when a guy fucked me?

Fuck yeah.

So he said the only difference was attitude, and if you got past that, a straight guy would enjoy the physical sensations the same. But I think he started to wonder why I asked that question and he asked me did I have any particular straight guy in mind when I asked? I dodged it.

So I thought about all that and Jesse wasn't too cool with me anyway, he thought Kent was kinda sick, and I figured he meant I was kinda sick. And I wasn't liking school all that much, and I thought about it and decided it was time to leave.

I kept my promise, I didn't run away, I left Paul a note and told him I figured it was time for me to finish growing up and not to worry about me, and I'd call him. I tossed out my coloring books.

Then I went over to Jesse's and I told him what I was going to do, and gave him the model we made. I asked him if I could fuck him goodbye. It was great, I fucked him for two hours, he kissed me as much as I wanted and told me I was jerk, called me David and said he'd miss me. Then I packed up some stuff in my car and took off for San Francisco. That place was fun.

L. A. sucks.

§ PAUL

It is just amazing to me how many times I could fail to see the obvious. But once the uproar died down, the missing persons report made, filed, and forgotten by the police, his folks notified, I realized there was nothing to be done.

Don't get me wrong, I was deathly afraid of what he would do, knew he wasn't going to make a good life for himself. My heart was so heavy. I expected any day to hear from a hospital – or a morgue. But in the end he was too big and too grown up and too disturbed to let me parent him. He was making his way in the world and life as best he knew how, and it was his life to make, to win, to lose.

I was lonely. I missed him.

I stayed in touch with Eleanor and the Colonel. They took it heavily too, but they were resigned to it by this time, had thrown in the towel years before, really. Not that they had given up caring, just given up feeling they could do anything about it.

He took the teddy bear with him.

Over the next six months he sent me a couple of postcards, one phone call when I was home though he said he'd called a number of times but no one answered. He didn't say where he was, just said he wasn't in L. A. He said he had a job, but wouldn't talk about it, I figured he was hustling again. Was not obviously drugged up when we talked but his voice was very remote, very disconnected. He sounded dead. I reminded him he could come home, that I would always love him.

At the seven month mark, a letter arrived in the mail from the Police department in Redwood City, California saying his car had been towed and was impounded for expired plates, illegal parking and abandonment. The car was registered in my name, as he was under eighteen, but I learned that it had been seriously damaged, nearly totaled, and told them to sell it for salvage and paid the back storage charges. They told me it appeared abandoned; there had been no personal effects in the car.

§ ELEANOR

If it was bad for me, it was crushing for the Colonel. He retreated from me, buried himself in work.

It wasn't a problem logically to understand. The facts were unpleasant, but there was no reason to feel guilty. Had Will come with us, the result would likely have been the same, and arguably worse. But emotionally it was more than he could bear. He had failed his duty to his son, and duty really was what made him a man in the first place.

I wanted to talk with him, support him, and have him support me. In fact, I was almost as crushed. I knew if we talked it out, it would help.

We had done the right thing, the only thing we could do. We were powerless, we loved him, we tried. All those things matter, all those things should have carried us through. If only we could have talked about it.

Spain became a gloomy place for a long time. I began to think of the prospect of leaving the Corps, of broaching the topic of retirement. After twenty-one years I was thinking about a change. I thought about living again in Boston being close to my family.

I thought about leaving my husband.

§ PAUL

I got a call from Eleanor, it had been almost eight months since he left, he was seventeen now, and he had asked if they could buy him a ticket to Spain so he could visit. She was skeptical, didn't want to send him the money because she figured he'd not buy a ticket, and asked if she could send it to me instead.

I agreed readily. If he came to see me we could go buy a ticket and I'd put him on the plane myself.

He didn't call for a month, then he was pissed off that I wouldn't just send him the money, I decided on honesty, told him we wanted to trust him but couldn't see that it was a smart thing to do. Trust requires judgment, has to be earned. I said I'd be happy to meet him at the airport or he could come to my place and we'd go to LAX together. That's when he told me he was in San Francisco.

"Why don't you come down here, or if you won't flake out on me, I could come up there to see you, I'd like to see you again, Will." I meant that.

"Yeah, well." He didn't sound interested. "It would just be better if you could send the money, that's all."

"Will, I can't do that, I already explained why."

"FORGET IT, just fuckin' keep the damn money!" and he hung up.

Eleanor said to hang on to the money, she thought I'd hear from him again. I did, about a week later.

"So when are you gonna come up here and give me my money?"

The words were harsh but the tone was changed; it was a little boy talking. He was pleading with me.

I met him five days later. He asked me to pick him up on a street corner in downtown, and he was there, waiting in the rain. When he got in the car I thought I was prepared for anything, but I was wrong.

I took one look at him, and drove to a nearby diner. He sat at a booth across from me, hands dirty, nails broken. His clothes, always impeccable, were soiled, torn, and stank, as did he. His eyes were sunken, his skin sallow, and he could not sit still, didn't want food but looked so emaciated I demanded he order something. He must have lost thirty pounds since I'd last seen him. He wouldn't look in my eyes.

At first I thought I'd be gentle, but then I decided to be compassionate and honest instead.

"You look like shit, Will. You look like you need a lot of help."

I expected anger, I expected FUCK YOU! and a walkout.

He stared at his hands, silent, picked up his coffee, hand shaking badly. He surprised me. "Yeah, I do." He said it matter of factly then he looked up at me and grinned.

"But I always need a lot of help and there ain't no one can help me."

—

Thing with Will is, you never know how it's going to go, you have to learn to just flow it. He let me clean him up a little, took him to my hotel and showered and shaved (he still didn't need it much, though) and I got him some clean clothes, and he crashed for almost two days solid.

He wouldn't tell me about his life, but it wasn't too hard to guess, I took him to the Haight-Ashbury free clinic; it was obvious he was a regular there, they gave him antibiotics, told him he needed to go in the hospital, but he said no fucking way.

Instead we went to the Passport Office, then the airport and I put him on a flight for Spain. I told him I loved him, hoped he'd stay with his folks long enough to get his life together.

§ WILL

There's not much point in telling about San Francisco, is there?

I mean you can figure out I was pretty much tricking for nothing, man they give it away there, though being young I got a lot of dick. That was nice. But nobody there seemed to be into keeping me, so I was pretty much sleeping with guys for a place to sleep.

I learned a lot about whoring, though. I'd gotten money before, but I never went out looking for it, and I found out a lot of stuff I hadn't known. I was really lucky I didn't get my ass in a major jam, but some of the guys who were doing it were OK, they clued me in on some shit, and I wasn't totally stupid, I listened sometimes.

I had been up on Polk Street for three days, with a few tricks, but it wasn't much fun, to be honest. Most of the guys just wanted a quick blow job or whatever, and they wanted to do it in the car, and weren't paying all that much. Nobody wanted to take me home, fuck me right, kiss me, or anything. And San Francisco was expensive.

I had to sleep in the park the previous night, and I was kinda dirty and my backpack had got stolen. So I was kind of drowsy, and it was raining a little bit so I was hanging out in the doorway to a closed store, it was late and wet and cold. So I wasn't really paying attention and this guy sort of snuck up on me.

"Hey you're new here, kid."

I was startled and I turned really quick. He wasn't very old, maybe a few years older than me, but big, about six-two and heavy. Not fat, not buffed out, but big. He had his hair cut kinda strange, but when I learned his name I saw it fit. Black hair, brown eyes, he was lookin' at me and I wasn't comfortable the way he did it.

"Yeah, so what?" I was pretty suspicious about what this guy wanted, he looked dangerous.

"What's your name? I'm Wulfie."

"Cool, I'm Will." We shook, hip style because he wasn't much older than me. I said cool but I wasn't so sure he was cool.

"So you ain't too used to tricking, huh?" He shook out a cigarette and offered me one. I shook my head no, I didn't want to owe him anything. I didn't answer.

"I said you ain't been doing this much up until now, right?" I just looked at him, he laughed "You don't got to be afraid of me, kid. I'm just hustling too, you're not much competition for me though. You're pretty but that don't go too far if you make mistakes."

“What do you mean, mistakes?”

“I mean, going the wrong places with the wrong guys for the wrong money.”

“Huh?”

“Let’s get some coffee, kid, I’ll pay for it if you don’t got money.”

“Well, uh – “

“Oh, hey, don’t worry, you won’t miss any tricks here, it’s dead tonight, nobody be around here unless you want somebody dangerous to pick you up. Might see a psycho, but no good ones tonight. It’s too late and it’s too wet. I was just heading home myself when I saw you.”

I was pretty confused, but then I decided to go with him and see if he knew something I needed to know. So we went to Denny’s and had coffee.

“So what’s your story, kid? Run away from home? Looking for love?”

“What’s yours, nosy?” I decided not to take any shit off him.

He laughed. “Yeh, serve me right. Let me start again.”

“I figure you are about sixteen, queer and horny, and daddy tossed you out.” He looked up. “I could be wrong, but it’s something like that. And you figure you need money and you can just kill two birds with one stone, get laid and paid all nice and neat.”

“Sometimes it works that way, but it’s not as nice as you’re thinking, Will. I been doing this since I was fourteen, and I like to look out for new boys, help ‘em keep out of trouble. Because new kids never know how much trouble they can get into out here.”

“So that’s all, I’m just killing time and trying to help out a bit, ‘cause I don’t want you to get what I got.”

“OK, so what happened to you?”

“Psychos. You gotta watch out for them. Nice as hell and then they get a chance and hurt you bad.”

“I know all about that.” I was thinking of Greg and his van.

“Oh, yeah? Maybe you met one, but you sure didn’t know what you was doing out there tonight, man you looked like a cherry ready to pluck and let me tell you, never even TALK to them leather daddies like you were. They’ll rip you a new asshole. Let me tell you about my big mistake, then you judge.”

“I had only been hustling for a couple months like you, I didn’t know shit about it.”

“There were a couple of pros who were buddies, a blonde guy named Alan and Trey, a black guy, that were kind of looking out for me, they were sweet guys. I was fourteen they were maybe seventeen. I still wasn’t real good at picking out the psychos. One of them got Trey later, he got killed by one.” He looked right in my eyes.

“Well, one night neither of them were around and I got picked up by this guy dressed in all leather. They had both warned me about that type but I was a little smart ass, I figured that I could handle myself. I was so fucken smart. Just like you.”

I started to say something, but he interrupted. “Never mind,” he waved me to shut up, “maybe you are smart and then maybe you ain’t and maybe you should listen and figure out for yourself what you need to know.”

So I did. I shut up and listened. I was listening real good, I started to believe him.

“When I told him that I wasn’t into doing anything that was gonna hurt he just laughed, says the leather is just like a costume for when he goes out. Stupid me, I believed him.”

“We go back to his place and everything starts out all nice and sweet, he got me a drink, kisses me, turns out the lights and put on some music. When we end up in bed, he asks me can he tie me to the bed.”

“Well, back then I didn’t know the hustler’s code but you don’t get that excuse, young Will. You better remember this one: *always* be able to leave, ‘cause you never know when someone’s gonna turn on you.”

“Since I had never had that done before, didn’t know no better, I told him yes. Once he got me tied to the bed and couldn’t get away, he totally changed. He got *very* rough. He did everything possible, including have his friends come over and work me over.”

“Sunday night he drops me off at the door to a hospital emergency room and drove away. Me, I had six broken fingers, two fractures in one arm, one in the other, a cracked vertebrae, a fractured jaw, a broken wrist and about forty cuts and burns. I ended up in the hospital for three fucken weeks.”

“So I got to be a *real* careful about who picks me up, and you better wise up too. Wanna see some scars?”

He leaned back, rolled up his arm, and showed me a surgery scar on his forearm.

So I just rolled up my sleeve and showed him mine.

He laughed real good. That’s when I figured we’d be buddies. He let me crash at his place that night, and we had pretty good sex too. Too bad he was so young.

Still, he was right that San Francisco was not a good place to whore. Way too much competition and dangerous tricks.

It was good to have a friend, but he disappeared from time to time, and I hadn’t seen him for about a month.

I thought Haight-Ash would be cool, and I did find a lot of guys to hang out with and drugs, but the big days there where you could always find a place to crash were over. The cops would come along and roust you out if you slept in the parks or whatever. So I was not in such good shape when I got together with Paul.

§ ELEANOR

When he got off the plane I was frightened by his appearance, but did what a mother will do. I tried to clean him up and fatten him up, figuring his sad state was the result of lack of food. But within a few days I began to think it was something more.

And there was the matter of his eyes, which were empty.

And of course, that was part of it. But his appetite was poor, and he began to get weaker rather than stronger.

At the end of the second week, we took him to the base hospital. He had hepatitis past the acute phase. They kept him two weeks in the convalescent ward. He was very weak, when they discharged him to us. The only treatment, they told us, was rest, and recovery could take weeks or months.

The Colonel could not bring himself to display any real emotions to him. I don't know whether it was a matter of being afraid to invest in him again, or fear of rejection, or continued discomfort with his difficult son, or fear it might provoke more misbehavior.

Three weeks later he was much stronger, and had put on a bit of weight.

He disappeared then, left no note.

§ WILL

I knew as soon as I was feeling better I needed to get out of there, my folks – well, I don't know if Mom maybe did want me this time, but I wasn't a kid, and I'd never make my dad happy, so I had to leave.

I whored a little along the beaches in Spain, learned some more Spanish, *Yo quiero chupar tu pinga*. Means I want to blow you.

I stayed in a couple different towns, Estepona, Fuengirola, Malaga, Nerja. Malaga was the biggest and the best in terms of my business, but Nerja was small and more like a little fishing village, which meant not much business but I liked it anyway.

The beaches were soft and sandy and warm and white. When I got there, it was still winter so it was rainy and cold once in a while, but the Mediterranean is warm and the weather was usually pretty good. Even in the winter they had a lot of tourists there, from Germany mostly but all over.

I had gained back some weight, didn't look so bad, so I got to practice my deutsch a little. Deutsch is German for German.

Lek mine shwantz. Means suck my dick. I can't spell it right though. German is hard to spell. I learned like fourteen different words for sausage; wonder why? Get a clue. Every goddam German used a new name for it.

It helps that I don't look like a homo, not nelly or anything, but mostly with the customers, the cops don't care, and some of the johns want you to be a pretty little femboy, but shit, that ain't me. Gotta work with what you got.

The hills behind the beaches were great, I liked to sit on the beach and read a book, and watch those clear blue warm waves wash up until afternoons. Then I'd turn around and look up at the hills while the sun went down, all red behind me and turning the hills all pink and yellow. And the towns looked really cool, the streets winding and the roads paved in stones and these little whitewashed stucco houses built up along the sides of the hills and cliffs. So at sundown they were like a movie screen for the sunset.

The food was cheap if you ate in the local *tapas* and it was so good! I never thought I'd like grilled sardines, but man I could get into them. And the rest of the seafood was flopping fresh; just about everything they served was fresh, nothing from packages. I could do without the goat cheese, though. But the salads were fresh, everything tasted great and it was cheap.

Once in a while, when I was flush or a trick wanted to go, I'd take a day off whoring and hike around the hills, looking at the olive and fruit orchards and goats and the kids who weren't whoring, at least right then. Long walks in the hills were great, the roads and orchards were lined with little stone walls, the views were dreamy and quiet. It made me think of the trips with Paul in the state parks when we were camping.

It was a good place, I got relaxed there, I got over the hepatitis pretty quick.

It wasn't America, for sure. But that was good, America sucked.

If you had to you could sleep on the beach, but I had money and there were some really cheap places that weren't too shitty to imagine living in. It was way better than a park in fucking San Francisco, I'll tell you that. I never had to sleep on the beach after that first week. I couldn't afford places with a view or private bathroom but shit, I didn't care about that, I just wanted a place to flop, a place I could sit and be alone once in a while.

And sitting on the beach every day was kind of necessary for my business, because when you work the tourist trade you usually don't get regulars. Regulars are the best for anybody who whores, they pay pretty good and take a lot less effort. They also tend to give you gifts and food and shit you don't ever get from one-timers. Of course, you gotta look good, you can't look streety for that kind of gig, if you look cheap and dirty that's a turn on for some of them but even they don't want you around once they get off.

Lots of them just wanted a quickie or one night, but some of them wanted to hook up for a week while they were there. That was the ideal thing, you didn't have to go out looking for a whole week, sometimes two, you could relax, they'd feed you the whole time, take you places maybe. You got to clean up in big hotel bathrooms and use their shampoo and shit. And once they figured out I knew how to act, they'd take me to restaurants and gay bars and dance clubs. The only thing, they weren't into drugs much, too clean those Germans.

The German tourists liked what I had to sell. Being American went over big with them; they were fascinated with my cock because I was cut. A teenaged American boy was some kind of fantasy for a lot of them. One of them told me he thought they were working out their guilt about Jews by sucking cut cocks, but I think he was kidding. I

wondered if I should lie, tell them I was Jewish, if they'd pay more for it. I got the right hair and eyes for it, but my nose isn't big.

So I'd look young as possible and wear American clothes and sewed an American flag to my backpack. I'd sit out all day in the sun, once I got a tan worked up and wouldn't burn, just sit there in swim trunks and wait for business. At first I wore those little bikini bottom things that the Europeans wore, and they liked it but after a while I found it was best to avoid European swimwear. My advantage was looking American, so I did that. Levis were good, too. Cutoffs or not, they worked, and I'd see some guys just get hard looking at me in wet Levis.

I could pull down \$25 or \$50 every day I whored, and that was pretty good money in Spain, let me tell you. And I didn't have to do a bunch of guys each day, I just did if I wanted more money or more sex. If I got a week long tourist it was \$150 or more for the week, and no work, just more sex which was fine with me.

I didn't get much competition, mostly little Spanish boys, up to about fourteen, not many guys my age and no other Americans. I got paid best of all the whores, well, of the teenaged ones, sometimes they'd pay the little boys a lot.

The little boys, the thing that freaked me out was their mothers would make the deals with the tourists for the young ones. I was pretty surprised about that. But I guess they didn't think it was such a big deal, and they needed the money. And one of the little boys told me – well, I think this is what he said, my Spanish wasn't that good – that his mom made sure they weren't bad guys, and that he got paid enough, so maybe that was OK. Still pretty weird.

I'd have been worried if there were a lot of Spanish guys my age, I'd learned that hustlers in a lot of places would beat you up for being higher paid, try to cut you up, scar your face, ruin your looks to cut your prices, get you fewer tricks, or just run you off. Or for fun. I saw that in San Francisco a little. And later Italy.

But that didn't happen in Spain, and I found out that the men were either into the young ones, or into me, but usually not both. I did have one guy pay four of us to do a daisy chain with him and that was OK, but the oldest other boy was only thirteen, and I wouldn't do anything with the ten year old. That's sick, I coulda smacked that guy for getting that kid into it. I should have got more money for that one anyway. I felt like busting that guy up.

It kind of made me appreciate my parents more. At least my folks never pimped me out.

Most of the Germans were really there for the beaches, or for the little ones, probably why there weren't more guys my age around. One guy said he preferred guys like me but did the boys if there wasn't anyone older. Anyhow, enough of them liked me.

This was actually the best whoring I ever did, all things considered, the best paid and safest anyway. And there were a few women and couples, and I thought it was pretty kinky, some of the stuff they wanted, but it paid really well. I fucked some of the women, but it was all business. I didn't give no discounts for it, that's for sure. Actually I never liked three ways, it's too lonely 'cause usually it's two people who are into each other an

there you are, like an animated dildo, you're not really part of the party. Lonely. I like to get fucked by guys who like me, not ... ah shit.

I would not let anyone tie me up, though. Wulfie taught me that lesson real well. Not that many guys suggested it, but they were willing to pay a lot. I turned down a lot of *pesetas* that way. I did tie some of them up, though, if that's what they wanted.

One guy was pretty sweet, he treated me like his son, I was thinking he wanted me to go to Germany with him, but even if he did, I wasn't into that any more. I wanted to be my own man. I didn't mind sex, or selling it, but I am not a kid anymore. Well, I guess if he had really offered I might have done it, given that another try. I got a lot of sex but not all that much loving on the beaches.

I figured I'd kick off drugs so much for a while, so if a customer had some pot or something that was cool, and I did find one guy who traded me a bottle of reds for a couple of blowjobs, but that was about it. Saved a lot of money too. And like I said, the Germans weren't into drugs that much.

I'll tell you this one thing, though. Peppermint schnapps is just a fucking stupid thing to drink.

The Spanish cops didn't care too much about me, I made sure I had my passport, my dependent ID card and I was almost eighteen anyway. As long as I kept nice clean clothes on and wasn't loaded in town, they didn't look twice, and one that did, well he got paid off in what I had to trade.

Funny uniforms, but uniforms are always a turn on.

When I didn't get a tourist to fuck me I'd go to that cop, his name was Pietro, that means Peter, though maybe he lied. We did it maybe ten times. He was nice to me. It was just quickies wherever, except one time we went to my flop. But he was a pretty cool guy, married and he showed me pictures of his kids. At first I thought maybe he wanted me to do it with them, but he was just showing them off. Maybe he was telling me he wasn't queer. I think I liked the times with him about the best of all the tricks I had there, he would hold me and kiss me and call his *putita*, so it sounds kind of like a nickname, and that's how it felt, little whore. Anyway, I needed his dick and he would usually feed me or give me a few *pesetas*.

Actually, when I think about it, he was maybe the best one, because he was about the only freebie I did. Well, there was one of the Spanish boys who was fourteen or maybe thirteen and he wanted me to do him, and I thought he was maybe a little like I was when I was young. So I fucked him as good as I could. Not 'cause I wanted it but because he needed it.

But it got hot and crowded, and I was bored, so I figured I'd try out the Riviera, but it was kind of a bust, they had a lot of pretty boys there and I didn't stack up so good, wasn't hot enough for the rich guys, and the others, well, didn't have a pot to piss and it was also hot and crowded. And everything was really expensive, Spain was much nicer.

So I went on to Italy, and found Rome was a bad place to be, they don't like competition there, and they get mean about it. The cops picked me up hitching and they didn't like that at all. All of Italy sucked, pretty much. I was lucky I didn't get beat up

more, they wanted me to move on, for sure. I headed back to Spain, not too beat up, I was lucky, but broke, and whored on the beach for a while, while I healed up.

Then I met a couple *companeros* who clued me in, and I whored real hard for a while, and saved up my money, and split to Amsterdam. Legal drugs. And I was eighteen.

Chapter Eight

The Blessing of the Multitude

§ WILL

A-dam was the turning point for my life. I know that now, I didn't know it then, of course.

It was very cool, though it had its bad parts. It was cold and wet a lot of time, and I couldn't make as much whoring, but enough, mostly to American tourists who liked boys.

I cleaned up my act so I could look sixteen again, wore clothes too big for me, got my hair cut so my head looked bigger, shaved real often though that wasn't so important since I still couldn't grow a beard, used eye drops to get rid of toker's red. Worked on making my expressions real innocent. This German girl roommate helped me make my eyelashes look longer, you can use mascara, they even make clear mascara so it isn't so obvious. She like me, I fucked her sometimes. I lost my tan and that helped, otherwise they thought maybe I was Spanish or Portuguese.

Then the demand soared, though you wouldn't believe how many of them were disappointed I wasn't Dutch. Black hair and eyes, and they wanted me to be Dutch.

I thought about dying my hair blond, and talking with an accent. And a lot of them wanted me to set them up with Dutch boys or do three ways with one. I guess it was a let down to come all that way and have to have sex with an American hustler, but it didn't stop them. I met a couple Dutch boys who were into it once in a while, they didn't trick for a living but they'd do it for some extra money. They were straight, both of them. When I needed them we made *veel geld* (lots of bucks, but they call them guilders) when we did a threeway for some guy. Most of the other guys whoring were from Europe but not Dutch. Italians and Greeks a lot, some more Spanish, Portuguese. One Irish kid, he had red hair and did pretty good. But mostly I stood out and the competition wasn't too bad.

There's always somebody who thinks a pretty, clean, American dick was the best.

The drugs and places to crash were everywhere. They called us street boys, *straatbengel*, but I never saw anybody there who had to live on the street really. You were supposed to have work permits and visas, and apartments were expensive if you wanted to be official and nice, but you didn't really have to do any of that crap if you weren't too picky. I mean, A-dam is the only place I know where a whore needs a work permit, but none of the boys had them, that was for the legal brothels, and I don't think they had boys there. There were lots of squats, and big shared flats where the guys didn't care about that if you came up with the rent. Those were mostly immigrant workers, not Dutch, some Turks and people from the poor European countries, they didn't speak English much.

I lived with about eight guys in a two room flat for a while, it was cheap and sometimes I paid in trade, got a little money from one or another of my roommates. Most of them were straight but not too picky. Horny guys don't care all that much if you're putting out and they don't have a girl, but a lot of them did, the sex was everywhere.

A-dam was a very fine place; this was kind of what I expected in San Francisco.

And Drugs! Mostly it was pot, hash, killer hash, sometimes it was laced with opium, and the H was fine, easy to get, clean. The junkies there were a lot better off than anyplace else I'd ever seen. I think the government gave it to them for discount, or something.

I'm not a junkie, never have been, I chipped a little but never got really into that stuff, still it was nice once in a while.

You know the worst addiction I had is cigarettes. The Spanish stuff was like smoking cow turds. I always swiped packs from the Americans when I slept with them if they smoked. If I could get there I'd go to the NATO commissary using my dependent ID when they were real busy so they didn't take time to check to see it had expired. I'd buy cartons of them there and sell them on the streets. I made like \$2 a pack that way. Can't do that in the states, dependents can't buy cigarettes, but at sixteen in the Netherlands you can and commissary would sell them to me. I stopped trying though because I figured they'd catch me. Also I bought condoms there, they have them at the checkout stands on most bases, the NATO facility was the same. They were better and lots cheaper than what you got at the local places and some of the *straatbengel* liked to have them if they could get their tricks to use em. Depends though.

Personally, I preferred the closer contact and I love sperm, but I tried to do it that way too because after the hepatitis I was kind of trying not to get too much V. D. And I was worried I'd give it somebody until I met a trick who was a doctor and asked him, and said probably not if I was all better. But he didn't take a chance, wouldn't even kiss me. So I figured I shouldn't take chances either.

They had a free clinic and I got syph in my throat and my ass once or twice. Most guys wanted to blow me or fuck me, and I preferred getting fucked, it paid better and I liked it better. Giving BJ's was fine too and it paid pretty good. If you convinced a guy you were straight, say you won't do it, sometimes they up the pay until you give in.

Anyhow, you just go into these coffeeshouses and drink this incredible coffee, so strong it wired you so much you needed some hash just to keep from shaking. And they sold hash right there, and you could smoke it there legally. And somebody was always

buying, I didn't even have to put out for it most of the time. Once in a while I bought, not often.

It was warm and steamy and friendly and quiet, you could overlook the gloomy streets and you didn't have to feel lonely. You could sit and read a book. The tables were all old, polished oak planks, and some shops were dark and some were bright and coppery and gleamed and that felt fuckin' fine to sit there and get wrapped in those places, my head all off on a trip of its own from the hash and the coffee, and the smells.

One time I hooked up with this kid, he was about nineteen, he was a student there, he was Dutch, and he just thought I'd be his lover, he fuckin' fell in love with me, so he fed me and gave me money for about two weeks. I don't feel guilty about it, I told him right from the start he was wasting his time, but he did it anyway. I gave him a lot of freebies, I shouldn't of done it because it just encouraged him. The sex wasn't good he was always wanting me to dick him, and he just laid there. I sthere anything more pathetic than two bottoms in bed together? And he didn't have much meat on his bones. Not too bad in his pants but nothing to write home about. Still, I made sure he got what he paid for. But he finally got the message.

But when I was with him, I got to find some places where I could do some drawing or sculpture again, I couldn't do it much, couldn't afford the supplies and to pay for space and you can't drag much stuff with you when you are moving around a lot. I changed places about once every other month. But it was fun and kinda reminded me of Twentynine Palms and Paul. I missed him some. I got a teddy bear at a flea market once, a beat up all ragged piece of shit, just because it reminded me of sleeping with Paul.

Anyway, like I was saying, A-dam changed things for me.

ELEANOR

His birthday came and went. It was a teary day for me, he was eighteen, and I had no idea if he was alive or dead. At that point I really went into a spiral down for a while, and the Colonel was not much help, I suspected for the same reasons.

Months went by and we got a little letter from Will postmarked from Belgium, saying he had been in Spain a while, and got tired of it, not to worry he was in good health.

I wanted so much to believe that.

Then more months, and suddenly a call from Paul with an address. In Amsterdam.

I made a reservation immediately. The Colonel couldn't go, couldn't get away, but I think in fact he was afraid of what we'd find if we looked for him. So I went alone.

I could not find him, but it was still reassuring in some ways. I saw the place he had lived, I saw Amsterdam, I decided it was safer than Los Angeles had been for him. Maybe I was rationalizing.

He was clearly not hanging out in the better areas, I didn't like the look of the neighborhood and was concerned about the drug scene in Amsterdam, very concerned.

But I didn't think it was the kind of place where you might end up with a knife in your back and be dumped in the canal.

It might not be ideal, but in sum I didn't think I could hope for all that much better.

And like much of Europe, Amsterdam was very accepting of the kind of interests Will had, I felt he was less likely to run into trouble on that account.

The Colonel didn't resent my going, but didn't want to hear my report either. That made me think it was so definitely painful for him.

About a month later he told me he had a trip planned, and as his work often is classified he didn't say where, but I noticed when the bills came that he had charged a hotel room in Amsterdam.

WILL

I was doing this, it was easy, but it's not like I am a lazy person.

I mean, I whored because it was fun and paid pretty good other places, and I needed to do it to survive, and of course I liked dick. But if I could have made a living some other way, I'd have done that and just done guys to get the sex I wanted. I never wanted a lot of stuff, just a place to sleep and a dick up my ass, some clean clothes, food, and good drugs. And sometimes a good book, but that was harder to get since I couldn't read Dutch too well. I liked to read a lot, Paul gave me that, I spent money on books.

So one of my roommates told me you could get jobs in Amsterdam if you wanted to make some extra money. A lot of them were students, and they got work visas so they could get work permits to work part time, but I didn't have much interest in school. Still, you didn't need a work permit for a lot of jobs. If you were undocumented, they didn't care, you couldn't get real jobs, like being a teacher or some shit, but you could work in a restaurant or coffee house, they were always looking for people. They paid cash, no benefits or shit.

That was what a lot of those Turks and all were doing. And for me it was even easier. First of all, most everybody there speaks English, so you don't need to know much Dutch, and I'd picked up a little I'm good with languages. But people liked to speak English so they could get practice.

I did that some, it worked out pretty good; I like working. It also meant I had less time to party and all, be lonely, and I sort of thought that might be a good thing for me. So I started to work in this Chinese restaurant (yeah, that's funny, right! Chinese restaurants in Amsterdam with American busboys!) and after a while somebody there turned me on to a job in a little grocery.

It was a family business, the owner's son had gone off to University and he needed some help a few hours a day, it didn't pay much but with a little whoring on the side I was doing fine. I liked working there, they were nice people and treated me real good. It was warm, crowded place, it smelled great from all the food and fresh baked goods; and they usually gave me lunch or a hot meal for dinner. Sometimes they'd have me stay after closing and take me upstairs and feed me at their dinner table. The deKuyks

they were called, I told my friends they were “a bunch of dykes” or said I worked at “The Dykes” but that was just a joke. Mrs. deKuyk liked me a lot, she was roly-poly herself, I think she wanted to fatten me up and did. It was a good place to work even if the pay was shit.

I didn’t tell them a lot about me, just my folks were military in Europe and I was just checking things out a little before I decided to go off to college. Well, it might have been true.

So I had been working there a while and I turned nineteen I’d been in A-dam more than a year, and then I met Matteus. That’s Dutch for Matthew, or Matthias, same thing, but I will always think of him as Matteus, it’s not the same if I translate it. After a while I called him Mats for short. It’s not “mats”, like a wrestling mat, they say it more like “mop” so its like “motty-oos” and “mots”. Funny way to talk but that’s Dutch.

Anyhow, he came into the store one afternoon shopping and I took one look and WHAM! Something happened inside, I got hard just looking at him.

Dunno why, really, he was not the sort of thing that I usually got all hot for.

Most of the tourists who wanted me were much more my type. I mean, given a choice between a guy who is thirty-eight and a little paunchy but hairy, and a guy who is nineteen and smooth and tight, I’m probably for thirty-eight to be honest. Well, thirty-two anyway. Paul would say I was fucked up about that, but it worked for me.

But Matteus was my age, and he was good looking but not what most guys thought of as incredibly hot. But suddenly I did think he was, I looked into those blue eyes and just WHAM! His hair was long, blonde-brown, he was not a little bit chubby like Dutch boys usually are in the winter, he was quite slender, had very pale skin.

When I came to my senses, about a day later, I realized he had the finest bones in his hands, they were slender and delicate, and that I had really flashed on them. Long fingers, like a diamond cutter I met, one of the few Dutch tricks I got.

And he knew it too, he looked at me, did a double take, and laughed. I figured he was straight and I’d been too obvious. So I went into the back room and stacked some cans up so I wouldn’t have to look at him, but I kept peeking out into the store to see if he was still there. And then he left, but he seemed to be looking over his shoulder back at the store and I sort of hoped he was.

He came in again the next day and just loitered around looking at stock and I knew then.

I asked him if I could help him, I used my best Dutch to do it. I figured that would make it perfectly clear to him that I was an American, because my Dutch was pretty bad. Well not so bad, but pretty obvious and not so good. He laughed and told me stick to English.

Mr. deKuyk was watching this and for one thing, I didn’t serve customers, I did stock and cleanup and almost never did anything direct with customers. I figured he had figured me out a long time ago, but the Dutch didn’t get too uptight about homos, and he thought this was amusing.

He finally said to me “Villem,” – that’s what he called me he couldn’t quite say William and they didn’t use Will because “Vill” sounded funny even to them – “Take your friend out for coffee after your work is done, don’t waste my time.” But I could tell he wasn’t mad.

So we made a date.

§ PAUL

It was 1978. He had been gone a year and a half, and I decided it was time to make some changes in my life. I was in this apartment in Twentynine Palms and it wasn’t where I wanted to be, and even though I wanted to be where Will could find me, I couldn’t let that run my life.

And I decided I was pretty tired of my job anyway. I considered looking for a transfer to another military facility, but decided to change altogether, and after a lot of soul searching, I decided to look for work in Chicago, and stayed with my parents for quite a while.

About three months after I moved, I got a postcard, forwarded from California, from Will. He was in Amsterdam and included a return address.

All it said was “Miss you sometimes. Love, Will.”

I called Eleanor, and she was surprised to hear it, they had received one letter, a single page, with not much information, postmarked from Brussels. I gave her the address, then wrote to him immediately, telling him I’d moved, asking him to call me or his mother some time.

It was good to know he was alive.

§ WILL

Matteus was early, he was waiting impatiently for me when I got to our date. We sat and had coffee but he asked all the questions, I was sitting there staring into those blue eyes, trying to get inside and to get inside his head so I could fuck his eyeballs out with my stare.

He smelled so good. I was hard as a rock every minute, couldn’t even think while we talked about anything but pulling him on top of me, wrapping my legs around him, having him fuck my brains out.

It was his hands and his eyes, they were the only things I saw when I looked at him, and I never saw eyes like that before. When I was looking into them I could not think of anything but sex and . . . I fell in love with him, the first time since Paul I’d been in love. Just looking in his eyes.

But he wanted to talk, and I told him whatever he wanted to know. Anything.

And a funny thing happened, two funny things, maybe three.

One thing that happened was I heard the story myself.

I mean, I know the story, I've told it a few times, to Paul, to Jesse, to some others. One guy PAID me to tell him this shit, he was a sick fuck, but it was easy money and he got off on it. I made it sexier for him.

But it was so different this time, I told the story and for the first time I can think of I heard it myself.

It was so sick and sad and pathetic!

I thought, *Fuck, you idiot shut up you'll scare him away.* And I thought *Why I am I saying this? Now?* I thought, *What the fuck have you been doing with your life?*

And inside me a scream was welling up and I was afraid I'd let it out.

And his eyes did get big and round. But he just kept asking questions and listening, and I could see tears rolling down his cheeks. That was the second thing.

The third thing was he suddenly said, "It's not a good time to talk about me. We must take care of you first."

He did. We went to my place, it was a crummy little hole, but I kept it clean. Neither of my roommates was around, they were just students passing through who flopped for a month or two and helped with the *huurprijs*, the rent, we were paying almost nothing, almost squatting anyway.

And he held me and his touch was electric and I felt his burning heat, his slim, slim body pressed up against me and the power from him came flushing through me, washing me clean, washing all my sins away, baptizing me in our mingled semen, making me feel right for the first time in such a long time, in since forever, in since never.

§ PAUL

Eleanor said she had gone to Amsterdam to look for him, but had no luck. He was not at the address I'd given, it was some small apartment building with a lot of very transient kids hanging around, a few of whom seemed to recall Will, but none knew where he was. After a few days she gave up and went back to Spain.

I had a new job with Motorola, and finally a lover, one of my brother Danny's friends had become a matchmaker, brought Brandt to Danny to check out for me one day and Danny called and said "You need to meet this guy, Paul."

I can't say it was love at first sight. But we had a good time, met again and in time it became clear to me that this was the match for me. He was a lawyer, brainy and I thought rather good looking in his peculiar way. Older than me, about thirty-nine.

He is a little exotic looking, he had long red hair, naturally very curly, and a scraggly beard. He is six foot seven inches tall, and thin as a rail. Phi Beta Kappa. In fact, he is one of the smartest people I've ever known; and he managed to keep alive much of the child in him; sometimes he was annoyingly spontaneous. I thought that quality would suit Will if they ever met.

And spontaneous, that's something I really lack, I like a world that is orderly, sane, rational. Brandt liked those things but he didn't need them as much as I did. And I needed someone like that, someone who could be spontaneous and irrational. I'm not sure why a spontaneous, irrational lawyer would be successful, but he was, very.

We moved in together after about six months; had a nice apartment in the city and I endured a commute to the suburbs.

I told him all about Will, in time. He was fascinated by the story.

One day he said "Why don't we go to Amsterdam this summer and see if we can find him?"

I thought that was a little crazy, but we wanted a vacation anyway and I'd never been to Amsterdam. On the other hand, I told him we'd see Paris first, and not obsess, this was a vacation, and we'd consider looking for the boy a side trip.

The summer of 1978 was beautiful weather, we made our plans, and another postcard arrived, this time directed to my parents' home.

So it seemed it was to be pretty easy to find him, after all. I told Eleanor she might as well let me check things out instead of going there, he hadn't sent his new address to her. Remembering how I had seen him that last time, I figured it would be better for me to see him than her.

All he had said was "I am in love. Miss you. Write. Will."

God knows who – or what – he was in love with, but it sounded better than a lot of the things I could hear.

We determined to enjoy our time in Paris and it was wonderful. If you've never been, it is really the place to start a visit to Europe. Yes, all the bad things you've heard

are probably true, but the people are friendly if you try to speak a little French, the food is glorious, the museums beyond description.

I sat at the Rodin museum and looked at The Thinker, in the garden, for two solid hours, while Brandt patiently waited.

Mostly I was thinking about Will, this perplexing creature to whom I was tied. For tied I was, I had never escaped the bonds of karma, even when he was gone and I absolved myself of responsibility. Even after two years apart, I knew I would never rest until his story was done. I just hoped the ending would be happy.

But I didn't have a lot of illusions.

§ WILL

He left, said he'd look for me in the shop in a few days.

He'd opened up some gate inside me. It wasn't because he left, but I cried for hours. Every now and then, I'd start again, deep wrenching, wracking sobs, almost screaming until I was exhausted, and then I'd start again, until I shot up just so I could sleep. Get away from the pain.

That night I had a dream about the time Greg raped me in his van.

I was in kind of a daze after that, not drugs, I didn't shoot again, I was just broken inside, not bad broken, but I needed to heal up after whatever had happened.

Two days later Matteus came by work and I thought I'd die just having to keep my hands off of him. I looked in his eyes and was lost immediately, couldn't even understand what he was saying to me most of the time. But we met, again after work, again in a coffee house, and went again to my place; and when we were done I fell into a deep sleep and he was gone when I woke.

I thought this was crazy, but it was so wonderful, when I was around him, I just felt like powerless, I couldn't even think. We met every couple days, but I didn't know anything about him. If I could pull my head out of my ass for a few minutes, I'd ask; he'd just say "not yet, not now, you need something else now."

He was right, he was so aware of me, I could say anything, or nothing, to him and he understood. He'd ask me again and again about my life. We'd lay on my little mattress in the dark while he did magic tricks with my insides.

It felt like he grabbed little ends of my story that were sticking out, and pull on them, pulling them like those long long handkerchiefs magicians use; dragging endless long streamers of shit and pain and fear and horror out, my life story in detail, bringing it all out. Turning me inside out. Until I was covered with this shit.

And then he would wash it all away with a touch of his lips against my nipple, a stroke of my ribs. He traced the scar on my arm so very gently with his fingertips, his warm sweet breath on the back of my neck. Shivers ripped through me every time he touched me. Then he'd gather up the pieces of my soul he'd pulled out and stick them back where they belonged.

Then he would disappear again.

I was having more dreams, nightmares. I would dream that Matteus was tied up like Gary did me, and I was raping him. I would dream Greg had Mats in the van, and was beating him. I was Kent or George sometimes. I couldn't sleep much.

After three weeks of this emotional crap, I finally began to shoot up before I met him, just so I could calm down and focus; or I smoked some hash with him in the coffeehouse. He seemed very nervous about doing that, strange because everybody did it. He wouldn't do much, said I should not do so much either, and I tried.

Finally, I just made him tell me about himself, I knew nothing about him at all.

He was a conservatory student, going to be a concert pianist, lived with his parents. He said he didn't think it was "feasible" for us to meet "just yet." I had to pull it out of him, but he said that he hadn't a lot of sexual experience, just one or two guys in the past six months. But it was really hard to get anything out of him.

He was hiding something from me, but I didn't care. I had finally found someone who made me feel safe. Made me real.

I sent Paul a postcard, Mats told me Paul sounded like someone to keep in touch with. I told Paul I was in love.

Matteus showed me things I had never seen before, some of which were not in our bed. Showed me the city through Dutch eyes

He refused again and again to show me his home, his school, anything of his personal life. "Not now, it's not the right time."

One day, I got suddenly real suspicious.

"What are you hiding from me?"

He looked at me quickly then answered without hesitation.

"Yes, something, you are right." He pierced me with those eyes. "But it's not a bad thing, just something I can't tell just yet."

"I've told you everything about me, can't you tell me what this is?"

Right there, out on the street, a busy summer day, he kissed me on the lips and a shiver ran up my spine. I saw some shocked looks out the corners of my eyes. Dutch people don't kiss in public.

"No, not yet, I am sorry, you must trust me."

So I did.

I was always trusting people, sometimes good people like Paul, sometimes bad ones like Gary. I think it was one of my problems, I never knew who not to trust. Well, I

had learned some of the bad ones, that guy who raped me taught me some of that, to be more wary, but come down to it I trusted people.

Paul had said it was an attractive but dangerous habit. "Trust is fine," he told me. "Trust demands judgment, though."

When we were apart I ached for Matteus, and sometimes I'd think of Paul too, I'd get the two of them all confused, I'd want to crawl into Paul's big warm safe bed sometimes. Have Mats fuck me there. I thought I should call Paul some time, but overseas calls are very expensive and I didn't have his phone number anyway. I wished I could talk to him, to get him to tell me if I should trust Matteus, but then I figured it didn't make any difference.

Mats might screw me royally, might turn out to be an asshole, but I didn't have any choice, I was going to trust him, I had to. If he betrayed me, I'd probably kill myself. But given the choice of not trusting him or dying, I was going to trust him.

I had never needed anyone so badly.

He was better than a thousand dicks.

Chapter Nine

“I Know Not The Man”

§ PAUL

Amsterdam was a glory, we took a first class train compartment from Paris, and when we arrived the day was sunny, warm, the city alive as it can be only during its brief summer. It was picturesque, quaint, modern, cosmopolitan. I could understand why Will might like it.

Of course I figured it had its dark side, too, and likely that's where I'd find Will.

We settled into our hotel, and then I could not wait, we asked directions to his address.

It took quite some time to get there, we had a few false starts, not understanding the city's tram system, we made poor estimates of the walking distances.

When we finally arrived it was getting late, nearly sundown. We found a seedy basement apartment in an even more seedy apartment building, far removed from the city's heart, and as expected a lot of ne'er do well young men and women frequenting the neighborhood. It looked like a lot of squatters and the drug influence was obvious. Well, what did I expect?

There was no answer, but I had come prepared, I sat on the stoop of the building and began writing a note to tell him I was here, what hotel we were at.

Suddenly a young blonde boy came up to me, looking at me sharply, and spoke.

“Excuse me, you are Paul?”

I was of course surprised, told him yes.

“I am Matteus, you are looking for Will, I think?”

“Well, yes, I am. Is he a friend of yours, Matteus? Do you know where he is?”

“You can say we are friends, I think. He is now working, but perhaps in a little while you can see him for supper if you like.”

I surveyed the boy, he was thin as a rail, not at all the sort of thing I'd expect from Will. He looked about fifteen, very fine boned, quite obviously gay. Will tended to the masculine, hairy-chested big man. Obviously this wasn't the love interest. This was a roommate, perhaps a fellow traveler in the sex trade. He was very pretty, he'd do well at it if that was his thing.

"Yes that would be fine, Matteus. Um, can you tell me how you happen to know me?"

"Oh I have seen your photo many many times, Paul. He talks of you often."

Ah.

"I am thinking he is not expecting you to be here, though?"

"No, well, we had this trip planned a while, but we didn't have his address until shortly before we left, so we didn't really have time to tell him we were coming."

"I am sorry, who are we, please?"

I introduced him.

"This is my companion, Brandt."

"It is nice to meet you, Brandt. I do not think Will has mentioned you."

"I met Brandt recently, Matteus."

"No matter. He will be very happy you are here I am sure. Can I say you can meet somewhere? Maybe you want a restaurant for a nice meal to see him?"

"Good idea, what do you suggest?"

He gave us a name and directions to a restaurant nearer to our hotel, and suggested we dine late. I gave him the name of the hotel so Will could call just in case something happened.

§ WILL

Matteus came to pick me up after work, and we were walking back to the apartment. I had thought he was going to wait for me in my room; it was such a nice evening, though, I was glad to have him to walk with me.

"Would you like a nice supper, Will? I think I will take you to a nice restaurant today if you like."

This was weird, we ate in really cheap places, buying a little food in stores, from street vendors, take out food, not "nice restaurants".

I knew Matteus had more money than I did, especially since I stopped whoring after I met him. It was tough to make ends meet and I was having to eat a lot more of Mrs. deKuyk's food. Not that I minded. So I was pretty inclined to take up a free meal, but didn't want him to spend his money. Besides I wanted him to fuck me just then.

"No, I don't want you to pay, you don't have all that much money," I told him, "plus I have other plans for you tonight."

He smiled, making day out of night for me.

“Yes, we can do that too,” he agreed, “if we hurry. But I have actually made some plans and we are reserved for nine-thirty, naughty Will, so you must be fast about it and get very clean for a nice meal, which you will please accept with more polite manners than you are now showing.”

Mats wore the pants. Well, actually neither one of us wore pants much when we were together, but he could always lay down the law to me. And his accent always made it so hard to argue with anything he said. I usually had to spend a minute trying to figure out what he was saying when he got that screwy grammar running, and by then it was too late to argue.

“Okay, okay, I give up, but you have to be the one who is quick.”

“Well,” he grinned, “on another hand, we cannot rush so much we are doing a poor job.”

Afterward, he made me shower and get dressed up in my best clothes, wearing my leather jacket, which was getting a little worn out, and find a really nice shirt and then got impatient because I didn’t have a tie, so he made me wear a silk scarf. I thought it looked fruity. I know better than to argue with him, though.

So it was a long walk to this restaurant and he was being real mysterious with me. I could tell he had something up his sleeve. I tried to guess.

“Couldn’t you have given me more advance notice? What, is this your birthday? You graduated from the conservatory? I’m going to meet your family? You found a tourist trick for me?”

“No, nothing like that, just a little special occasion, maybe you will meet someone though. I’m sorry, I should have told you sooner but it comes up suddenly. But you will be enjoying yourself I’m sure.”

And even when I bugged him he wouldn’t let another peep out. “It’s enough now, you will see.”

So I saw this restaurant, and I knew he couldn’t afford this place, this was one of the major expensive tourist places, one of the ones that served Rijstaffel, the Indonesian-Dutch food, like twenty course meals. It would cost a fortune to eat here. Thirty bucks a person at least. Maybe one of my tricks would take me to a place like this but not Mats!

“Are you sure about this, you can’t afford this place!”

“Yes, well, someone else will pay for your dinner, I think, and I will perhaps not eat so much. Maybe I will just pick a little from your plate.”

“Someone else?”

“Ah, we must go in now, we are almost late.”

We walked in and the maitre’d surveyed us doubtfully, but Matteus spoke quickly in Dutch to him, he said we were expected then I lost it, something about me being American.

The maitre'd told him to follow, '*nagaan*,' and we did, and then I saw him.

Oh my heart swelled up so I thought it would explode, it was pounding and pounding and I started to get tears in my eyes immediately. I stopped right there in the middle of the restaurant.

"My God," I whispered. "Oh my God."

§ PAUL

I could not have been more pleased, neither by the restaurant, nor by Will when I saw him. He came up all teary, speechless. I didn't know until a little later that little Matteus had kept it a surprise for him.

But he looked so fine! He'd perhaps been more muscled when he was working out in California, but he had obviously regained his health, put weight back on, was far from what I had expected or feared. His eyes glowed, his skin looked healthy if pale from the scant sunlight. He was, all in all, a good sight.

And more. He was somehow grown up in a way I'd not seen before. Of course he was pushing twenty now, so I should expect that and he did look his age, but there was a more mature cast to him, and I realized it was in his walk, his posture, not his body.

"My little boy has grown up," I exclaimed aloud, not thinking. He was startled.

Of course we had a bit of catching up to do, he really had not expected us, didn't know of Brandt, didn't know why we were there. Ordering food and making introductions was complicated and distracting.

I saw that Matteus had invited himself to dinner, didn't mind since he'd been such a good messenger and made such a nice surprise. I found I liked the kid, at least pending learning more about him. . He did have a poise about him that I enjoyed.

Thus, I was astonished after I made introductions of Brandt and Will, when Will turned to this fey child and said "This is Matteus, but you know him, of course. My one and only."

Indeed, astonished is an understatement.

Never in a million years would I have expected Will to be interested in such a little creature. And to be introduced as "one and only"? From Will? The boy who had five men a day sometimes and couldn't be satisfied?

Well, of course I might be taking that part too literally.

"Well, Matteus has been quite modest, Will, he didn't tell us about his elevated status. One and only? My that's some compliment, Matteus," I winked, "You'll bear some watching."

All through that joyous dinner, while I learned a little of Will's life, I watched the interactions between the two. Matteus refused food, said he'd eat a little off Will's plate, and did so. The waiter was scandalized, not I think, by the loss of revenue but by the intimacy. These two could not hide it, though it was not blatantly sexual behavior, just

star-crossed lovers. Well, Will was star-crossed, Matteus seemed more in control, but just as much in love.

Will told me Matteus was studying concert piano, I was suitably impressed, he surely had the fingers for it. But when I asked questions the answers seemed a little evasive.

How long had he been studying was the one that caused the trouble.

“Well, a while now, since I was eight, but more seriously since twelve.”

“Ah, about eight years altogether then,” I said being generous.

Will interjected, “No, like eleven years.”

But Matteus was silent.

§ WILL

How could I not have seen it? I’m so stupid. I was blind.

I didn’t figure it out while we ate dinner, I was back at the apartment and he had left to go home and suddenly the conversation played back in my head.

Of course he had never spent the night, now I understood why. I knew that I’d made a mistake. A horrible mistake.

That night I dreamed about rape.

When he came the next morning I made him tell me. Just to be sure.

FIFTEEN.

The whole world came apart.

I was crushed, I didn’t know what to do, what could I do? I had to send him away, I had to go away, run away, kill myself, something, anything, I could not bear this pain.

Then he was crying, telling me not to be crazy, to forgive him.

“It’s only a little lie, I’m not fifteen in my heart. You must see this.”

He finally left.

I was in a deep funk, I went out and wandered the streets all day, finally found a guy to fuck me.

It felt awful. I wanted HIS dick in me.

I sat up all night, rocking on my mattress, crying, dozing off, crying again.

It was earliest dawn when I got dressed again and wandered the streets, moving aimlessly, but knowing where I would end up.

As I headed there I felt guilty, I remembered what he had said to me that night, it seemed so very very long ago.

“ . . . If you kill yourself I’ll be left with nothing. ”

I didn’t like the thought of leaving him with nothing. But you have to do the right thing, he taught me that, even if it hurts.

§ PAUL

We had spent a busy day at the Van Gogh Museum and the Rijksmuseum, each incomparable in their own ways; then a delightful dinner in a little bistro if that’s the right word in Amsterdam.

We had plans to see Will once more before we left, the next day; and I had excitedly telephoned Eleanor to tell her of our dinner the previous evening.

“I can’t say with him what will happen, Eleanor, but I’ve never been so optimistic. He’s grown up so much. The boyfriend seems so strange, such a departure from his past, but he’s sweet as a kitten, and still seems to be the leader in the relationship. They’re a cute couple.”

“Paul, it’s so wonderful, do you think he would let us come to see him?” I relished the relief and joy in her voice

“I don’t know, Eleanor, I can ask tomorrow. Nothing to lose by asking.”

When I hung up, Brandt and I shared a late night snack and a few glasses of wine in our room before going to sleep.

It was barely six a.m. when the phone rang.

Chapter Ten

Gospel and Epistle

§ PAUL

I called Eleanor and asked her to hurry on up.

Brandt stepped in to the rescue, because I was suddenly overwhelmed with the immediacy of what I needed to do. He changed our flight and hotel reservations, made some calls to find local resources, not much we could use, but at least some numbers to call if we needed it.

Then Brandt went to his place and stayed there to wait for Matteus to appear.

Matteus showed that afternoon, distraught, hoping to find Will, so Brandt gathered him under wing and shepherded him off to a coffee shop, where he extracted a full confession including home address.

Matteus was tearful, painfully aware of the price of his deception.

“I was not understanding he doesn’t know this, at first, no one else will think I am nineteen. So when I am finally knowing he thinks I am older, I was going to tell him when we had coffee the first time.”

“But when he tells me his story I know he won’t like a boy for his lover, so I didn’t tell him. I was thinking he will not want to me see if I tell him this. Besides he needed something else then so I did for him, what he needs.”

Brandt called me to find out whether he should bring Matteus to the hotel.

§ WILL

Thing about Paul, he always knew exactly how to handle me.

Probably sounds funny, but you know I thought a lot about all the shit I gave him. He thought he made mistakes and then I’d fuck up because of them, but he was all wrong about that. I’d have fucked up just as bad or worse, no matter what he did. He knew how to handle me when I did. I’d missed that, someone to keep me in line.

He came down to the lobby and took me up to his room.

I started to tell him the whole thing about Matteus. I told him the asshole was fifteen, not nineteen.

I started to tell him anyway, and he seemed puzzled about it then he stopped me from saying anything. He held his hand over my mouth, hugged me tight close to him, set me down in a chair, knelt on the floor in front of me.

“Will, are you thinking about hurting yourself?” It was just like old times.

I was glad his hotel was before I got to the canal, or I’d have jumped in first.

§ PAUL

We took a vote about bringing Matteus to the hotel; Will voted no, I voted yes. The yeas had it.

Matteus looked at me pleading as Will sulked, face down on the bed.

“Please, Paul tell him this does not matter. When he is fifteen he has many older men, what is wrong with this, I know he loves me!”

I almost laughed. I’d have been thrilled, when he was fifteen, for him to have limited himself to a single nineteen-year-old. On the other hand, I’d lectured him often and well about the need to respect age differences.

“Matteus, I am not sure anything I say can make a difference here. I am sure he loves you, I know he does, in fact. But this is a difficult thing for him, as you can see.”

I wasn’t sure the age of consent in Holland, but I thought it was twelve or fifteen, certainly it was no more than sixteen. The boy had eventually to deal with family, of course, and I didn’t know what that would be like. But there didn’t seem to be any insurmountable impediment to the two of them being together, well, nothing not implicit in any teenage romance.

The truth is, I didn’t know why Will was so upset; frankly except for the practical difficulties, I didn’t see the problem. I couldn’t for the life of me see why Will, with all his experience of the world, hadn’t known immediately. No one with working eyeballs would think Matteus was nineteen.

On the other hand, Will was suicidal, seriously so, and there had to be a reason because he had most definitely NOT been that way the night before.

Hours passed, I had Brandt take Matteus out to get a bite and talk, ordered up some food, Will was sleeping, but I woke him up. He had no appetite.

I asked him if we could talk about it, he looked down at the floor, mesmerized by the intricate floral pattern of the carpet. Then slowly looked up.

“I’ll do whatever you say.”

“Can you tell me, please, Will, what is so upsetting to you about Matteus being fifteen?”

“I can’t believe you ask me that, Paul!” He was excited suddenly and crying.
“After all you told me, how can you not understand that?”

“Will, I know I’ve told you a lot of things, tried to give you the best guidance I could. But rules apply to specific situations, and I don’t what rule you think applies here, or what you think it means, and I wonder if you haven’t got to reexamine what it is. So can you please tell me what is wrong with this, as you see it?”

But he broke down crying every time he tried to talk, wracking sobs.

After several tries, he was wailing at the top of his lungs, he was so shaken, out of control, flailing about violently such that I had finally to lay atop him to hold him still.

But having begun, I sensed this was very significant that I should let him; that this was not something to stop. So I told him, encouraged him to scream it out, to let it happen, whatever it was.

“How could I fuck around with a little BOY? “ he finally screamed. “How could he lie to me?”

“More, there’s more.” I said

“I WON’T DO IT I WON’T I WON’T . . . AAH, AAH, AAH, AAH!”

“What won’t you do, Will, What?” My breath was hot on the back of his neck, I was holding his arms down, pinning him tightly to the mattress of my bed.

He screeched, a soulful agonized steamwhistle of pain, a wordless primal scream.
AAAAAAAHHHHHH! AAAAAAHHHHHH!

“Tell me, what it is that you won’t do, Will! Tell me!”

“I – I – I . . .

“I WON’T RAPE HIM, I’M NOT LIKE THAT!”

He collapsed, hiccuping, screaming, hyperventilating.

Hotel security was knocking on the door.

§ WILL

It was very dark in the room, very late at night. I was in Paul’s big warm bed alone but dreamed father was there, kissing me, kissing my forehead. I fell back to sleep his scent in my nose, the moisture of his blessing on my brow.

§ PAUL

The Colonel had changed, met Brandt with a smile, shook my hand heartily. Listened silently. I still found Eleanor much easier to talk to. Matteus had gone home, much consoled, but would be back the next day if all went well.

We all slept, but the Colonel kept watch on Will; he conceived it his duty to do so.

And he was ever a man of his duty.

§ WILL

It was good to see mom, no matter how bad things were. They met Mats, and all six of us sat around and ate lunch.

The Colonel kept looking at him out the corner of his eyes, and suddenly I saw what he saw, a limp skinny nelly little boy faggot who fucked his son's eyes out.

How come I didn't see that before?

Why did I not want to know it?

Well, there! Fuck it, I saw it, I didn't care if the Colonel liked him or not.

—

"You're finally beginning to understand, Will, what was happening to you all those years. Last night you screamed out ten years of pain."

"I don't understand, Paul. Really, I wasn't raped except that once."

"You were raped, many times, even when you were wiggling your ass at men, they ended up raping you. They took advantage of your youth, your willingness, your need for love, the emptiness."

The Colonel shifted in his seat.

"All the pain you had, you didn't even feel it, you used more sex to hide it, bury it, make it not hurt. Then last night you screamed it all out at once. Because you thought you were the cause of it, you were going to do to Matteus what had been done to you."

"In fact, you didn't even see what everyone here can see – his real age – probably because you just didn't want to face it, thought it was a bad thing, and couldn't see it to avoid that pain."

"But Will, there is a clear difference here with Matteus. You must come to understand it. You are not raping him, you are not that much older, you are not taking advantage of him. Matteus isn't as needy as you were, he was in control of himself when he found you."

"And remember all the other things I told you to look at in having sex with someone? Equality. Mutuality. Trust. Healthy interests. And Love, of course, you have that, it's obvious."

"Yes, he violated your trust, you will have to find a way to forgive him for that. He's young, he made a mistake there. He made it out of love, though."

Matteus was all teary and rubbing his eyes with a Kleenex.

“From everything I have seen and heard, Will, Matteus and you have a good, safe, healthy thing going on here. It may not be perfect, I see obstacles for you two. But I must say Will, this is the best thing I’ve seen you involved in all the time I’ve known you.”

So there it was, I didn’t know how, what to say or do. I didn’t have to die instead of loving him. Screw the Colonel if he didn’t like it.

After that it was kind of silent and then I didn’t know what to say and then I got up and walked away from the table and looked out the window; it was another nice day out there; and then I went back and bent over and kissed Matteus on the lips right there in front of them all.

Fuck ‘em.

§ ELEANOR

Even though Paul had explained at length what to expect, it was still startling to me to see Will involved with someone like this. Mind, I was not being judgmental, I just wanted him to be happy, but Matteus was indeed a real change. I thought perhaps it was a good thing, a sign of changes that had happened inside our boy.

Well, our man, now.

Nor could I understand what had happened to Will that caused this crisis. But by the time we got there, I began to see it was mostly healed. That recognition came more slowly, of course. When we arrived he was deep asleep and Paul tried to tell us what had happened.

We heard about Matteus’ real age, but I must admit I didn’t see any real connection or problem, just as Paul said he had not at first, but we talked it through and I began to see that Will had come to feel he was doing to Matteus what had been done to him.

As we discussed it I saw that it meant Will was coming to the realization of how much he had been hurt in the past. And because Matteus was so young – well, only a little younger than Will, but perhaps so young compared to Will’s usual preferences? – Will was identifying somehow with those men.

Most amazing of all to me was the Colonel’s reaction.

He was silent while we met with Matteus, but could not seem to take his eyes away. I could almost see his thought processes whirling, he was in his totally focused mode, which I rarely saw outside of his work.

A little later I saw him draw the child aside, took him out on the balcony and they sat in the chairs there, overlooking that beautiful city, and talked for almost an hour. Because I was worried I kept a close eye on this, though I think no one else noticed it.

Later he told me that Matteus had gently scolded him, told him he couldn’t hide his love for Will, and that Will needed to see it. I think it was the directness, the simplicity and honesty that got him.

It took me two weeks to get that out of my taciturn husband in little bits, long after we got back to Spain. But I saw the results much earlier.

The Colonel hugged Matteus.

§ WILL

My parents stayed for five days, Paul had to go home after two. I took them to see my apartment; they met Mr. deKuyk.

The weirdest part was when they left, what the Colonel did. I was gonna wave at him a little bit, I just hugged mom, then was gonna wave off the old man, and then he grabbed me and hugged me. Didn't say anything. Smelled good. I couldn't get loose, his arms were too strong.

Then he surprised me a lot more because he shook hands with Matteus.

So then they were all gone and we weren't and I took him to bed and we fucked each other's brains out.

After that I told him we had to figure out something to do with his family, because he wasn't out yet. We couldn't go to his house, but he did show me the conservatory where he studied and sometimes I came to see him there, to hear him play.

He played like the angels, I never thought that much about music like that but when he played it grabbed me right in the nuts and hauled me up, it was so intense, it really felt a lot like having him fuck me.

One day I laid on the floor under the piano while he played something, a Beethoven thing, he said "Moonlight Sonata," just for me. I thought I would die, it was so beautiful, I thought I'd cream my pants right then.

We didn't know what to do with the family thing, he told me he thought his family had figured out he was gay, he just didn't want to take it too quick. Then he told me he thought my being an American was going to be a bigger problem. For Chrissake!

So we decided to let it ride, I saw him every possible minute.

I decided I needed a better job, but I didn't have a work permit, so I signed up as a student in a local college, which is like a high school, never mind the name.

But they weren't sure what to do with my Certificate of Proficiency; this wasn't California. So they gave me some tests, fortunately in English and decided I could enter the 'International Baccalaureate' program, which is for college – I mean University – bound students, and takes two years. Usually students are sixteen when they enter this, it's like being a High School junior, but I was almost twenty.

Still I studied for a while and being a student let me get a student visa, and with it a work permit. But I didn't find much better work, and I liked "The Dykes" pretty much so I stayed there a while.

Then one day another guy I knew, he whored now and then, he knew I was looking for some work, but not whoring. He told me he had a customer who needed an aide. I didn't understand that, I told him I didn't want to whore any more. He said no, this

guy was very old, and he needed someone to help him wash, get dressed, cook his food, stuff like that.

Well, I figured I could check it out, and so I went with him to meet this guy, Mijnheer – that's Mister – Desmet. He was actually Belgian he spoke French but also Dutch and pretty good English. So sometimes it was Monsieur Desmet, sometimes Mister, sometimes Mijnheer. So I started calling him one after another, "Mister, M'seur, Mijnheer, Desmet." I'd do that when he'd give me a hard time, like the way your mother uses your middle name to tell you you're really in trouble, "William Anthony Hogan!" He thought it was funny.

He was about eighty years old and he'd had a stroke, couldn't get around too good. I felt kind of sorry for him. He was a bit fat, with his white hair still pretty thick but cut into a butch and waxed up the way the Belgians do it.

He liked me, and he was a very funny man, I laughed all the time. He was always telling jokes, even though I couldn't understand them half the time. He called me an ignorant child and patted my head, but I guess when you're eighty you think everybody is a child. And I probably was ignorant, but I was trying to change that.

I liked him a lot once I got used to him. He hired me, the work permit meant the social security people paid my salary, and it was mostly easy enough stuff to do, just shopping and cooking and cleaning and taking care of an old man's body. I'd trained half my life for this job, it was a piece of cake.

I did pretty well at the college, but didn't have as much time as I'd like for Matteus. Mr. Desmet solved that; he told me to move into his house, which made the money situation much better, and he just loved Matteus.

They'd sit and yack in Dutch for hours and then I'd haul him off to the bedroom and Desmet would get this big grin on his face and make dirty jokes and comments all afternoon, sometimes he'd yell them at us through the door while we were fucking. Tell us not to break the bed, he's an old man, he can't afford a new bed. The noise was giving him a heart attack. We'd wear our dicks out. Save it for winter so he doesn't have to heat the room. He just could go on and on, teasing the shit out of us.

He'd get us laughing so hard we couldn't fuck! Christ, he'd thought of things I hadn't ever heard of! I didn't know if he'd ever done it, but I didn't have any trouble imagining him whoring on the streets when he was young! I bet the customers would have loved him!

I might as well admit I did him now and then.

He didn't ask or anything. He could hardly get it up but once a week and I felt actually good about it. I don't even think he was gay, he had been married, his wife was dead. But I guess when you're that old you think any sex is a good thing.

I'd be giving him a bath and he'd get hard, so I'd just do it. I thought I'd bring him a little happiness, it wasn't sick like when I was whoring or prowling bathrooms. And afterwards he'd give me a kiss on the forehead and tell me I was a sweet boy, and not to let Matteus get away from me. I told Matteus all about it and he told me I was sweet.

I know – he was ugly and old and all wrinkled; he was all gray –everywhere – and had liver spots too, but I didn't care, it didn't turn me off. It wasn't about being turned on anyway. It wasn't important, Desmet was beautiful. I was telling him I loved him. He was just like Mats in a lot of ways.

We talked about just leaving the door open for him so he could watch. I thought about doing a three-way with him, really give him a treat, 'cause he thought Mats was *magnifique* which I am pretty sure means bitchin' or hot. But then I figured I didn't want to share Mats with anybody, and if we did we'd end up killing the old guy with a heart attack or something. But I'd of done almost anything for that old guy. I figured he was as close to a grandpa as I'd ever have.

It was nearly Halloween, 1980, I turned twenty and Mats was sixteen, and so we were ready to tell his parents because Desmet said we could move in with him if we needed to.

It went pretty good, they weren't surprised he was gay, but they weren't too crazy about me. They got used to it, though.

Mats parents were *old*.

I mean they were over sixty, not as old as Desmet. His mom was 45 when he was born and his dad was almost fifty. He said he came too late for them, they didn't know what they were to do with him. But I think he was wrong, for once, they were really nice people, but I knew they would have to be with Mats for a son.

They had had two other sons, when they were young, but both of them were killed in World War II. That was really sad. That's probably why he wrapped them around his finger. They did pretty much anything he wanted them to do.

One night he told me we were going to dinner together to meet them. At first I was so fucking nervous I thought I'd have to go back to using drugs, but he saw it, said "Not to worry, Will, they will be liking you. And even if they are not, it is not making any difference, you must know this."

And I did know it, he was right. I knew I couldn't lose him, but I still didn't want to fuck it up.

So we went for dinner and I loved their house, even though it was pretty old and stuffy if you compared it to American houses. Like every Dutch house, they had lace curtains on the windows. The furniture was all real heavy, solid, antiques and the woodwork dark, but the floors had bright rugs, all geometric and modern patterns, and they had a lot of modern artwork on the walls. The music was just like Mats played, it didn't get me hard, though, thank God. I sure didn't want to explain that to them!

Anyway, he introduced me, and we had some conversation, but not a lot, because they spoke Dutch, didn't have as much English and my Dutch was OK but not for something like this, so Mats did a lot of interpreting.

You know, I didn't need a lot of it though. His mother had this really beautiful look sometimes, when she looked at Mats, so I knew how much she loved him and

figured she'd understand why I loved him. And his dad was as touchy-feely as Mats, had his hands all over me while I was there, as soon as the ice was broken. I don't mean he wanted to fuck me or anything, just he didn't worry about touching me, so he put his arms on my shoulders, shook my hand and held it in his, stuff like that. Well, after a while, anyway, it did take some time, they didn't do much of that the first time we met. But later.

I spent another year with school and graduated, did pretty good, my Dutch got a lot better too. In these schools you don't just pass courses, you have to pass special tests at the end of it all, and I did surprisingly well. I was eligible to go on to most Universities in Europe.

My parents came up to my graduation, I was pretty surprised though I did tell them about it. The Colonel got promoted, he had his eagle, that was cool. He was getting pretty huggy too, but I kept my distance. They were ready to rotate back to the States, he was going to an assignment at Great Lakes, near Chicago, which is where Paul lived.

Paul sent me a present. A teddy bear. He included a note.

March 16, 1982

Son,

You're all grown up now, and you don't need this.

But just in case, you have it, and any time you want you can hug it.

And know that it will be me that you are hugging.

Love,

Paul

Poor Desmet got another stroke, and he went into hospice. I visited him there, and he let me stay in his place, but I knew he couldn't last. Matteus and I had not been living together anyway, he was living at home, though he spent more time with me. So I got another job, doing deliveries for a bakery, and we got a little apartment of our own for a while.

I was worried about not having a work permit anymore, and was afraid I'd lose the job at the bakery, but my mom had the answer. Her mother was born in Ireland, and once we got the paperwork together, the Irish Embassy gave me a certificate that showed I was an Irish citizen. Who'd guess? But that's Irish law, so I got a passport and because Ireland had joined the EEC a few years earlier I could work legally. I didn't have to be in school.

But all that got me to thinking about some things.

Matteus turned seventeen, and had about finished his program at the conservatory, he actually did a small summer concert tour, with some other students, then entered some piano competitions, and just blew people away.

I started thinking about how I'd taken care of Desmet, I'd liked that, and now that I was out of college I thought about what I wanted to do next, and I wanted to go to school some more.

So we, Mats and I, decided to try something really different.

§ PAUL

Brandt and I had purchased a condo on Lake Shore Drive. I thought it pretentious but he pointed out it was just a better investment because the truly pretentious people would want it if we resold. I told him to stop being a lawyer. Lawyers can rationalize anything.

I had invited the Colonel, now a full Bird Colonel, and Eleanor to our housewarming, and was a bit surprised when they did come. Eleanor was regal, the Colonel a bit uncomfortable with our largely gay crowd, but took to my brother Danny as much as his son had. They sat in the corner all afternoon, thick as thieves.

We shared what we knew of Will's situation.

Perhaps it was a tribute to Matteus, who I came to feel was one of the more determined little fellows I'd ever met. He had set his sights on Will and bagged his game, held on with a ferocious tenacity. I could not image an obstacle that would get between him and Will.

Eleanor told me that they had gone to see Matteus perform, across the border, in Lyons, France when he was on tour, she was thoroughly committed to the boy as a son in law of a sort.

I sensed the Colonel too was at ease with Matteus, which I knew to be at great odds with Will's perception of the situation. While he certainly was not the sort of thing a Marine Colonel is expected to dream of for his sons, I thought the Colonel had come a long long way to accept him; he had only good things to say about Matteus. He sounded almost proud talking about his musical career.

It was too bad Will never could seem to see the changes in his father.

The letter was one of those onionskin airmail things I was used to getting about three or four times a year from Will. But I was really impressed with what it had to say.

I had spoken with him a number of times in the last two years. He was going on twenty-two now, and while the demons were definitely not gone, he was healing, this was the longest sustained time of good news in his life that I could see. Matteus had proven to be a very good healer.

June 11, 1982

Dear Paul,

I have some good news, at least I think you will like it.

Matteus and I have been talking for a while now, he just finished his program at the Conservatory, and we have made a decision about where to go from here.

So I hope you will be happy to learn to that we are coming to Chicago!

I've been accepted into a Nursing program at a community college in the area. Yes nursing, I think it's right for me.

Matteus is going to do advanced studies and get his degree at the Chicago College of Performing Arts.

We will be there for the fall semester, and I hope it means we can see you a lot more often. With my parents in the area I wasn't so sure we should do it, but Mats said it wouldn't be a problem, and that being close to you would be good for our souls.

I can't argue with that one.

So I hope you can find a little time to help us get settled, we're on a tight budget but we'll find something in the area. It's very expensive to ship anything, so we can't take much of our possessions with us, but we don't really have all that much anyway.

Can't wait to hear from you and see what you think!

I love you so much.

Your son,

Will

Nursing, when I thought about it, seemed a good choice for Will. He had accessed a nurturing place in himself, and I thought that had to be a really good sign.

Chapter Eleven

Sin and Absolution

§ PAUL

It was August, 1982 when they arrived in Chicago.

Brandt and I had talked about it and we decided to make a trial at having them live with us.

I was apprehensive, but the location was good for Matteus, whose school was in the heart of Chicago, near Grant Park. Will had a lengthy commute to school by train, near where his parents were living.

Matteus had scholarship money and some from his parents, Will had student loans, and was trying to hold down some part time work to help out, and I just figured I had to make a contribution too. I knew the Colonel had offered, because Eleanor called me to see if I could persuade Will to accept, but he wasn't hearing it. He'd take money with reluctance from me, but not from them.

Brandt got the worst of the deal, but he did his best to be supportive. He worked long hours and traveled a bit so it wasn't as bad as might have been, and he genuinely liked the boys, especially Matteus. I was lucky to have Brandt.

One day he dragged me outside for a walk along the shoreline, it was a blustery fall day, and I'd rather have been inside but he had something on his mind.

He wanted them to go. Will had been making passes at him.

§ WILL

Thing is, I wanted to be good. I really did.

And when I said Matteus was better than a thousand dicks, he was. Really.

But even that day in Paul's bed in Amsterdam, where I found something I was looking for, as I always knew I would – though I expected it to be something else – didn't change the fact that old habits die hard.

My ass itched for cock sometimes, almost all the time.

I had resisted for a long time, in A-dam it hadn't been such a problem, but here Mats and I didn't even see each other what with his schedule and my school and work and commuting.

But even when we had time for sex, even when I knew it was wrong and sick, I couldn't always resist. I loved Mats, but this wasn't about love. I knew, Paul had told me, that there was a hole in my soul, it was because of that I was doing all those guys. And Mats was the one to fill it for me, I knew that. But it wasn't really filled all the time.

Sometimes I'd just find myself cruising the bathrooms on campus, not really meaning to but there I was. Usually I'd walk away, usually. I didn't want to be there, I just couldn't seem to not be there.

One evening Mats was at a late rehearsal and Brandt went out and Paul and I were sitting in the living room, I was ready for a rare evening where I could relax, watch some TV. Paul turned it off and looked at me and I knew there was trouble.

§ PAUL

It was my initiative and I'd had some time to think about how to have this conversation. He wasn't a child anymore, and yelling had never worked anyway.

"Will, the tough thing about life is, the more things change, the more they stay the same. Another tough thing about life is, we keep having to learn the same lessons over and over again. Will, do you know what I want to talk to you about?"

"No, not for sure," he said with some poise; this wasn't a child anymore, "I'm thinking I'm in some trouble, though."

"You tell me."

I waited. The silence stretched. His countenance slowly sank into sadness, he looked at me with those black, sad eyes and I saw that puppy dog I'd first seen seven years earlier.

He was not avoiding my gaze, he was looking into my eyes. Pleading.

"I don't know what to do, Father." He said it very softly, almost to himself. "I don't know how to control myself. I don't know how to be full without looking for dicks to do it." Tears began to inch their way down his cheeks. "I know the hole is there, but I can't seem to do anything about it."

That was more insight than I'd ever expected. But insight doesn't mean solutions.

"I'll try to find a way to help you, son."

We talked late into the evening, trying to understand the issues, to see a solution. It seemed that more therapy would be the place to the start.

First he tried the counseling center at his college.

§ WILL

You know it made me feel like shit, going to the counseling center. They gave me a straight man to talk to, a guy about thirty-five. A jock. Well, I hadn't told them what the problem was.

A straight man couldn't even conceive of a five-cock-a-day habit much less figure out what to do about it. After thirty minutes he just said "I can't help you." I bet he went off and threw up.

In fact it turned out to be really hard. I figured out as time went on that no one knew anything about this problem. They couldn't even find a concept to work with. I tried half a dozen places, spent hours filling out forms and telling the same sick story over and over again.

Some didn't figure there was a problem, They were all politically correct, they knew "Gay is OK." they thought I was *lucky*. They thought I was just *good* at it.

Or they thought I was just like every other faggot. They all get laid a lot, right?

Anyway, those tried to get me to accept myself as I was, which didn't solve a fucking thing.

A brilliant few figured since I wasn't happy with my homo self, the solution was to make me straight!

I wouldn't sit in a room with them once they suggested it. Those people were too stupid to breathe – five cocks isn't enough so substitute pussy?? You're the ones need a shrink!

I finally found someone.

Mary Beth was about Mom's age but more gray, and she would wear these long, loose, beaded dresses with arms that flowed down like drapery, knitted loose shawls, scarves, shit mom wouldn't be caught dead wearing. But she had that same kind of stiff upper lip Mom had, and the same way of making you feel warm and toasty all over when she talked. And she had big sad eyes, Paul said eyes like mine, that you could kind of just sink into. I did like them, those eyes said "I accept you," I thought they were eyes full of wisdom. Eyes that never missed anything.

Mary Beth kind of reminded me of mom to be honest, and yet I could still talk to her without being ashamed too much. She said "I don't know much about this problem, but let's just talk and see what we come up with."

It helped. Everything helped.

At first I just talked about what I was doing. She zeroed me in on what I was feeling when I was doing it.

That helped, because thinking about the feelings, about that big hole in me, did help me to understand things. We decided to keep a record of my feelings, and then after a while I could sort of predict the times that I was likeliest to get in trouble. The feelings

that led my asshole to itch, so to speak. And then we had some ideas about how to avoid getting there.

I wrote them down on a poster board in her office. The list was scary.

Empty.

Lonely.

Abandoned.

Worthless.

Fucked up.

We did something about that. Started to get into what it was that made me feel empty, lonely, worthless, abandoned, fucked-up and man that was a can of worms.

And we talked about things I could do, things to help me to feel filled, loved, supported, cherished, worthwhile, appropriate.

Things to do, of course, that didn't take somebody's cock.

One day we were talking about the day in Amsterdam after I threw Mats out. And I talked about how it felt when I found that guy to fuck me. That it was Mats' cock I wanted instead. So I focused for a long time on how that had felt, on recreating that feeling when I was tempted.

Then she went back to what I was actually doing, and we did some behavior modification stuff to help. Avoiding places that were problems, times, situations, walking away, not wearing clothes that made me think about getting boned. Reminding myself of it when I went to get another dick, that it wasn't Mats' dick, and it was his dick that felt the best of them all. Lots of things.

Every little bit helps.

But you can't avoid bathrooms, and hell I could get laid just walking across the quad. So it helped, but it didn't solve the problem.

And then Mats left me and it all fell to shit.

§ PAUL

I knew this was going to be bad. Matteus finally caught on to what was happening, and I came home from work one afternoon and he was gone. No message, no forwarding address, nothing at all. Will was devastated.

For the next week Will searched for him, found him at school but he wouldn't see him, finally he was asked by security to leave the campus. Warned against returning.

I asked Will to stay away for a bit, to let me see what I could do. I also told him that he could react to this badly or well; it was his decision. I pointed out that in the past he'd have run away, drugged up, or acted out sexually when things went bad.

“If you want him back, Will, those would be the worst possible steps you could take.” But I wasn’t sure if it got through to him.

I went to find Matteus, it took several tries, but I found him on his way out of a practice room late one evening about ten days after he had moved out.

“Matteus, can we talk a moment?”

“Yes, of course, Paul, I am expecting you for some time now.”

“Matteus, are you all right? I’m concerned about you.”

I think he assumed I’d launch into something about Will first. Of course I was concerned about Will, but in some ways I was even more worried about Matteus. Here he was, not quite eighteen, all alone in a foreign country, cut adrift in a big city, and no doubt his heart broken as well. And he seemed such a delicate creature.

He looked at me, his eyes limpid. Then down a moment and up and he fixed me with a resolute gaze, then spoke with an even strength.

“I am not so very well, thank you for asking. I am not so happy. But I am not to need anything if that is what you mean.”

This little guy amazed me with his strengths. I knew what a mess Will was, and if I’d been in this situation I’m sure I’d be shaken to the core. Maybe he was but he didn’t show it.

“You have a place to stay, you are safe? I’ve been worried.”

“Yes, Paul, thank you again, you have not to worry. I have moved into a place with some other students, it is not so bad, much nicer I think than our apartment in Amsterdam was. I apologize, I am somewhat to hurry, Paul, I am expected there soon.”

“Okay, Matteus, I don’t want to hold you up, but . . .” I didn’t quite know what to say, then it came to me.

“I miss you. So does Brandt. And I know you know Will does.”

Before he could say anything I continued, “I know you need time to think this out, and I want to help both of you in any way I can.”

“But I’m not here to pressure you, I want you to understand that I care about you very much. You have become part of my family, and I am sure you are hurt. I hope you will let me stay in contact, no matter what. Of course I want to see if there’s a way to repair what’s broken too. But my concern is just as much for you as it is for Will.”

He set down his music case, and walked up to me, reached up and touched his delicate fingertips to my lips, sealing them. I began to understand the way he handled Will. He was so direct. This kid had balls.

“Thank you Paul, I am loving you too. I will call later so you can have my number. For Will I am not so sure I will want to hear from him again.” Then he paused a moment. “But I will not be stupid and say it unless I am sure. I may change my mind on this. I must go now, you are very sweet, Paul, to come to see that I am well.” And he gave me a peck on the cheek, stretching up to reach.

And with no further ado, he was off.

§ WILL

I understood what Paul was saying to me, but I hurt inside so badly. I wanted to get some drugs, some cock, anything, I wanted to pick up and run away, he was so right about it all.

Talk about feeling empty, lonely, worthless, abandoned, fucked-up.

And so I called Mary Beth, asked her if I could possibly see her right away. Before I went crazy. I started seeing her three, four times a week, buried myself in my studies, anything to keep from what everyone called ‘acting out’.

It was very hard.

In school we heard that the CDC announced a new name to cover a puzzling set of medical conditions then known by a number of different names: lymphadenopathy, GRID, gay cancer. The new name was Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome.

As weeks passed, it didn’t get all that much easier, but some of the pain went away and I started, with Paul and Mary Beth’s help, to work out some ways to handle the impulses, the temptations. I wasn’t always successful.

Part of it was just talking to myself, reminding myself of why I wanted to do these things. Part of it was talking to someone else, having someone else to distract me, reassure me, hold me.

Even the teddy bear got some of that.

Part of it was keeping busy. Part of it came from the Alcoholics Anonymous Meetings Mary Beth suggested I go to.

At first I thought it was a dumb idea.

“Mary Beth, I’m a lot of things, and I know I’ve drunk a lot of booze and been wasted to kill my pain a lot of times, too. But whatever I am I’m no alcoholic. I could never drink again, it wouldn’t matter to me. I have abused it, but alcohol is not my problem.”

“I accept that Will. But I think you may learn some very useful things there.”

“Think about this, there is a similarity here, isn’t there? Alcoholics are compelled to seek out a particular item, a particular experience, no matter what harm it does to them. No matter what pain it brings to those around them. They must do it, they need it to dull pain they cannot tolerate. Does that sound familiar?”

“OK, I see that, but . . .”

“They are very practical, Will, in finding ways to deal with compulsions. With addictions.”

So I went. And then I started to listen to what people were saying there and I thought it wasn’t so different. She was right.

That really was turning a corner for me. They were using alcohol to fill up the holes, I was using dicks. Many of their stories were worse than mine. All of them sounded familiar.

I couldn't get up and talk, not even once I found a Gay AA meeting, I didn't think they'd understand, and it wasn't about alcohol. But listening helped a lot. Then I decided to go back to the straight AA meeting. They might not understand, but they didn't hit on me and make it harder.

Well, most of them didn't anyway.

And from them I learned about one day at a time, and sometimes one minute at a time. I just won't go look for a cock right this minute, just not now for this next one minute. Just for the next ten minutes, I'll not go cock hunting. Whatever works.

So the weeks passed, and then months passed. I knew Paul was talking to Mats, went to meet with him now and then, told me he was OK.

Paul asked me to work on myself, just be patient about Mats, try to make myself ready if there was an opportunity.

I ached for him so badly. I wept. I screamed sometimes.

Paul was so good to me. He forgave me for tempting Brandt. Brandt put up with having me there, and I wasn't so tempted with him.

And once or twice, when Brandt was travelling, I found myself crawling into Paul's bed again. I felt very small then, like a little boy. But he just kissed me and said "Welcome back, son."

It was safe there, and I didn't want to have sex with him any more. Probably the only man on earth I *knew* I didn't want to do. Sleeping with a boy he *never* wanted to do. Well, not a boy anymore.

But still, late one night I asked him about that.

"Paul," I whispered in the dark, "I understand why you never had sex with me. And I thank you for it, you were so right about that. But I wonder. Weren't you ever tempted?"

He was drowsy, but he turned over and squeezed me.

"Incredibly."

"You mean that?"

"Son, it helped that you weren't quite my type, that, like you, I prefer my men to be a bit older than a teenager, but when I was alone, after Dennis left me, I was so lonely and often very horny."

"It would not have been so much temptation to have had you around but in your own bed. But lying there next to me, warm and soft, and I knew you would be enthusiastic, all it would take was a little hint. Just letting down my guard for a moment. There were a lot of nights that it was a close call."

"I never knew."

“You weren’t supposed to.”

I thought for a few moments.

“So how did you resist, how did you make it? I need to know how to do that.”

“I just kept reminding myself why you were in my bed in the first place. What it was that you really needed, what it was that you didn’t need.” He paused. “And how much I had come to love you. How important it was that I not do anything that would hurt you.”

“And it *would* have hurt you, Will; and I knew it even if you didn’t.”

“What about now, Paul? Is it a problem for me to be here?” I didn’t want that from him, I wanted to know if he did, though.

“Why,” he said puzzled, “you’re my son, Will. You have been for a long time. It wouldn’t even occur to me now.”

Then one night when Brandt was home I crawled in between the two of them and they both held me, and then I really felt like a little boy. That night I cried myself to sleep in their arms.

§ PAUL

All in all, I think Mats leaving was a good thing, painful as it was. It was the first thing that had ever really gotten inside him about his behaviors. I think he understood this would always be difficult for him, but I’d never seen him not act out before, never seen him handle pain positively.

I worked on Matteus, he was a tough little bugger. Not hostile or defensive, strong. But he was feeling the betrayal and the pain. His way of handling it was to retreat into his music, burying himself in it. Will didn’t know, but I set up a regular Wednesday night meeting with Matteus, when Will had a late class.

We went out for dinner, a treat for us both. I took my cues from him, sometimes he just wanted to enjoy a break, a nice meal, a nice restaurant, idle talk. But often he wanted to be serious, and he was such a forthright speaker.

Will better get him back or he’s on my list as a backup for Brandt. Nah, I couldn’t get past that little elfin body of his, really, no attraction at that level. But he would make quite a catch for someone. This young man had a heart of gold, he’d sweep someone off their feet.

Finally, as Thanksgiving approached we were sitting in an Italian restaurant that was one of my favorites, a table next to an open fire, it was warm and mellow and we were eating tirimisu. He put down his spoon, looked sad, then back up at me.

“Paul, I am still so hurt because of him, but also I am missing him very much,” he told me. “I am very lonely.”

“Well, Matteus, I can understand those feelings. What do you think, is it possible for you to take him back? Can you give him another chance? He did forgive you when

you let him down. I'm not saying it was the same, though maybe in his eyes it was pretty serious."

He was quiet for a long time.

"It is not for what he did, but for the future I am so concerned. I can forgive him perhaps, I can forgive a man here or there if he still is loving me, but I cannot think he will not have another hundred lovers this year, so for what does he need me?"

He could always cut to the heart of the matter.

"OK, I understand that perfectly."

"But I'm going to give you a shove now. I've been watching him for these past two months, and he has made enormous strides. I'm not telling you he's perfect, I'd have to be honest and say you might have to be ready for a slip up at some point, it could happen."

I took a breath.

"But Matteus, you know you both love each other so much, you have to give him a chance; it doesn't all come together perfectly for him. But he's doing it, has been doing it, without you, for months. Compared to what he was the first day I met him, it's been a miracle."

I took a sip of my coffee.

"Talk to him, son, tell him your pain, let him tell you his."

—

Two weeks later Matteus moved back in. Just in time for Thanksgiving. He thought it a thoroughly excessive experience, "very American," he said, diplomatically.

The Colonel and Eleanor stopped by for dessert.

§ ELEANOR

We were both overjoyed at the reunion. I had spent many sleepless nights worrying when they separated. I thought losing Matteus would throw Will into a spin, push him back over the edge. Matteus' love was the one thing that I thought had saved him, and I was truly petrified.

In fact, the Colonel and I had met with Matteus three times, though no one else was aware of it, I think.

It was my husband's idea.

"We can't lose both of them, Eleanor. We have to do something."

Well, I said he was ever a man of action. We asked Matteus to come to our place for dinner.

When we were together with Matteus I was amazed further to see how Thomas doted on that boy. For once he did most of the talking.

“Matteus, we are sorry that Will has hurt you. We don’t want to lose you from our lives, not from his either.”

It was enough to make me take a deep breath.

“We think of you, both of us do, as another son. And we hate to see our family split apart like this.”

It seemed that wonders would never cease.

§ WILL

I had my life back.

It was so painful to face him, but there was no pain I wouldn’t take to get him to come back. I told him all about Mary Beth and the things I was doing to be good. And he told me about how much I hurt him, and instead of getting crazy, I stored it all away to remind myself when I needed it.

Like Paul reminding himself why I was in his bed.

So a bitter cold winter settled down around us yet I was warm, and spring came and we thawed and still I was warm, and our first year of college was done.

And Mary Beth got me started talking about my father.

Chapter Twelve

Crucifixion and Resurrection

§ WILL

Things happened in blurs around me.

I came to see that I would live my life in very small bits, little pieces of time. One day at a time. Not the TV show, a way of life.

Paul said, “whatever works.”

My horizon being so low, it was almost a surprise when June 1984 came and there I was on the stage, graduating. Both of my fathers were there, and I didn’t stop the Colonel when he went to hug me.

We had a little party afterward, all of our friends, family, Paul and Brandt’s friends, lots of people, I was surprised how many were crowded into the condo that day, and I was the guest of honor officially, and I had a speech to make.

“Some of you know about my past, and some of you don’t. I won’t burden you with it today.

“What is important, is that I would not be here if it were not for Paul. I would be dead somewhere, and he knows it too. Dead in my soul and probably just dead.”

I was shaking and trying in vain to keep my voice steady.

“So for you, father Paul, I want to recite a poem. I didn’t write it, you may recognize it. But the fact that I can say this is because of you, most of all:

“Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the Pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.

“In the fell clutch of circumstance

I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

“Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the Horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
Finds, and shall find, me unafraid.

“It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.”*

[* Invictus, William Ernest Henley]

Funny thing. The Colonel was the one who cried.

I had some pretty big worries for the future.

Immediately I needed to study for my boards, so I could get my R.N. license, I'd loved my clinicals, and couldn't wait to get to work, but had to take and pass the boards first.

Things were looking pretty bad in the gay world just then. People in Chicago were starting to show up with this AIDS and the mortality rate was looking dismal. Some were saying it was going to be 100%.

At Nursing school the curriculum pretended all nurses were straight, but there was a pretty active Gay Student Union, and half the male nursing students belonged to it. We got proactive about things, started networking. Just about the time I graduated we found a group in New York that published guidelines on how to have healthy sex.

I started making Mats wear condoms, and on the rare occasions I fucked him I used them too.

Mostly I was being good, I was getting better at it, and I was still seeing Mary Beth twice a week, it was . . . interesting what I came up.

I decided that I was going to have to learn to live with one sick puppy for a very long time. This just wasn't going to go away, I could see that I would have to work on my a-dick-shun all my life. That was depressing.

The more I read about AIDS, the more worried I got.

One day at a time.

My license came through, I quit my temp job as a Nursing Assistant, and went to work at Mercy Hospital for a while. I loved it I volunteered to work the Gerontology wards, I loved the old people there, they were so calming for me.

They were all wonderful patients. Some of them were so wise and happy, despite the horrible stuff that was happening to their bodies. Some were nasty, bitter, angry, whiners, but I liked them too. They'd earned the right. Most of them were pretty helpless and I figured it was a privilege to be able to help them.

It really helped, in the strangest way, to fill up that hole.

I did about six months there and then went to the University of Chicago Hospital, because they were doing work with people with the AIDS syndrome. It was not as rewarding at first, but it became important to me because there were actually doctors and nurses who refused to enter the rooms of people who might have it.

And many of these men realized in time that they were going to die, most of them died, pretty quickly. But it was not just sad and frustrating and painful, sometimes it was so uplifting. There is a serenity that comes over some people before they die, and they see the important things, and every contact you have with them becomes profound, a religious experience.

Paul said it may be that this was what God put me here for. He said my pain made me a better nurse to them.

Mats was buried in his music, but things were going pretty well for him, he had one more year and figured he'd take a graduate program too.

We were getting worried about his immigration status once his student visa expired. There were a lot of problems for gay couples to begin with though being a recognized performing artist would probably have made his chances of getting permanent residence a lot better.

We actually had not decided what we would do when he graduated, I could see us going back to A-Dam, I missed it sometimes, I still wrote to the Dykes now and then, Mats would write the letters in Dutch for me. They read English well enough, it was just a courtesy.

And this AIDS thing was stirring up a lot of shit politically, there was talk of banning gay people from immigrating, or even visiting.

One day at a time, Will.

In March they announced that they were ready to provide testing for the disease. It was a decision point for me. I figured if anybody had it, I did.. The evidence showed a long dormant period was common, if not universal, as much as ten years I debated being tested.

Mats was vehement, I'd never seen him so excited.

"No, Will, you do not need this test, what will it do for us? There is nothing to treat this if you do have it, or if I have it either. So what is the point? What will we do except worry?"

"Mats, still it would be good to know."

“Then some nazis will maybe come and take you away because now they will know if you do, and if you do not, then maybe they will come anyway.” I had rarely seen him so angry. Well, he wasn’t American, didn’t understand the difference between the posturing and the reality. I figured Nazi meant something in Holland. I thought of the brothers he had lost before he was born.

So I put it off.

I was being pretty good, and when I slipped, and it was gratifyingly rare, not even once a month, I still had the presence of mind to have a condom with me.

I was not going to pass this around to anyone, I was a health professional. Then I realized what that really meant, I needed to know because I couldn’t risk passing it to patients accidentally, I need to know for my own peace.

There was a Gay Men’s Health Coalition chapter in Chicago by this time, and I was working there as a volunteer, my nursing degree was a big plus but there were a lot of professionals there. Testing was voluntary despite the ravings in Washington, and completely confidential, untraceable.

I didn’t tell Mats.

I got the results two weeks after Rock Hudson announced he had it.

§ PAUL

With the boy out of school, they were talking about moving out of the condo, but both Brandt and I talked them out of it. Financially they still needed help, the location was important too, it was close to Will’s work and to Matteus’ school. But I could see my little bird would fly the nest one day not too far off.

I changed jobs again, took a management position with a medical device company, started travelling a lot myself, so with both Brandt and I being gone rather often, it was actually a good thing to have the place looked after.

I knew Will was worried about whether he had this HIV; I was just as concerned, and Matteus came to talk to me about it several times, just seeking some moral support, not wanting to burden Will with his fears.

Then Will came one day, went into the room with Matteus, closed the door and they stayed in there for hours, it was obvious they were making up for lost time, Matteus missed two classes.

§ WILL

Well, I never expected it but there it was.

Negative.

You'd have thought I would be overjoyed, and I was certainly happy, we celebrated with a long afternoon of fucking. I still used condoms, though, I wasn't sure I was going to trust this test. Just in case, you know.

I was encountering every day, at work, at the center, when we went out and tried to go clubbing – something that rarely worked since no bouncer would let Mats in the door of a bar – people who had it.

And I thought God was playing a little joke on me, of all the people on this Earth to not have it, I was the least worthy. I didn't know just then how big a joker He was.

I started to talk with Mary Beth about it. Seemed like everything that happened, good or bad, I couldn't really handle on my own.

“Will, you have a lot of work to do, a lot of years of damage to repair.”

“I promise you Will, that it won't always be that way. It takes a long time for people to come to believe in their own worthiness, especially people who've taken the kind of beating you did in life.”

One day at a time.

And then it was another year behind me, and I began to work exclusively with AIDS patients, we called them PWA's now, and volunteering to do outreach for prevention.

I used to go down to places where the hustlers would hang out, Halstead and Clark streets, to hand out information, condoms. I was better than most of the outreach workers, because I understood our clientele there. My coworkers did not know of my past, but the street boys got to like me, opened up for me. They knew I wasn't judging them, and once in a while I got one of them to do something good for themselves.

But I wasn't foolish, I was no Paul to be able to work his magic and save their lives as he had saved mine. I just hoped here and there I could do a little good.

In January, Mats got his Bachelor of Fine Arts and did a concert performance as part of his final requirements, it was stunning, he played a Rachmaninoff piece, supposed to be one of the most difficult piano pieces there was. I could not judge, but the ovation was incredible and I'd nearly messed my pants just listening. It was recorded and I nearly wore out that tape. He looked beautiful in that tuxedo. Tiny, but gorgeous.

He started on his Master's degree, concentrating on preparation for another performance. And he was doing visiting performances with smaller symphonies.

That summer of 1986 we took a vacation, went to California, the scene of the crime.

I took Mats to Disneyland, remembering that day with Jesse, wondering what had ever become of him. Wanted to introduce Mats to him. Even wondered about Kent and Gary, with much less affection but some compassion. I had grown up a lot.

The trip was good for us both, but Mats was very tired, he'd pushed himself hard to finish school in three and one half years, and the concert work was incredibly draining. He got a cold while we were there and it lingered for weeks.

When we got back to Chicago he didn't get a lot better and I was at work when he called me.

"Will, I am not to worry you about this, but the doctor is saying I must go to the hospital."

He had pneumonia.

And a sick feeling ran up from my testicles into my heart.

§ PAUL

People ask me sometimes why I did it, why I took Will into my life, kept him there, paid such a price. I have no answer, I have every answer.

I did it because my parents loved me and taught me how to love and he needed love, deserved it. And the more badly he behaved, the more I knew he needed it. I did it because he was there and needed me.

I did it because I was created to be of value to others.

I did it because I became his father and he knew it, well before either of us could see it or say it.

I did it because it was God's will, and my destiny. I was always meant to be a father, his father.

Perhaps I did it because I needed a son to mourn my passing; to carry on my memory; to share my love with others after I left.

I did it because.

I did it.

It went so quickly.

God forgive me, I think it was a blessing. Matteus lasted less than six weeks. I guess he was just smaller and more fragile than most.

In the end Will was no sacrifice for me, the price of giving up places and people for a while was small. But the price of love is always pain, and there was to be more pain, for me, for Will. All love ends, at least with death.

And that was my only regret. I was deeply troubled for Will's pain was not to end with Matteus.

I had spots on my legs.

We knew of course, but both Brandt and I went for testing to be sure.

§ WILL

GOD, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
Courage to change the things I can,
And the wisdom to know the difference.

In two years I lost them all.

§ ELEANOR

The Colonel told me it was “sad,” but I could read his real language. Sad? It was devastating.

He didn’t display it for anyone, not even me, but my husband had become very attached to these men. He too had accepted Matteus as a third son, and this loss struck as deeply as anything other than losing Will could. I knew at times he was put off by Mats’ feminine demeanor, his soft nature, but he also understood the sweetness, gentleness, and fathomed for once his son’s attractions. No, I don’t suggest he shared them, but this was, perversely, something he could understand. In any event he never doubted Matteus’ goodness, nor what a positive effect he had on Will, and that was all that mattered to him.

We had both come to prize Brandt’s eccentric sense of humor and his ability to speak engagingly and substantively on any issue. I knew, and we both grieved for Paul’s incredible dual pain.

And then, Paul.

Thomas understood Paul, related to him in a way I could barely grasp. He had shared his fatherhood with him, something men just don’t do. Shared the love of his son with him. They had a rare, perhaps an unheard of bond.

If the Colonel was in pain, my lot was no better.

Paul had saved my son’s life. Matteus was my son-in-law. I loved them both.

And under it all, of course, we shared a vast reservoir of fear. Fear about whether Will would survive this, could survive it. He did not have the disease, but we feared it would kill him anyway.

§ WILL

It had not ever occurred to me, but Mats was not a virgin when I met him. I know I was as faithful to him as I could be, and given the incubation time for this disease, I

don't have any reason to think he'd ever cheated on me. Not that I'd have any right to complain. Not that that would matter to me now.

But God was a cruel trickster to do this.

He went softly, smiling at me, telling me, "Please, Will, for me do not be too sad. For me keep to your one day at a time, I will be happy for you if you do."

I was with each of them, to the end. With Mats, his parents flew over but arrived too late. They took it with the resolve people of that age often show, but they had to be utterly destroyed to have seen all of their beautiful sons die before them.

Paul got me through that, helped me heal up enough before he told me the rest of the bad news. After Mats I thought it couldn't get worse, and Brandt was hard enough, I had come to feel very strongly for him, but...

Everyone's father dies. "And no parent wants to outlive their child."

Paul lingered for days, delirious. I slept at the hospital, lived in a chair by his bed just as he had for me so long ago. And when he went he didn't have that last lucid moment; didn't recognize me at all.

It was a gloomy fall day in 1988. I was almost twenty-eight years old. I was so drained. I was so exhausted. I could hardly move.

I was a fly stuck in amber.

The funeral was three days later.

Father took me to his home afterward, after we laid him to rest next to Brandt and Mats.

He tucked me into his own bed, and he kissed me on the forehead. And he whispered in my ear, as he lay down next to me and wrapped me in his arms, "I love you son."

I didn't see much of the old man growing up and was looking everywhere for my dad. I found him here, lying in my father's bed, in his arms. I had always had what I was looking for, after all those men, all those years, I had always had it, I just had not known it.

I had my Father's Love.

Afterward

December 31, 1988

- 106,994 cases of AIDS have been diagnosed in the United States; 62,101 are dead.

December 31, 1999 (latest available as of this writing)

- 733,374 cases of AIDS have been diagnosed in the United States; 430,441 are dead.

June 2000

- *412,471 Americans are estimated to be living with full-blown AIDS; and 650-900,000 altogether are infected with HIV.*
- *AIDS is the fifth leading cause of death among Americans aged 25 – 44, and the ninth leading cause of death among Americans aged 15 – 24*
- *Worldwide, there are over 35 million infected with HIV and at least nineteen million who have died.*

I Am Not Paul

Paul is the ideal me, of course, the me I might honestly strive to be. I have done some of the things Paul did. But I am weaker, he is much wiser.

Many have commented on the need for more Pauls. Many know such people are God's angels, saving those they may, compelled by forces not understood by anyone including them, to make one more effort, one more sacrifice, heal one more soul.

In that I am Paul. I have sins to atone for, and a precious handful of lives I've made better. God will, I hope, not weigh the scale too finely, judge me too harshly. I pray that God understands how truly flawed his creatures are; and judges us not by our failures but by our efforts to be better.

I did finally take up the burden.

There was a 'Will' who was a real person, I knew him briefly.

Will exists today, in many places, ages, forms. His pain is real.