

Mountain Bike

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In deference to the rugged terrain of the fire road, the ambulance moved agonizingly slow. Come on. Hurry the fuck up! He's gonna die before we...Shit don't think things like that, he's not going to... My mind was racing as I glanced round the tight confines of the ambulance. Both EMTs were busy doing what paramedics do, so they mostly ignored me. I was fine with that, cuz right then Cary's life was in their hands. It was hard to look at Cary; I'd never seen so much blood in my life and it made me nauseous. However, what was worse was that he almost looked dead. Some monitor kept beeping at regular intervals so I hoped that meant he was alive. His chest barely moved with his breath. As much as it pained me, I was glad to see him grimace when the vehicle hit a large bump; I instinctively reached up and wiped tears from my own eyes.

We had been having a great day of biking in one of the local canyons. After the ball-busting uphill climb, we laughed and joked while we rested. I was suffering more than Cary and he was quick to point this out; his body is a machine! Eventually we began the fun part: riding downhill. Occasionally we had to negotiate our way around hikers or other bikers on their upward climb, but the trail was mostly ours. We both leaned into the curves, but almost as soon as he released the brakes, Cary would be peddling as if gravity alone was too slow. I knew he was challenging himself but was also putting on a show for me. It was difficult to watch the trail *and* his athletic antics, but his body was certainly worth the extra effort on my part to watch the show. Of course, he had no idea that I had been lusting after his body for quite some time. As we approached a hairpin turn, I ignored his gorgeous ass and legs to concentrate on the trail, as winter rains had disturbed the generally compacted surface. When I briefly looked up, I saw the back of Cary's bike swerve before the rear tire cleared the trail. I guess he had hit the front brakes a bit too hard and got a bit of unintended lift. He corrected, but was apparently losing control as this bike teetered on the bank. I'm not sure if I heard him yell before he disappeared from the trail.

I stopped my own bike as quickly as possible and peered down into the canyon. I yelled but got no response. I yelled a second and third time; still no response. I felt my pockets and realized I had forgotten to bring my phone. Fuck it all to hell! I desperately thought, as I was about to climb down into the brush-covered slope. I spied a group of hikers headed up the trail and hurried toward them with the hope that one of them might have a phone. Everyone in the group may have had a phone but only one, a woman of about 30, understood me in my near-hysteria. She immediately called 911 and promised to stay until help arrived as I scrambled to find Cary.

“God, I hope you weren’t screwing around Cary. This is so uncool. We were having so much fun before this shit happened. I’m sorry, but this is just so fucked up!” I’d started thinking out loud, when a sob, caught in my throat and ended my speech as silent tears rolled down my face. I looked up and caught the tech seated next to me looking in my direction.

“You don’t look so good, guy. I’ve got my hands full at the moment so do me a favor and just put your head in your lap and just think about breathing.” I felt his hand on my neck easing me forward and then he rubbed my back for a moment as he continued. “I think your friend is going to be okay. It looks much worse than it really is. They’re ready for him at the hospital and his parents have been notified. So just hang in there okay?”

Once I realized I was about to pass out, I tried to concentrate on breathing. How stupid would it be for me to faint? I had a couple of scratches and bruises from scrambling down the embankment to reach Cary, but I’d had worse injuries on the playground. Cary had taken a serious fall. I felt woozy as I recalled the gash over his right eye and how his bike was bent around his body and that the front rim was completely destroyed. All this bouncing around didn’t help my stomach either.

When the driver reached pavement, he took off like a racecar driver. The siren was only mildly irritating inside the tiny medical cocoon, but the speed made it feel like *finally* something was happening! I was about to sit upright when I felt a warm hand on my neck.

“We’re almost there buddy, so please just hold on.” I recognized the voice even though I couldn’t see who was speaking. As promised the vehicle soon came to a stop. The rear doors opened and medical personnel crowded the small aperture as Cary was transferred to hospital jurisdiction. “The waiting room is over there,” the blonde guy said gesturing before he followed the gurney into the emergency room entrance.

Inside I found Cary’s parents looking quite grave. It rather frightened me as I thought perhaps they knew something that I didn’t. “Your mom is on her way,” Cary’s mom announced before she hugged me. The three of us sat in the waiting room while I was totally freaking out.

It felt as though several lifetimes had passed before a doctor appeared in the waiting room. “Mr. and Mrs. Norton,” he began after a nurse had pointed us out. “Fortunately your son was wearing a helmet, so most of his injuries are no more serious than what he has probably experienced while being a typical kid, although he received a lifetime’s worth of bruises and abrasions today. He received a gash above his right eye, which required several stitches, but it appears to be only superficial, with no damage to the eye itself. His right wrist sustained a significant sprain and he has a broken nose and two hairline

fractures in the two outboard fingers of his left hand." His mom gasped. "But those breaks are fairly insignificant," he added to reassure her (and me.) "Because of the mild concussion, we will keep him overnight for observation and I expect he will be released tomorrow." He looked at me and noticed I was still wearing my helmet. "I'm glad you boys had the good sense to be wearing headgear; it could have been much worse." Then turning back to Cary's parents he continued. "I don't expect any complications, but don't hesitate to call if anything troubles you. The hospital can provide your personal physician with any pertinent information and of course, we are always here if the need should present itself." He looked at the three of us in anticipation of questions, before he continued. "Your son has splints on both hands. The right hand is bound because of the sprained wrist, so that one will come off soon, but the other will remain in order to allow the bones to mend. Obviously he is going to have a bit of difficulty with eating, bathing and going to the bathroom. No offense, Mrs. Norton, but in my experience teenage boys don't want a mother's help in these situations. You could help by providing food that doesn't require knives, you know things he normally eats like cereal, pizza or sandwiches that he can eat without a knife and even his fingers if he wants to. But let his dad or better yet, his little brother," he said looking directly at me, "Help him with changing his clothes, going to the toilet or taking a bath." He's bound to feel uncomfortable and we don't want him avoiding these things simply because he is embarrassed or uncomfortable." I was about to clarify my relationship to Cary, when his mom clasped my hand in such a way as to tell me everything was okay. The doctor looked at each of us before he began to speak again. "There is one other thing. We observed some abrasions and severe bruising in the pelvic region; my guess would be that he was struck by the bicycle's handlebar. It appears that no serious damage has occurred though Cary will probably be very sensitive there for several days. However, in preparation for anticipated emergency surgery, his pubic area has been shaved. At his age, this is likely to be viewed as a traumatic, if not emasculating experience, so no one," he said looking directly at me, "Should make comments or jokes about his condition. We don't want to compound his cuts and bruises with any psychological trauma. Understood?"

"Yes doctor," I said completely unnerved.

"Unless you have any further questions, I'll get back to work. A nurse will be around shortly to escort you to the observation ward where Cary will spend the evening. You are welcome to visit, but only for a very brief period. Please don't be alarmed by the amount of machinery at his bedside; it's only for his protection, and don't expect him to respond much. With the trauma and some sedation, he's likely to be fairly non-communicative." He turned his warm smile on the three of us. "But please ask the nurse if you have questions or concerns, okay?" He then shook our hands as we thanked him before he departed.

As soon as he was out of earshot, Cary's mom told me that she had indicated that I was Cary's brother. "Some emergency rooms only admit family, and you're

as much family as the rest of us except for your last name," she said with a smile. "We'll all go visit him once the nurse gets here, if that's something you'd like to do," she added gently squeezing my hand.

"Yeah, sure. Have you seen my mom?" I asked nervously.

"No, I haven't, but...Keith," she said turning to her husband and handing him the cell phone. "Why don't you call Mrs. Willett just to confirm what part of the hospital we're in? I'd hate to have her sitting in the wrong waiting room," she said with genuine concern.

I recognized her gentle manner is some of Cary's actions.

Shortly thereafter, a nurse escorted us to the area where Cary was being held for observation. It wasn't a hospital room per se, but a series of curtained bays within close proximity of a nurses' station. There were probably only several cables and tubes connected to him, but to me, it looked like some man-eating apparatus had attached itself to my friend in an attempt to suck the life out of his body. And although there were no visible remnants of his bleeding, he looked more lifeless than in the ambulance. I'm sure I gasped audibly and I began to feel faint once again. I approached his bed from the left, the side with the fewest encumbrances and leaned close to his ear. "I'm sorry Cary. Be strong, get better... please don't die. I love you." I looked around but couldn't find a body part that looked safe to touch; I was desperate to feel him but was afraid of causing him more pain. I looked up and saw his parents looking at him. The room was starting to spin. "I gotta go," I said while trying to smile. I made my way beyond the curtained cubicle and headed towards the waiting area. I was so happy to see my mother's face on the other side of the door; I'd probably never been happier to see her than I was at that moment.

She dropped me at the hospital the next morning. I had to work that day, and she agreed to pick me up after she made a trip to the grocery store. It took me a while to find Cary, as he'd been moved from the observation ward to a semi-private room. His parents had already been in to see him, but had stepped out for coffee.

"Dude!" he said from his bed. "It's good to see you and you're just in time. I gotta piss like a race horse and it's so embarrassing to have the nurse help me, do you mind?"

He looked rather helpless, but his voice sounded strong, almost cheerful. "No, not at all. What do you need me to do?"

"Nothing really, just help me walk to that door over there," he said, pointing toward his destination.

Since he was no longer connected to all those awful machines, it seemed like a simple request. "Sure."

He pulled back the sheet and brought his long legs to the side of the bed. I stood there like an idiot not knowing what to do, while staring at his muscular legs. Shortly he threw an arm around my shoulders and stood up. We walked into the toilet room and closed the door.

"Just hold this damned thing up," he said referring to his hospital gown as he bared his crotch and aimed his hefty cock towards the toilet. I'd seen Cary naked in the locker room, but never this close and never with his arm around my shoulder. My cock immediately started to stiffen. Seriously, what could be hotter than having my studly friend leaning into me, while nearly naked and taking a piss? I tried not to stare at his shaved pubes, but that was nearly impossible. His stream was strong; just like the racehorse he had mentioned. And Cary was hung like a horse! When he was finished, he signaled me to release his gown and since I was closest to the valve, I flushed the toilet before heading back to his bed. I had another good look at his incredible legs as I helped him back into his bed and pulled the bedding up over his body. When his parents returned I excused myself to meet my mother to get dressed for work.

Work consisted of bagging groceries at a local market. I had had the same job last summer and had pretty much mastered the 'paper or plastic?' question. However, one of the managers noticed that my politeness and smarts surpassed that of several of his regulars, and so had negotiated to move me into the store's coffee bar on a part-time basis. It was a nice change of pace.

When I got home that afternoon, mom informed me that Cary was home from the hospital; I changed out of my work clothes and headed down the street. We seldom used the other's front door and I found his mom in the backyard playing with the twins. Olivia and Jasper tended to think of me as another brother, so they came over to greet me before I entered the house. Cary's room was empty and I was momentarily confused. "Cary?" I called out, thinking that perhaps my mother had been mistaken.

"Dude! I'm in the guest room!"

Away from the hospital environment, Cary looked sort of like...Cary. He raised his muscled arm preparing to greet me by bumping fists, but just snickered when he remembered his splint. "Welcome home," I said, failing to find anything original on my tongue. "Looking good, buddy. How do you feel?" I was so happy to see him looking like himself that I wanted to hug and kiss him; I settled for squeezing his shoulder.

"Man, it's great to be home! I'm excellent, a little sore, but nothing to complain about. Thanks for stopping by." He was smiling and I smiled as well, though I

didn't know why he was thanking me, not visiting would be unthinkable. "What do you think of my new crib?" he said referring to the room we were in. "Dad put my bed in here, since there's a bathroom right there. Pretty cool, huh?" He looked almost like a kid with a new toy.

I glanced around the room. Although it was the guest room, it was set up as the family's den with a large television and stereo. Except for his toys, which were still in his room, this was a pretty awesome. "S-w-e-e-t!" I replied.

As was fairly typical, I ate dinner at Cary's house, except that night his mom delivered our meals on TV trays, while she and the twins ate at the kitchen table. After I took the dishes into the kitchen Cary and I were watching television when his mother appeared and asked us, well since I was the able-bodied one, asked me if I'd watch the twins for a few moments. "I'm sorry," she said. "But their dad is out of town on business and I need to run over to check on the in-laws. I'm sure it's nothing but Nina's going on about something and I can't figure it out over the phone." She chuckled; apparently this was a common occurrence with Cary's grandmother. "I shouldn't be gone too long. I'll get the kids in their jammies and they know their bedtime is only an hour away. If you pop in one of their movies, you won't have to do anything except send them to bed. And Cary's got my cell number." Within ten minutes she was on her way and the twins sat on either side of me as the four of us watched *Toy Story*.

The twins awakened me the next morning and I discovered that we had fallen asleep before the movie had ended. "Good morning," Mrs. Norton said brightly and entered to collect her two youngest. "Your lap must be quite comfortable," she teased. Cary snorted. "The twins looked so content curled up on top of you that I didn't want to disturb them last night just to put them to bed. Sorry, it took longer than expected. I hope you didn't mind."

"Not a problem, Mrs. Norton," I said with a smile.

"So is everyone ready for breakfast?" At the mention of breakfast, the twins abandoned me and surrounded their mother. It was obvious we were all hungry.

Dressed in a t-shirt and his boxers, Cary joined the family at the kitchen table for breakfast. As we stepped back into his room he quietly asked. "Dude. It's pretty lame, but could you help me take a bath? I'm getting kinda ripe..."

"I was wondering if I was the only one to notice."

"Well, I'm sort of handicapped," he said holding his bound hands out.

"That's just one of your handicaps," I teased with a laugh and slapped his ass.

“Ouch! I’m sore back there.” His smile let me know he was teasing. “You’re just lucky my hands are bound or you’d be in major trouble,” he said even as his strong arm pulled me into a lopsided headlock.

“Fuck, you do stink!” I said in a loud whisper, thinking his mother might hear me. My head was nestled in his armpit and my face was pressed against his muscled chest; suddenly his musk became intoxicating rather than obnoxious. “Okay, let’s dunk you in the tub, so I can get out of here; I do have to go to work today.”

Cary lowered himself into the warm water without assistance, though I stood by just in case. With his hands on either edge of the tub he leaned back and relaxed. He is so fucking hot! I thought and tried to imagine myself as a nurse in an attempt to keep the experience clinical rather than erotic. I gently rubbed the washcloth over his body being careful not to dislodge the forming scabs. I purposely avoided his crotch, but thoroughly scrubbed his armpits. He actually moaned softly when I washed his hair, which caused my cock to swell a bit. I thought of some of the nastiest customers at the store to divert the flow of blood away from my dick as I quickly finished my task.

Getting Cary out of the tub proved to be more problematic and we were both concerned about him falling since he wouldn’t be able to grab onto anything. I went into a kneeling squat outside the tub and got his arm over my shoulder. “Okay, on three,” I said and we rose in unison without too much difficulty, except that when he first exited the tub, we were practically hugging with his arm around my shoulder and mine around his waist.

“Wheew,” he exhaled with a nervous chuckle. I quickly patted him dry, but wasn’t quite sure how to approach his crotch, especially since his cock seemed to be a bit thicker than normal. I was relieved when he grabbed a hand towel with his free fingers and dried his cock and balls.

Having worked my way from his head down, I was crouched before him drying his feet. “Okay, big guy, let’s get you dressed,” I said as I looked up, with my face almost level with his crotch. My face flushed red and Cary just smiled down at me.

Cary probably could have dressed himself, but he didn’t object as I helped; he put on boxers, shorts, a baggy tee and flip-flops.

We were sitting side by side on his bed, when he said, “Thanks.” I sort of shrugged my shoulders and was about to say, ‘sure’ or something like that when he kissed me on the cheek.

A slight flush came to my face, but I just smiled at him. I was nervous as hell. I was also more than a little happy. I’d been thinking about kissing Cary for several months, but these last few days, the urge had gotten so much stronger. And

strangely, many of the times the feeling surfaced when we were in the company of others, like inside the ambulance, in the hospital and this morning while eating breakfast. Of course, bathing him was an altogether different thought process, which in my mind involved a lot more than just kissing. “I gotta get to work,” I said standing up. “Oh, and um... make sure your mom replaces the bandage over your eye. Okay?”

He followed me to the door. “Later, dude.”

I hurried home to jerk off before I showered and dressed for work. I was so jacked up, it was hard to concentrate; fortunately, I was just bagging groceries and that was pretty much second nature to me. During my lunch break I went to the restroom and dropped a load, something I’d never done at work. I was grateful to get my nut quickly, as I really didn’t want a coworker in the same room, even if I was out of sight, inside a stall. When I got home I changed clothes and mowed the lawn, hoping to burn off some of my sexual energy. Of course, the yard work necessitated another shower and I enjoyed a more leisurely stroke session under the flowing water. Eventually I called Cary, but kept the conversation brief. I told him I couldn’t come over, as I had to help my father. I hated to lie, but I wasn’t sure I could trust myself after this morning’s adventure and subsequent unbridled horniness. Cary sounded like he usually did: happy and content. To minimize my lie, I actually worked on cleaning the garage for several hours after dinner, something my father genuinely appreciated.

I beat off before going to bed and again in the morning; the sheets suggested that I had also had a wet dream. Damn! However, after breakfast and a shower, I felt great and went to work in an excellent mood. I was a bit embarrassed when the manager pointed out to my coworker that my smile and enthusiasm were *exactly* what he expected from *all* employees. She wasn’t thrilled with that bit of information.

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“Mom, can I ask you a question?”

Cheryl Norton, immediately raised her alertness lever to its highest. Like his older brother, Cary had adopted the habit of addressing his parents by their first names. It had been at least a year since Cary had called her ‘mom’. “You know you can always ask me anything, Cary,” she said turning to give him her complete attention. “What’s up?”

“Well,” he began and then paused. “Yesterday...yesterday I kissed Andy and I want to know if that means I’m gay?” His voice had almost the same tone as if he was asking to have his eggs scrambled rather than fried.

Twenty years of parenting could not have prepared her for that moment. She took a breath and answered. "In a word, no. A single kiss can do many things... just ask your father," she said with a smile. "But making you gay certainly isn't one of them. You might want to consider that in many cultures men kiss each other, the same way they shake hands in this country. It's just another way of communicating." She smiled at her son, who appeared calm and satisfied with her answer. "I'm glad you felt you could ask me."

"Sure, thanks mom." He remained seated in the bar stool, but said nothing more.

"Anything else?" she prompted.

"Nope."

"Then may I ask you a question?"

"Sure."

She was a bit disconcerted by his casual attitude when she assumed something important was being discussed despite Cary's apparent vagueness. "Would you mind telling me how this happened and what Andrew did to respond?"

"Nothing really happened," he said and shrugged his shoulders. "It just felt like the thing to do." She noticed his thoughtful expression. "Well, he had just helped me take a bath and get dressed which was kinda weird, I mean I don't know if I'd ever want to do that to him, but he was totally cool and stuff. Hmm, maybe that's what it was like when I was a baby and you did that to me, of course, I couldn't kiss you back then." A tiny smile appeared on his face. "And I thought about how the twins crawled on top of him last night like he was their best friend or a big dog...you saw them; it was...really... sweet...or something. And they didn't make a peep the whole time you were gone. And that night at the hospital he told me not to die because he loved me." He paused. "So then I just kissed him. On the cheek. One time. He didn't do anything, except smile, though I think he was a little nervous cuz his face got kinda red, but maybe mine was too. And then said he had to go to work and reminded me to have you fix my bandage."

Cheryl walked around to the opposite side of the bar and hugged her son. "Cary, some days you drive me absolutely crazy, but god, I love you so much." She kissed his cheek.

He returned the kiss. "That's for changing all those diapers," he said with a grin.

"Thanks, honey. I loved *almost* every minute of it," she said with a snicker. "But I'd like to add something else for you to think about." He nodded his head and she continued. "It's very common for people to feel a special bond when they've gone through some dramatic or tragic event. Andrew and you have been friends

almost from the moment the moving van arrived. That's over five years, but this past weekend, you shared a rather intense experience. It's sort of like my best friend, Jeanine and I. You probably don't remember, but I had a lot of problems when I was pregnant with the twins, especially the last trimester. It was pretty scary at the end; we thought we might lose them when they decided to come early. But Jeanine was always there for me. She was even in the delivery room with your father. At that moment I felt as though I loved her more than even your father, though in a totally different way, of course. We hug and kiss every time we see one another, and obviously there's nothing sexual about it, though it is about love." She rubbed his back. "Does that make any sense? I know it's not quite the same thing because women kiss all the time and no one thinks twice about it. It's partly a cultural thing and partly a gender thing, but still it's just another way of communicating."

"I think I get it, yeah mom."

She kissed the top of his head. "Just one more thing. I'm happy and proud of you for walking in here to talk. I encourage you to do that whenever, and that goes for your father too. And just remember, no matter what: if you ever did decide you're gay, or you want to spend your life writing the great American novel, or heaven forbid, get into politics!" she said with a snicker. "You will always be our son and we will always love you. So, are you hungry?"

"Like always!" he said with a smile.

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The typical pattern for the coffee bar included a rush at mid-afternoon followed by a lull until 5:00 or so when shoppers were headed home from work and tired housewives attempted to bolster their energy before fixing dinner. It was during the afternoon lull that the blonde EMT stepped up to the counter. Over his shoulder I could see the bright red vehicle parked in the loading zone.

"I'd like two medium iced coffees and a large iced latte with whipped cream please."

"Sure thing," I said with a smile. I'm surprised my face didn't hurt from smiling so much.

"Say, aren't you one of the guys from the bike accident in the canyon?"

"Yeah," I said, momentarily looking up from my task.

"Of course, you're the one that tried to pass out on me!" He said with a chuckle. "So how's your friend doing?"

"Cary. He's doing great! He's already been shopping on-line for a new bike. Nothing stops that guy!" I said with obvious admiration and continued preparing the beverages.

"Glad to hear it! I didn't think he was too bad off, but you can't always be sure. Good thing he had that helmet on." He watched me as I fitted the glasses into a cardboard tray and tucked straws and napkins between them. "But maybe you guys should call to see if I'm on duty before you go riding in the canyon again," he said with another chuckle.

I looked at his face, his smile was genuine and his face was handsome. My eyes dropped past his incredibly broad shoulders to an equally impressive chest. Reading the engraved plastic plate just above his heart, I said. "What does the 'E' stand for?"

"Eric. Eric Matthews. Nice to finally meet you under less tense circumstances... Andrew," he said, obviously reading my name badge, and placing two \$5 bills on the counter.

"No, you keep that," I said pushing the money back towards him. "My treat. It's the least I can do for you guys." I was very serious but still had a smile on my face.

"You sure?" he asked dubiously.

"Absolutely. I know Cary would say the same thing, his parents too. We're all indebted to you guys."

"Well, if you're sure," he said as if making a final offer. I just nodded my head. "Then, thank you. I know for sure, our driver, Mike will appreciate it. He always bitches about being broke, but he always orders the most expensive drink!" We both chuckled. "Thanks again." I thought he winked at me but I couldn't be sure, as he turned to leave.

"Not a problem. Thank you! And thank the guys." I watched him walk out the door and thought to myself. Man! That guy is built; looks like he should be playing football or something! I rang up the order and paid the bill from my pocket.

Cary called about the time I was getting home and invited me to join a couple of our friends for a movie. It sounded great except that I had no desire to see the film they had chosen. I also thought I could use a few more hours of separation. Today had been great and I hoped to keep things on an even keel.

We talked for a while until Cary finally asked. "You're sure you don't want to go? Andy, are you okay?" He sounded a bit worried, definitely atypical for him.

"Yeah, sure. I had a great day, though I am kinda tired. And," I added quietly, "That flick doesn't really interest me, maybe next time. But thanks for asking."

"Okay."

"But dude, can I come over after breakfast tomorrow?" I asked, with hopeful enthusiasm. "I've got a late shift tomorrow. We could do more bike research or something, you think?"

"Sounds like a plan! Man, you are something else," he said with a snicker.

"Yeah, but even my *parents* can't figure out what that is!" We both laughed. "I'll call you in the morning before I show up, just so you're not in a compromising position or anything." I started to snicker but somehow ended up snorting through my nose. We both cracked up.

"Dude, you're fucking hilarious. I'll see you tomorrow. Later."

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I was a single child by default. I have an older brother, Joseph and sister, Sarah but he had already started high school by the time I came along. I was my parents' surprise baby; my mother was 39 at the time. We have always lived in the same house and I had several good friends in the neighborhood, but never a best friend. By the time I was advanced to junior high, I had fallen well below the 50th percentile in terms of height and weight; I was the smallest boy in my class, and most of the girls were taller than me.

Just weeks before school started, I noticed a moving van drive past our house. For whatever reason, I decided to see where it was going and discovered the Norton family.

Mr. Norton had recently been transferred and apparently it was a bit of a scramble for them to get settled before school went into session. Cary was my age, but at the exact opposite end of the developmental scale. His brother, Matt was only three years older but he looked like a giant to me. Cary walked right up to me and introduced himself and the bond seemed to be sealed when we learned that we would both be in seventh grade together. He then introduced me to his family, like we'd known each other for years. That's when I discovered the twins, who were squirming around in a playpen, like a pair of puppies.

Since I never really knew my siblings, I'd always wanted a brother; Cary seemed like the perfect candidate. He took me under his wing sort of like Batman and Robin. Neither Cary nor Matt ever teased about my size or lack of any particular athletic skills despite the fact that they were both natural athletes. They actually encouraged me with backyard games played at my smaller scale. Matt eventually got a college football scholarship. Thankfully I wasn't genetically doomed to stay

small and near the end of freshman year, I started to grow. My *brothers* worked me mercilessly that summer and coaxed me to tryout for soccer and baseball the next year. I barely made the cut for the JV teams, but the *brothers* were happy, so I was happy. Both sets of parents were also pleased. Last year I got promoted to the varsity teams though I did quite a bit of bench warming, but I enjoyed my teammates and appreciated the progress I'd made in such a short time. Like his brother, Cary played football while I played soccer, but we did spend baseball season together. So we've been best friends for five years, and we really are like brothers.

I've always loved Cary as a brother, but a while ago I started to feel a bit differently about him. Perhaps it has a little to do with the fact that he's fun and funny, very likable and, a gorgeous hunk, but mostly it has to do with the fact that I figured out that I'm gay. Maybe my sexual development was as delayed as my physical development, cuz I just discovered this fact about five or six months ago. I haven't told anyone yet and sometimes it makes me a bit nutty. Duh!

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The energy was palpable when I arrived at the Norton house. The twins were beside themselves with excitement over a birthday party they would be attending that afternoon and insisted on telling everyone at the table, including their father, Kevin Norton, at least twice. He was spending some extra time with the family before he left town for another business trip. Cheryl Norton in particular, seemed pleased that Matt had called to say he would be coming for a short visit during the upcoming July 4th holiday. Cary seldom needed an excuse to be upbeat, but he was pleased to be losing the brace on his sprained wrist. I just sat back and absorbed family, until finally Mr. Norton had to leave and Mrs. Norton and the twins left in the car. Cary and I had the house to ourselves.

"Dude, c'mon, I wanna show you something," he said as we headed toward his room. "By the way, you were right; that movie totally sucked!" We laughed as we sat near his computer. "This is so fucking cool. Wait till you see this!" While he was pulling up the website he wanted, I asked about his wrist. "Yeah the brace comes off today, but I'll have a Velcro one that I can wear if I need to. I'll probably just tape it when football starts...but check this out!"

"It's Matt!" I said seeing him dressed in his uniform with a huge smile on his face. Half a page had been dedicated to Matt Norton on the University of Michigan's football website. Already as a sophomore he was making quite a name for himself.

"Yeah, isn't that awesome. Damn, my big bro is the man!" Cary almost yelled.

I had finished reading the blurb and said. "Yeah, and to think I knew him when he was just a nobody!" We both laughed, but it was great for me to see how much

Matt and Cary meant to each other. We also reviewed some bicycle images Cary had book marked.

We were just bullshitting like we often did when he turned to me and said. "Hey Andy, I'm going in to see the doctor today, you think you could help me with the bath thing again?"

He had this funny little smirk on his face so I figured he was teasing me or setting me up for a joke. "Aren't you afraid I might just leave you in there, now that we know you can't get out by yourself?" I snickered. "Huh?...huh?" I taunted and jabbed him in the ribs.

"You'd never do something like that. You love me, remember?" He laughed and his eyes seemed to sparkle or something. Something was definitely going on with him, but I laughed too, at least on the outside.

"Yeah right. I forgot," I teased back, still a bit guarded.

"L-a-s-t chance, Andy!" he said like some provocative salesman. "Cuz after today, the doctor's gonna give me my hand back. And I won't need you." His smile was disarming. "Dude, c'mon. It'll be fun!" He stood as if we had reached an agreement. As soon as I stood he pulled me into another headlock. Even with his bandaged hands he was too strong for me to break away. And despite myself I laughed as he led me to the other room.

Fun? And for whom? I would have been totally into it the previous time, but I was so nervous, and he definitely seemed even more uncomfortable than me! I couldn't even imagine what was going on in Cary's head. Then I noticed his scent, and my resistance began to fade.

As he stepped out of his boxers and lowered himself into the tub, I decided that Cary was something of an exhibitionist and wanted to take advantage of his captive audience.

"Better take your shirt off so it doesn't get all wet like last time," he said with a grin before he bent his knees, and submerged his torso in the warm water. A long, soft, "Ahhhh," escaped his lips as his eyes closed.

I interpreted this as a signal that I was now free to look and touch as much as I wanted. I stared openly before I reached for a washcloth. I flashed on the idea of removing the rest of my clothes and climbing on top of him, which of course, stiffened my cock immediately. Instead, using the cloth in my hands, I worshipped his body. At measured intervals I allowed my fingers to touch his skin, with soapy hands I massaged his shoulders and scalp. I raised his arms straight up, exposing his pits and the marvelous musculature of his limbs; the arm nearest me rested lightly on my back when I reached across his body to

cleanse his other one, the brace was rough but his fingertips almost tickled my skin. All the while, Cary emitted small moans of pleasure and a slight smile formed on his lips. As if the water was a magnifying glass, his chest looked even bigger than I had remembered, a vast rippled plane inviting my touch. The wet cotton teased his nipples before I made a pass along his defined abs. His smile faded and his lips actually parted as his chest got the lion's share of my attention. On one of the downward passes I noticed his cock for the first time since I had begun bathing him, it was definitely swollen, though not at all hard. My fingers gently massaged the fading bruise in his groin before using the cloth to rub the remaining area except for his cock and balls, though I debated that decision for quite a while. More blood had arrived at his handsome dick before I asked him to sit up so I could wash his back. He groaned disapprovingly at my request, but he complied. His back received thorough attention and his shoulders additional massage, the fact that he was sitting precluded me from handling his muscled ass. He repositioned himself again so I could work on his legs. The bruises were fading but he had quite a collection of scabs, therefore I concentrated on his enormous feet, the backs of his knees and the insides of his thighs, allowing the washcloth to graze over his exposed sphincter once before lowering his leg. I pulled the plug and rinsed his body with the hand-held shower as the murky water receded.

We repeated our two-man maneuver to get him out of the tub, but I wasn't wearing a shirt so his warm, wet skin touched mine. He seemed to press his body against me as he exited the tub; I was nearly hard again. I briskly rubbed his body with the fluffy towel wherever possible and patted around his scabs and dark bruises. He ignored his crotch so I accepted the challenge and gently towed his cock and balls; his cock throbbed in response and swelled further. I actually snickered as I realized that Cary probably hadn't jerked off since the accident because of his bound hands. He didn't acknowledge my snicker and I didn't say a word.

Cary was seated on the edge of the bed as I helped guide his feet into his boxers. I looked up and noticed his half-hard cock and a cheesy grin. "You need a shave," I said in a matter of fact tone. We were both still pretty smooth except for our legs and neither of us needed a daily shave. He raised a hand to finger his stubbled face. "I'm talking about down here," I said as I let my fingers trace the stubble at his crotch. He sort of chuckled, and then moaned as my fingers continued to tickle his pubes and his cock bobbed, getting harder.

"I don't know," he said. "It's starting to itch," he snickered. "Andy! What are you doing?" he called out in surprise, "Without even thinking, my hand had cupped his hefty balls and I was licking and kissing his stubble, as his dick hardened against my cheek. "Dude...ummm. I don't know...ahhh, about this." He sucked in a sharp breath. "Oh, man..."

"Chill, buddy," I said looking up at his confused face. "I don't know either, but I have an idea," I said while pushing him backward with a hand on his chest. He didn't resist and lowered himself onto the bed. I tore the boxers from his lower legs and crawled between them. I glanced at his still growing cock and at the landscape of his muscled torso from this new perspective, but the multi-colored bruise in his pelvis was somehow strangely erotic. Cary's subtle moans accompanied the licks and kisses I administered to an increasingly greater portion of his crotch. I ignored his distended dick though it frequently rubbed against my face of its own accord. I ravenously kissed, licked and nibbled all his skin and relished the variety of his smells. His generous ballsac had to be addressed one nut at a time, and after leaving them, my tongue slid up his throbbing rod.

"F-U-C-K!" he screamed as I licked, then kissed his head, which was drowning in precum. I had never intended to blow Cary. I'd never had a dick in my mouth and though I'd never seen him hard, I knew Cary's would be huge. And it was: about eight inches was my guess. But apparently my own cock was doing my thinking as I wrapped a hand around the base and eased his monster into my mouth. It was difficult and I wasn't having much fun at that point; I was too busy trying to keep my teeth tucked away like I'd read was proper technique. Still, this was something I'd wanted to try for quite a while and Cary's grunts and moans suggested he wasn't in pain. By concentrating on half of his meat, I was able to develop a reasonably smooth up and down movement, occasionally going faster, to test myself as much as anything. "Oh God...Andy!" he called out as his hips began to thrust. Cary's nut was getting closer but my jaw was already hurting so I pulled off and slid my mouth up and down his length as if playing a harmonica, or licked it like a popsicle and teased the head and the ticklish spot just below it. He was thrashing around on the bed, bucking his hips, rolling his head from side to side and breathing heavily. "JESUS...FUCKING...CHRIST!" he yelled as I swallowed my half-portion and went back to work. "Oh, god...ahhh, umm, Andy...dude, I'm...I'm gonna...F-U-C-K!" he bellowed and started to unleash his pent up load. His juice went everywhere! It was in my throat, dribbling out of my mouth and even coming out my nose; I thought he'd never stop shooting. He softened slightly, so I slid off his prick, thinking he was done for the moment. My own cock was hard as a rock. I rested back on my knees and looked at my friend. His mouth gaped open and his chest heaved like he had just run the length of 20 football fields. I smiled, happy that I'd been able to make Cary feel so good. I crawled onto the bed on hands and knees straddling Cary's body and stared at his face, his eyes were still closed as his breathing started to settle. He opened his eyes. "I guess you really do love me," he said with a silly grin on his face.

"Yup," I responded with a small smile. I was ecstatic, though I wasn't quite sure how Cary would react when he fully regained his senses.

We just stared at each other with our small grins until finally he spoke. "I've never done anything...with a guy," he said timidly.

"Me either," I confessed with a bigger smile. His arms pulled me down on top of him and our faces nestled into the other's neck. Perhaps a kiss was too much to expect from Cary but I ground my crotch into his and dumped a huge load in my briefs. He thrust up against me and deposited several shots on the front of my shorts.

I pulled away slightly to catch my breath when he quietly interjected. "Dude..."

"Ssssh," I said and placed a couple fingers over his mouth before he could ruin everything with some remark or complaint. His body could easily bear my weight and I was getting into this one-sided snuggle. "Shit! It's getting late," I cried when I happened to glance at the clock by the bed. I started laughing when I finally got off the bed. Of course the front of my cargo shorts were soaked, but I was looking at Cary sprawled on the bed.

"What?" he asked, slightly annoyed, but with a smile.

"You!" I said with a smirk, pointing to his beautiful body, which glistened with sweat and looked good enough to eat. "I was supposed to be getting you ready for the doctor, not for some porno photo shoot!" I laughed. "C'mon, let's get you cleaned up *again!*"

He was gazing at his reflection in the bathroom mirror when I returned with his shaver and deodorant. "Okay you conceited shit; get that gorgeous ass in the tub!" He just smiled, he didn't seem to mind being busted and apparently he appreciated my compliment. I used the handheld shower and in order to keep his hands dry, made him stand like he was being frisked. It was beyond hot and I was hard all over again. I finally got to feel his steely ass, but time was limited, so I focused on the job at hand. He was smiling when I turned him around and continued to smile as I scrubbed his crotch, which of course made him go from half hard to rock hard, but I explained. "Sorry dude, no time to help you with that. I just didn't want the doctor to find any leftovers from this morning," I said with a sinister laugh. He looked slightly disappointed but laughed too.

"Well, okay, but I think you're gonna need some more practice; remember when you were learning soccer? Practice, practice, practice!" he said with a lascivious laugh.

Very quickly I got Cary dried, shaved and dressed. He loaned me a pair of shorts and laughed at my soaked boxer briefs as I stripped them off and pulled his shorts over my half naked body.

I was totally distracted at work, though I didn't screw up too badly in the coffee bar and after my break, I was back to the box boy position. (I only had to change aprons.) I was pretty stoked about finally having crossed the gay milestone of giving a blowjob, but this just seemed to raise a million other questions. Was Cary gay too? Did the fact that I sucked his cock mean we're boyfriends? We didn't actually kiss, so, does that mean it's just sex and not love? Should I, or do I need to tell anyone else? What's next? What about all the other gay stuff I'd read about?

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Nothing seemed to have charged with Cary after our lusty interlude, so I chose to be content with the status quo and the next weeks passed quickly. The wrist splint came off and Cary was permitted to drive, though only his mother's car for the present, as she had an automatic and his car had a stick. Within a week Cary moved back into his room. Cary allowed me to 'practice' on him and he assured me that my technique was definitely improving, which pleased me. Only once did he ever offer to reciprocate. Cary was rather clumsy, but it gave a good idea how great it *could* be. And the fact that it was Cary made me cut him major slack.

It was good to see Matt, when he arrived for his visit, though I mostly stayed away since I'm only the 'adopted' brother and didn't want to intrude. Kevin secured a job for Cary, which would start the second week of July. Eric Matthews walked into the grocery store one day and invited Cary and I to join him at a Bike, Blade and Board Show at the convention center.

I made the introductions, when we met Eric at the rendezvous point. As was his style, Cary was Eric's instant buddy. After the obligatory review of the Cary's recovery, we talked about bikes and riding and sports in general. The show was mind-blowing. I was astounded to see bikes selling for over \$15,000, as well as a chainless bicycle. Cary saw several models he was interested in and Eric spotted a pair of rollerblades that he decided to buy off the Internet, if he could get a reasonable price. Cary and I were drooling over the skateboards, while Eric reminded him of his healing fingers and tender wrist. Regardless, the guys and chicks doing demos were amazingly talented and fun to watch. Eric stopped at a hole-in-the-wall restaurant and treated us to the best burritos I'd ever tasted. Eric was surprised by how much Cary could eat.

Eric was driving us back when he asked. "So how do you guys like college?"

I could see Eric's face in the rear view mirror as Cary answered with a chuckle. "Ask us again next year.

"Yeah," I said. "We still have to finish high school." Eric's expression definitely changed, though I couldn't read it.

“That’s right,” Cary said. “Numb nuts here, has to pick up an MVP award in soccer this year.” He turned his head and flashed me a silly smile. “And if I don’t get at least a partial football scholarship, I’m screwed.”

“Here all this time I thought your name was Andrew,” Eric said as he caught my eyes in the mirror. I shrugged my shoulder and smiled, as did he. “But seriously, you guys are high school seniors? You’re awful big for a 17 year old,” he said looking directly at Cary and squeezing his bicep, which I saw Cary flex for his benefit as he tossed out an appreciative smile. I started getting hard just watching them until I caught Eric’s eyes in the mirror and felt slightly embarrassed. “Maybe I’ll have to get to a game or two this fall.”

“That would be cool.” Cary enthused.

“Westridge has a pretty good football team...”

“*Pretty* good?” Cary interrupted with mock indignation.

“Yeah, they’re not too bad, but they were **way** better when Cary’s brother, Matt was on the team,” I said suppressing a chuckle. I could see Cary getting ready to counter until I mentioned his brother; instead he just smiled. “But if you are at all interested Eric, they always put out flyers at the grocery store about the time school starts. They’re usually in a little rack by the customer service desk.”

“Thanks. Good to know,” he said just as he pulled up to the drop off point. “And thanks for coming along today. I had fun. I hope you did.” He extended his hand towards Cary and they shook.

“It was awesome! Thanks, man,” Cary said and popped open the door.

“Yeah, it really was great. Thanks for inviting us,” I said and squeezed Eric’s thick shoulder since we were in an awkward position for a handshake. “But just ignore him.” I said, glancing at Cary, who was still leaning in the open door. “Since he hit his head, he’s forgotten most of his manners, like saying ‘thank you for saving my life.’”

Cary’s face turned red. “Yeah, Eric. Thanks for that. Everyone tells me you did a great job; I really appreciate it.” He extended his hand and they shook hands again.

“You’re welcome. I was just doing my job. But as I told...Andrew, a while ago,” he said smiling at me. “Perhaps you should call to see if I’m on duty the next time you want to go mountain biking.” He chuckled and this time I definitely saw the wink.

By this time Cary was fully recovered except for the healing fingers and started his job the following week; he liked it okay. "It's pretty lame," he said. "I work in the mailroom half the time and with the file clerks the rest of the time. I have to wear a tie, but mostly the people are nice, and the pay is excellent for work that any idiot could do."

"Obviously you're perfect for the job," I snickered.

"You're dead meat, when I get rid of this splint!" he growled before bursting into laughter.

Several weeks later, the splint did come off and we got together at my house to celebrate in our special way. Cary appreciated my ministrations; I actually got him off twice, but he seemed a bit distracted. I teased about trimming his pubes, which had grown back and he made a snide retort. I just chalked it up to the fact that his Jeep had gone into the shop for some expensive repair work, which I knew had him sort of bummed out.

* * * * *

The following week my parents and I went to visit my paternal grandparents. I'd always loved visiting them on the farm, but this trip was particularly significant since my grandpa had apparently become serious about selling the farm as he'd leased out the land for several years already and wisely concluded that a smaller house, closer to town would be more practical. As a teen it was one of the first times I'd seriously had to think about human mortality. But we didn't dwell on the sale and had a great visit. My dad's parents were well into their 70s and still going strong. Dad and I helped grandpa with a few household chores and we all spent time in their huge garden. And as in years past, we had homemade ice cream and apple pie, still my favorite part of visits to the farm. My other favorite thing was hearing stories from when dad was a kid and even about my older siblings. Grandpa is an awesome storyteller.

* * * * *

After the week at the farm, summer was already nearly gone for another year. Pre-season sports training would be starting soon before Cary and our friends got into the thick of our senior year. Cary wasn't excited about the prospect of classes but was jonesing to get back on the football field. I laughed appreciatively at his enthusiasm, though I wasn't anywhere near as anxious for the soccer season to get underway. But there were plenty of other things to talk and joke about while we ate pizza one evening. Mid-bite, I noticed that Cary's nose now had a slight imperfection as a result of the break. I liked it, a lot. It gave his face a bit of character and moved it one step away from perfection. While I was admiring his nose, he asked me if we could schedule a meeting where he could

introduce me to a new friend from work. I agreed and said I would check my work schedule tomorrow.

“So who is this guy?” I asked.

“Hannah’s not a guy,” he said. “But she’s pretty cool. She’ll be a sophomore this fall... in college,” he added in response to my surprised face. “I think you’ll like her,” he said with a pleased expression.

“I’m sure of it!” I said, despite the fact that I was a bit surprised by this turn of events. I guess I shouldn’t have been so surprised by his announcement. Cary and Matt were both chick magnets and dated regularly, though never with the goal of just putting another notch in the bedpost. Also, the fact that he wanted me to meet her said something about her and about our relationship; I wouldn’t be surprised if she hadn’t yet met his parents.

Hannah was very cool. And while I was predisposed to dislike her, that was not possible. She wasn’t movie star beautiful, and some might consider her to be plain. She had a luxurious mane of dark hair and lips that even I thought, to be very kissable. She wore little makeup but it accentuated her best features, her eyes and lips. However, it was her personality that made everything else so attractive. She seemed to glow with energy and her witty humor made her a perfect foil for Cary’s often-clownish behavior. She was of average height, but looked almost tiny next to Cary; they were a very cute couple. Of course, I thought he and I made a very handsome couple as well.

Life got more chaotic once pre-season training started. Hannah left for college, and Cary and I had little free time, or we were just too tired after work and practice to do much of anything. It didn’t get any better once school was in session and we quit our jobs. We only had one class together and I was enrolled in two AP classes, which demanded extra attention; plus I was somehow elected to the student council for the very first time, and without even trying! The upside of the situation was that we appreciated our time together even more. We hadn’t done anything sexual since my return from the farm; this bothered me, but Cary acted almost like it had never happened. Usually, he is quite unflappable; I guess that’s a good trait for a football hero.

I saw Eric one last time before school halted my summer job. On that occasion, Barry, the other EMT who had been in the ambulance that day, accompanied him. Introductions were made before I prepared their drink order.

“So Andrew, are you going to take the soccer team to state this year? You know, Barry was quite the soccer hero in college, that is, if I can believe his stories,” he said with a chuckle.

My back was turned during this and I felt an embarrassed flush rise in my face, though I wasn't quite sure why. "Hardly," I said and glanced at Barry and then Eric. They looked so sympathetic or *something*, that my embarrassment completely vanished. "My main job is to keep the bench warm," I said with a smile. "The comment about MVP was Cary's backhanded way of encouraging me. See, I used to be kind of a runt so Cary and his brother sort of pushed me into it. I've only been playing two years and most of the guys have been at it since they were kids. But I like it. It gets me out of the library, you know?" I slid the tray across the counter and saw they were nodding their heads with understanding smiles.

"Well good luck Andrew. It was nice to meet you," Barry said, picking up the drinks while Eric handled the money.

"Thanks, same here," I said and handed Eric the change. "Thanks guys." They smiled and headed toward the door. If Barry played soccer, I bet he has great legs, I thought while admiring the pair of retreating asses. And I'd still like to see Eric in his high school wrestling singlet. I wonder if they're a couple, although Barry seems kind of old, like maybe 30 or something? Another customer interrupted my musings.

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My life was fairly typical for a high school senior. Due to the attrition of last year's graduating seniors, I got more playing time than I had expected and the team did well enough, though not nearly as well as the football team, which appeared to be headed for Regionals at the very least. My tryst with Cary had seemingly heightened my interest in finding a boyfriend, or at least exploring the possibility and I finally admitted to myself that there were at least four or five guys at school that I thought I might like to get it on with. But they seemed like some elusive goal; Cary had been a fluke: we were friends and he was horny. I'd never told him I was gay and my assumptions about him were apparently incorrect. I felt like a schmuck for not trusting Cary or myself enough to tell him the truth and I wouldn't approach anyone at school until I had come out to him.

I enjoyed the best family Thanksgiving ever; in addition to my grandparents, both my brother and sister with their spouses and children were present. I think I enjoyed my nephews and nieces, ages 15 months to 6 1/2 years, as much as my parents and grandparents. But every time I was the topic of conversation I felt like they were all waiting for me to divulge my big secret. Of course I remained mute on that subject, though probably no one had the slightest suspicion that I might be gay, although I wondered if possibly my mother or sister had some sort of innate psychic ability that might enable them to see into my mind. A day later, while eating a turkey sandwich I realized how nutty I was getting and decided to visit Cary on Sunday after all the relatives had left.

Mrs. Norton was making turkey sandwiches for her men when I arrived, just something to tide them over until dinner, while the twins played nearby. I was too nervous to be hungry but accepted a half portion out of politeness. We talked and ate for 15 or 20 minutes until we excused ourselves and headed off to Cary's room, where we played a video game for another 20 minutes. We hadn't played since the accident and unfortunately Cary was *still* seriously superior. I put down my controller. "Hey bud, I need to talk to you."

"Sure but the game's not over yet dude, even though we both know you're gonna lose," he said with a chuckle.

"Obviously, but this is kind of important."

"Okay. Talk."

"Well, we've been friends for a long time, right?" Cary nodded. "We've been like brothers and from the start you've been...like...my big brother and my best friend. And...and Matt too. You're like; all of you are like my second family. I mean, your mom even told the people at the hospital I was your brother, so I could get in to see you, so..." I felt tears starting to form.

"Yeah, bro, that's all true. Kevin and Cheryl like you fine and the twins adore you. And yeah, sure, I think of you as my best bud, but what? It's not like we didn't already know all that stuff. So what is it you wanna tell me? I'm sitting here listening," he said with curiosity and possibly some annoyance.

"Well," I sighed. "I've always loved you like a brother, same as with Matt and the twins, but lately...there's been something...more. Cary, I... I love you...like, guy to guy." His face seemed to cloud over with confusion or something. "I'm gay, Cary. I...I'm sorry if that bothers you." I wiped my wet eyes.

"No way! Dude, are you sure?" He was shaking his head with disbelief and shifted away from me. "You mean like butt fucking and that shit?"

"Well maybe that... but yeah I'm pretty sure," I said quietly. "But I haven't done anything except that stuff with you."

"I'm no fag!" he said angrily.

"Dude, I know. I wasn't even suggesting that! Remember, I met Hannah and I know Rachel from school, so I know your interests, and that you have excellent taste in women." I saw the tiniest of smiles on Cary's face. "I guess I let myself ignore that because you're really hot and you're also my best friend, or at least you used to be." I paused, staring a hole in the carpet. "But you know what? Every time I helped you get off, all I thought about was you! I was so happy that I could do that for you... that I could make you feel that good."

"I don't know Andy. I was horny; I'm horny most of the time," he snickered. "But I don't want to be gay."

"You're NOT! I AM! And I'm not asking you to do or be anything you don't want to be. All I really want is to be honest with you about who I am and hopefully keep you as my friend. You're the *only best friend* I have. It'll hurt like hell to see you head off to some Big 10 school or whatever next fall, but I want us to stay friends." I had to wipe my eyes again and fought off sobs, which threatened to burst out of my aching chest.

"Yeah, but..." Cary began but stalled.

"There are no buts, Cary," I started to cry in earnest. "It's either yes or no; this is not about sex, it's about friendship. I know I crossed a line and made some bad assumptions, but that won't happen again. And except for the boy/girl thing, I'm same same guy I've always been." I wiped my eyes again and stood. "Just think about it, please. I'm gonna go. I love you Cary and probably always will. But this is hard for me too. I've never done this before. How the hell do you tell your best friend you're a faggot?" I wiped my eyes one last time before I opened the door. Fortunately Kevin, Cheryl and the twins were in the den watching some program so I was able to slip out of the house unnoticed.

Cary and I didn't speak and avoided each other after that. I devoted my energies to my studies and exorcized any thoughts I might have had about approaching those cute guys at school. The manager at the grocery store almost wet his pants when I asked about a holiday gig, seems all his regulars wanted days off during the holidays.

After several lengthy discussions with myself, I decided to mail the Christmas gift I had purchased for Cary, since he and his family were out of town. I guess I debated because it felt more like a last ditch effort to revive a friendship than a holiday gift, given with joy. It wasn't much: a couple of CDs: *Smashing Pumpkins* and *Foo Fighters* and a humorous card, which seemed to convey my feelings, though under the guise of humor. Honestly, the card was the most important part.

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During one of my shifts, Eric appeared at the coffee bar; he wasn't in uniform. "Andrew! How's it going? I haven't seen you for a while."

I was engrossed in cleaning and looked up to see his handsome face, which was rouged by the chilly weather. "Hey Eric, happy holidays! The holiday greeting had become rote since I had started working. "I don't work during school, but I'm picking up some hours during the holiday crunch. What can I get for you?"

"Oh, I don't know. I was thinking about one of those cinnamon mocha things, what do you recommend?" He flashed a beautiful smile.

"Everyone raves about them, but what does that really mean?" I said. Just seeing his smile had improved my day immeasurably.

"You've convinced me. Fix me one of those please." There was that smile again.

There were no other customers so we chatted for several minutes. Finally I felt brave enough to ask. "Say Eric, do you think we could get together some time to talk about college and stuff? I don't know exactly where I'm going just yet, but it's coming up pretty fast and I'm starting to get a bit nervous, you know? I don't want to be a bother you or anything, just if you have some time or something."

"I'd be glad to." He grabbed his receipt and a pen that was lying on the counter and wrote a number on it. "Give me a call and I'm sure we can work something out," he said with his enchanting smile.

The Saturday night before school resumed, Eric picked me up outside the grocery store. He had assured me that we would go someplace low-key so my work attire wouldn't be noticeable or problematic. I was nervous nonetheless, especially since he was wearing a pair of rather snug jeans, which highlighted some of his most attractive assets. He chuckled when he discovered I didn't like coffee. "Well order some cocoa or something," he prodded, standing close but not smothering me. I enjoyed the sensation of his body heat as I ordered; he ordered and eventually paid the tab before we headed out in search of a seat.

"I guess I just assumed you liked coffee since that's where I always see you," he chuckled.

"No problem," I said as we settled into our seats, which looked like they had been salvaged from the dumpster behind a thrift store; the chairs were surprisingly comfortable. "I'm just glad you could find the time for me."

"No problem," he said mimicking me. "But what college mystery do you want me to reveal?" he teased, again with his beautiful smile.

I watched him out of the corner of my eye as I took a sip from the steaming cup; it was still too hot for my palette, so I leaned into the chair and rolled my head in his direction. God he's beautiful! I thought. "Well actually," I began and then stared at the ceiling.

"Well what?" he teased.

"Well, actually," I began again, with my eyes focused on the cracked plaster of the ceiling. "I was curious..."

"Yes?"

"Well I was wondering if...please don't take offense. But I was wondering if...I was curious as to whether...um...as if...maybe," I squeezed my eyes so tight they hurt. "Are you gay?" I said barely above a whisper.

His large, warm hand covered my white-knuckled grip on the chair, and I felt his breath when he answered. "Yeah, but relax. I had a feeling you were headed there."

His words allowed me to relax a bit and a huge sigh exited my mouth. The very last bit of breath formed a very weak, "Cool." Opening my eyes, his handsome face was just inches from mine. (I think he had moved his chair closer while I wasn't looking.) I felt comforted and terrified in the same moment. "Good to know," was all I could get out before a tiny smile crossed my lips and I started to softly laugh. His forehead wrinkled with his unspoken question. "God! I'm such a spaz sometimes," I said and laughed louder this time. "I was so totally freakin' myself out, that you might have needed to call the paramedics!" The words were barely out of my mouth when I realized the absurdity of my last statement. Eric stared at me in disbelief until we both broke out into laughter. I actually started to cry and I laughed so long that my sides hurt.

Hooking up with Eric was the smartest thing I had done in a long while. After a year of agonizing and worrying about my sexual identity, I was talking with the only other gay person I knew and he was totally candid and sympathetic. Eventually I asked about Barry, which produced a hearty chuckle from Eric, though his manner spared me most of the embarrassment over my misguided assumption. As it turned out, Barry was very happily married and had two small children, which he adored. Eric was an occasional guest at their home, but they were nothing more than co-workers and good friends. This of course, raised the question of Cary and myself. I was mortified when the question surfaced, but was glad to finally have someone to talk to about my dilemma and loss. I'd sort of skirted the issue with my parents when they asked about him, though I suspected that I wouldn't be able to keep them at bay much longer. (They're my parents; they're not stupid.) Perhaps I talked too much, my cocoa had turned cold before I drained my cup, but Eric remained a very attentive listener.

"That's a tough one, Andrew. I can't say I've had that experience. When I finally told my best friend he was like, 'it's about time you told me, since everyone else apparently knows all about this!' He even gave me a hug and a kiss, but no tongue, damn it," he chuckled. "I'll bet Cary will come around. You probably just caught him off guard, especially since he is back with all his jock buddies at school. I'm not excusing him, but I still remember my high school locker room.

There was all this macho bullshit, though most of the guys didn't even know what the hell they were talking about. I mostly kept my mouth shut since I didn't know anything about straight sex either and I certainly didn't want to let anything gay slip out, you know? Cary's got to be under a lot of pressure, even if he is all studly and alpha male and all that shit. Maybe he feels guilty by association, even if he is completely straight, so he's rejecting you in order to maintain equilibrium in the locker you, you know?" He looked at me with the most caring expression I had ever seen on a face other than my mother's. "I think you should give him a little more time, and I don't think you're ready to tell your parents just yet, thought I'm not telling you what to do. Shall we blow this place?"

We both started to laugh at his double entendre. The laughter was a welcome relief from our serious discussion, but I was exhausted and welcomed his offer to drive me home. When he stopped in front of my house, I felt the urge to hug and kiss my new friend and that's exactly what I did. The good night farewell might have turned into a serious make out session; we both got into the passionate kissing. I wanted to move closer but the console between the seats effectively blocked my path.

"That's kind of in the way," I said with amused aggravation, indicating the impediment.

Eric had pulled away, though his hand was still squeezing my neck. "It's my Detroit chastity belt," he snickered. "It gives me another moment to reconsider when my dick starts thinking for me. I don't know, but tonight I think it's trying to keep me from hooking up with a sexy stud that's not quite legal." He smiled. "Am I right?"

"Yeah, I guess. My birthday is a couple months away." I had been embarrassed, but got a little flirty and said. "I'll be *legal* the 15th of March."

"The Ides of March? You are dangerous; I guess I'd better watch my back!" Eric teased. "Sorry Andrew, but as a city employee I have to be a bit more scrupulous than most, but more importantly, I like you and don't want to mess things up. So will you call me or may I call you? I really enjoyed this evening and I'd appreciate the opportunity to get together again before we commemorate your big day. But regardless, please call me anytime, okay?" I just nodded before we were again joined in a lip lock, which lasted for several lingering moments. I doubt that my cock had ever been harder.

"Thanks, Eric. Thanks for everything. I owe you big time for tonight. You're...an amazing guy!" I said smiling.

He smiled back. "So are you, Andrew; so call me, please."

"You might get tired of my calls," I said trying to sound jovial, though I realized I could easily wear out my welcome with my only gay acquaintance.

"I doubt it, but I'll let you know if you get on my nerves," he said with a smile before his warm mouth met mine in our final kiss of the evening. We said our good byes before I exited his vehicle and he drove away in the dark. My parents were already in bed, which meant, I didn't have to hide my hard on as I walked to my room.

* * * * *

36 hours later school resumed, followed a few weeks later by the end of the first semester. The elective class that Cary and I shared came to an end with finals, so we saw the other only sporadically. I promised myself to end the school year with the best GPA I'd ever posted and to only call Eric occasionally. Eventually winter turned to spring and at our school, basketball and wrestling gave way to baseball and track and field. At the end of the first week of baseball season, Cary called me.

I'd barely answered the phone, when he began to speak. "Hey, buddy, are you alright? I haven't seen you at practice all week; everyone's asking about you. I know you didn't forget that it's baseball season again.

Despite my surprise and joy at hearing Cary's voice, I tried to respond in a calm voice. "Dude, thanks for the call. No I didn't forget," I said with a chuckle, which surprised me. "I'm okay, but I've decided to sit the season out." There was silence on the other end. "Cary, the main reason I played baseball was to hang out with you. I like the game and the guys and everything, but it was mostly about you... I don't mean in any sexual way; I just like being around you. But since you don't seem to be comfortable with that, I'm concentrating on school to see how close I can get to a four point O, this final semester."

After a lengthy pause, Cary replied. "Oh...okay, whatever."

It had been nearly four months, and even Eric's support had done little to assuage the hurt I felt over Cary's abandoning me. "Well, thanks for the call, Cary. I hope you'll call again. Unless there's anything else, I guess I'll let you go." I was surprised by how close to tears I was at that moment; obviously things hadn't changed very much for either of us.

Several days before my birthday, Eric called to invite me to dinner. We had talked several times since our evening at the coffee house, but we hadn't been together past that chilly January night. I was pleased to accept his invitation and we agreed on Friday night since my birthday landed mid-week. Eric was perfectly charming, which almost made me forget about the fact that I'd never celebrated a teen birthday without Cary somewhere in the picture. Eric took us to a Greek

restaurant, something I'd never experienced before. It wasn't particularly fancy, though they did have cloth napkins. The company and food were great. We lingered over dessert before Eric drove us to the theater. The movie was good, but having Eric's arm around my shoulder made the experience Oscar-worthy. And though I had fantasized about a night of raucous sex with Eric, it was perfect when he gave me a strong hug and a lengthy kiss at my door before we said good night.

In my room I picked up my phone to call Eric and noticed that I had two messages and several missed calls. I dialed Eric. He was still driving home while I thanked him for the best birthday ever. I didn't keep him on the phone; I couldn't think of a way to say the evening had been perfect. As it turned out both phone messages were from Cary, but since I was still enjoying the evening's glow and as it was after 1:00 in the morning, I decided to return the call later. I slept soundly that night, probably with a smile on my face.

My phone actually sounded urgent when it awoke me the next morning. "Andy, what the fuck? I've been trying to get a hold of you. Where were you last night? I tried to call at least half a dozen times!" Typically self-centered Cary, but I could only smile at his rant.

"Good morning to you too," I teased; the previous evening's glow had not yet faded. "I was out last night, but what's so fucking important, friend?" I imagined I heard him gasp at my haughty response, but his voice and tone had definitely changed.

"Sorry Andy. I was a bit concerned when I couldn't get in touch with you last night. I guess you're alright?"

"Yeah, I am. What about you?"

"I'm...I'm good. We clobbered Blair last night in the season opener! It was great! I wish...you...you should have been there. It was great." His words lost energy as he spoke. "You really should have been there, Andy," he added sincerely.

"Thanks and congratulations."

"Say Andy? I've been thinking about you...about us lately. Could we get together one of these days, if you have some time?"

Cary and I met at a diner, neutral territory as it were. Despite being rather nervous, it was good to see Cary and except for the fact that he appeared to be nervous as well, he looked as handsome as ever. I didn't say anything about the way he looked. We talked for 15 or 20 minutes about stuff, while we ate something that neither of us could even remember. We talked about everything and anything except *us*.

Finally Cary spoke. "Andy, I want to apologize. I haven't figured out all this stuff out about you, and..." he scanned the adjacent tables before he continued. "You know, the gay stuff, but I haven't stopped thinking about what you said about us being friends, *best friends*. The last few months have given me a chance to see that there is no one else out there like you. I have lots of friends, but no one like you." He sighed. "I think you just freaked me out. I mean..."

"Sorry. That wasn't my intention; I just didn't want you to hear it from someone else."

"Yeah, but when you told me, all I could think of was that kid, Zippy or Skippy or what-ever-the-hell he calls himself, and that Todd guy with his posse of pretty boys. All those guys are weird; they're freaks!" he said emphatically but with a hushed voice.

I had to snicker at his comments. "Yeah, they're a little out there, but probably fairly harmless. And if it's any consolation, I won't be hooking up with them or acting like that anytime in the foreseeable future. At least not when you're around," I teased with a chuckle. Cary actually smiled at that.

"Glad to hear it," he snickered. "But you know, Andy," he said conspiratorially. "I liked that stuff you did, that we did. I don't know much about guy sex, but I was kinda curious and I felt safe with you, you know? I even talked to Cheryl about it."

"You told your mom?" I yelled in my loudest whisper.

He shook his head. "Not about the sex stuff," he said reassuringly. "But do you remember that time I...kissed you? I asked her if that meant I was gay."

I couldn't help but smile. It was all silly and stupid and naïve and sweet, all at the same time. "Really?" I said, a bit incredulous. "What did she say?"

"No," he said and smiled. "But we were talking and I mentioned how the twins act around you and that you told me you loved me that first night at the hospital and all that stuff just made me want to kiss you, because...I guess I...I love you or something, but...but not in a, a sexual way, you know?" He sighed with frustration and some embarrassment. "So I kinda understand what you maybe feel about me." He paused. "I guess I shouldn't have let you do that other stuff."

"You seemed to like it," I said hopefully. "And I know I liked it, so no biggie, right? There's no way I could jump your bones without your permission, and now that I know where we stand, it won't happen again. Does that sound like a plan?"

"Yeah, but I really missed you at the game last night. Several times I...I turned around looking for you. I wanted to...I just wanted to see your smile whether the

team scored or make a lousy play. Andy, I've missed you. Man, I'm really sorry for being such a..."

"Stud?" I interrupted. He smiled for the first time that evening. Without a second thought, my face sprouted its own smile. "I missed you too, Cary. I missed having a best friend." He then proceeded to shock me to the very soles of my feet by half standing and leaning across the table to kiss me on the cheek.

"I love you, best friend," he whispered into my ear before he returned to his seat. All I could do was smile.

Just like the previous night with Eric, Cary walked me to the front door and hugged me long and tight before he bid me good night. I resisted the urge to kiss him. Momentarily, I envisioned the two of us going to my bed where we would enjoy non-stop sex until Monday when we would have to return to school. Instead, I said good night to my best friend and silently vowed to call both Cary and Eric tomorrow. It had been quite a while since I'd been so happy.

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The next morning I bounded into the kitchen and kissed my mother's cheek. She was sitting at the kitchen table with tea and toast. I had yet to figure out how that non-breakfast could sustain her until lunch. "Morning, mom!"

"Andrew, if this is what celebrating a birthday does for you, I'm going to think of a way to modify the calendar," she said with a chuckle. "Do you want some breakfast? Your dad's cooking except he's out working the Jaycees pancake breakfast."

"Sure, breakfast sounds good, but after I run. I'll see you in a few." I kissed her again. "Love you," I said, noticing her smile as I ran out the door. I realized that I wasn't getting the workout that baseball normally provided, so I made it a leisurely four-mile run. I felt as though I could run 100 miles, but I knew it was because I was riding on a high and knew better than to overdo it.

"So what would you like for breakfast?" she asked as I entered the house.

"Surprise me," I said and headed for the shower.

"Blueberry pancakes! That's awesome, mom," I enthused as I sat at the table and started to eat like a starving man. After several satisfying bites I sat back in my chair. "Mom, do you and dad ever fight?"

She laughed out loud, before she spoke. "Andrew, we're adults and your parents, but that doesn't mean we're not human. Of course we fight...well I'd prefer to say that we occasionally disagree." She had a knowing smile on her face. "We had a

big blow out when Sarah was still pretty young; you weren't around just yet. Your dad spent a couple nights in a motel and I'll tell you that I was more than a little scared that he wouldn't come back. Thank god that was the last time we were that stupid." She paused to take a bite of the single pancake she had served herself. "When we were younger, we were more inclined to fight, but now we're more likely to agree to disagree. But why do you ask?"

My confidence faltered momentarily. "Well, um, Cary and I had a falling out a while ago and up until last night I was feeling like you must have felt when dad was in the motel. He's my best friend and it hurt so much..."

"Andy, is that what's been going on these past months?" Thank god she cut me off before I told her why Cary and I had been on the outs. "You know your dad and I don't what to interfere, but you haven't been yourself for quite some time, even though you tried not to show it."

"You mean dad noticed too?"

"Yes, he did. I sure hope you weren't planning a career in acting," she said with a warm smile.

I got up from my chair and hugged her. "You guys are the best!" I declared before planting another kiss on her cheek.

"Thanks, we think you're pretty special too, but please eat; your breakfast is getting cold." I stared at her for a moment smiling before I took a bite. "So I guess you and Cary have patched things up?"

"Yeah, last night actually." While I ate, I debated the pros and cons of divulging the reason for the rift with Cary but decided against it. I wasn't ready to go down that road again so soon, in case they responded as he had done.

"I'm glad. You know I was smiling the entire time you were out running just from seeing you so happy this morning." She paused. "I refuse to play favorites; I love you and Joey and Sarah equally, but you're special to your dad and I." She was smiling but had to dab a tear at her eye as she spoke.

"Thanks, mom." I had finished my breakfast and picked up my dishes and took them to the sink. I started to fill the sink with water and turned to face her. "I just want you guys to be proud of me; I want to be proud of myself."

"We are honey, and you should be," she said as she pushed me out of the kitchen. I think she was about to start crying in earnest, so I slipped away to my room.

Eric was my first call of the day. I caught him in the middle of getting ready for work, so we kept the call short. I again thanked him for the fantastic evening and for all his support over the past few months. He shrugged it off but was pleased to hear that Cary and I had finally resolved our conflict. We agreed to talk again soon. I sat for a moment as I realized that Eric was truly happy for me, the way a friend would be. I guess I loved him too, in a certain sort of way. My call with Cary lasted much longer. There was the occasional pause, which never would have occurred previously, but for all intents and purposes we were back to our old ways: being the very best of friends.

The midterms produced no surprises. Only my Trig class was giving me trouble, but even that wasn't too big a deal. I was feeling good and even bold. As the bell sounded to announce the end of class, I approached Leo. He had been on the soccer team with me the past couple of years, was in two of my classes this semester and was one of the guys I had targeted as desirable before my run-in with Cary. "Hey Leo, I'm going to the home game this Friday to cheer on the baseball team; you wanna join me?"

"You shitting me?" he responded cautiously, or possibly with surprise or maybe confusion.

"No. I'm not. A bunch of my buddies are on the team, but if you don't like baseball that's okay. I know it gets kinda slow sometimes. But..."

"No. I'd...that would be...great. I mean, yeah, um..." His dazzling white teeth appeared between his luscious lips and his dark eyes seemed to twinkle as if to compete with the glossy tangles of his wavy dark hair.

I was cursing myself for not approaching him earlier in the year, but simply said, "I've got to get to class, but we'll talk tomorrow okay? Glad you're on board."

"Sure Andrew," he said with a smile as we parted ways.

