

# The Offer

by Wrestlr

[M/M, Hypno, MC]

Synopsis: Jack's a runaway. If he wants a place to stay, he has to agree to be hypnotized.

Disclaimer: The naked hypnotist strides confidently into your room. His lips curl in what might be a smile as he dangles his shiny crystal pendulum before your eyes and announces, "Listen and obey. If you are not of legal age, or if you offended by sexual situations, you will leave this place immediately. From here on, no matter how realistic it may appear, everything will seem like fiction to you, a pleasant dream where scientific possibilities and laws may change according to my suggestion. Now, if you are willing, sit back, relax, and enjoy the ride."

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1.

"I said, on your feet."

Seemed like just moments ago, exhausted, Jack closed his eyes. Despite the nagging pain from the half-healed bruises covering his lower back, the cold, the uncomfortable concrete bench on which he lay, sleep overwhelmed him quickly.

With his eyes closed, he saw a warm living room, maybe a hearth with a fire crackling behind a grate. The smell of turkey and stuffing, something cinnamon too, radiated from the kitchen where his mother--no, boyfriend--yes, his handsome dark-haired boyfriend was cooking. Soon his boyfriend would call to him--*Dinner's ready, sweetheart*--and then Jack would sit at the table and feast until the gnawing emptiness inside him was sated.

"Hey. Get up. You can't sleep here."

Through the window, he saw snowflakes drifting down, blanketing the front lawn and shrubbery.

"Hey! Wake up."

Someone was complaining at him from outside the room, but he couldn't see who. No matter, because if he concentrated, he could focus on the room. He could make it real. He wanted it to be real. He shivered from the seeping cold and moved closer to the fire. But its heat felt weak, getting weaker. *Stupid fire*, he thought. He picked up the sweatshirt, thick and warm and soft, a bright blue that matched his eyes--everyone said so--and pulled it over his head. He still felt chilled, but the sweatshirt was comforting. He looked around this room and smiled, finally safe.

Something, somebody, poked his shoulder--then again, harder. "Hey! I'm talking to you. Wake up. You can't sleep here."

Jack jerked. The voice from outside suddenly was right in his ear. His eyes snapped open, and his dream vanished. He blinked, turned his head up, and managed to locate the source of the voice--a flashlight beam in his face, the abrupt blur of a silver badge, a blue uniform. *Crap!* he thought, *a cop*. Jack struggled to sit up. He squinted at the cop's face, trying to make out the words. The cop's expression was unreadable, his eyes flint-sharp in the argon streetlight. *Can't tell what color they are*, Jack thought.

Cloud-breath from the cop's mouth meant he was saying something. Jack blinked again, clearing his head and concentrating though the cold. He had planned to avoid the police, thought maybe this churchyard would be a safe place to finally get a night's sleep. Someone must have seen and reported him, or maybe the cop had spotted him. The cop must be telling him to move along, the standard cop line. Jack tugged at the thin jacket he wore, disoriented by the memory of a soft, warm sweatshirt.

"Sorry," Jack mumbled, stumbling slowly to his feet through the aching cold that stiffened his very bones. "*Fuck!*" he cursed as his blanket slipped from his numb hand and landed in the slushy snow at his feet. That was the only warmth he had, a threadbare piece of material he had stolen from Goodwill when the clerk turned her back, and now the damned thing was wet.

Jack leaned down to retrieve it, only to see the ground spinning quickly toward his face. Strong arms grabbed him, prevented him from planting himself face-first in the snow. Jack twisted out of the cop's grasp quickly--the man might be a cop and wear a badge, but no one touched him. Not anymore. Jack knew what men would want from him. He was young and he was pretty. He had learned quickly in the last week what men wanted from him. He dodged enough of it after he left home.

"How old are you?" the cop asked, sounding concerned but looking very much in control.

"Eighteen," Jack lied immediately. He took a step back; his leg hit the bench on which he had been lying. He nearly stumbled. The cop stepped with him, looming large despite being about Jack's height.

The cop frowned. "No--no, you're not. How old are you really?"

Jack knew he was shaking so hard even the cop would see. He hoped the cop would blame the cold. Carefully Jack lifted the blanket, damp and icy, trying to create a barrier between himself and the policeman's intense gaze. Jack willed his teeth to stop chattering.

The officer waited for his answer.

"Seventeen," Jack finally said, "but I'll be eighteen in a couple of days." He hoped knowing he was nearly eighteen would give the cop reason enough to leave him alone and not call Family Services. He wanted to shout at the cop, *Go away--I'm not hurting anybody*.

"Dylan," the cop said, holding his hand out as if he wanted to shake Jack's. Jack was confused, waiting for the flash of handcuffs, and he dug his fists deeper in the wet blanket he held. Who the fuck was *Dylan*? Then Jack's cold-addled brain realized--the cop was telling Jack his name. *What kind of name is Dylan for a cop?* Jack thought. *It sounds more like a porn star's name.*

The cop, this *Dylan*, did not move his hand, just held it there in the air between them. Finally Jack reached his cold hand out and shook the officer's. The warmth and texture of the officer's leather glove felt strange around Jack's skin.

"And you are?" the cop prompted.

"Jack," he muttered, careful to give only his first name. The cop did not push him for his surname, just nodded and pulled his hand away.

"So, Jack, what's your story? Why are you lying on this bench outside in this churchyard on the coldest night of the year?"

The officer was not shouting or scolding; he seemed just to be making conversation. Still, Jack immediately felt himself turn defensive. "I ..." Jack stopped, assessing the lies he could spin. Which of the stories he used would persuade this cop to leave him alone? Nothing crystallized as right for this situation. Jack sensed something about this cop, who seemed not much older than he was, a small-town officer who was not trying to intimidate him like a city cop would have. This officer was not part of the system in the same way as the city cops who said he should just go home. *I don't have a home, not anymore*, Jack remembered bitterly. He was too tired and cold to lie convincingly, so he told the truth. "I can't be at home right now," he said, wincing as the cop's gloved hand gripped his jaw and turned his head. The cop shone his flashlight on Jack's face, assessing the bruises over and around his left eye and down his jaw line, painful where the cop's grip accidentally pressed them.

"Who did this, Jack? Was it someone in this town?" The officer's tone spun a safe haven for sharing secrets, protective, insistent, and not very cop-like.

Jack shied away from the man's hand, an icy uncertainty pinching his skin as he contemplated being in the dark churchyard on his own with this man. The cop seemed friendly enough, but was that just an act? Cautiously, trying not to reveal his intentions, he looked to his left and then to his right. If he was going to run, he needed a head start--being held or cornered would take that head start away. To his right, dense shrubbery gave no exit. To his left, a gate led to a small cemetery and shadowy grave stones. That was his best bet. He shifted his weight, ready in an instant to push himself away, run the five steps, and vault the gate. His legs shook with the added tension, and he knew he would probably fall immediately on the icy walkway. Still, any plan offered more hope than no plan.

Meanwhile, the cop waited for Jack's answer.

"I fell," Jack said firmly, the same line he had used most of his life, the same line that always earned him looks ranging from pity to doubt to disgust when he said it to people he panhandled for money to buy a

burger and to cops who harassed him for loitering. He was not expecting much from yet another man in authority.

The cop evaluated him--"Uh huh"--but did not push for more information, just nodded at the statement. He took a step back and away, and Jack felt relieved. The officer spoke directly into his radio: "I'm at the church. Nothing to worry about. I'm heading home now. See you tomorrow." Static broke the snow-deadened air, and a tinny voice acknowledged the radio message with a series of codes and a single name, *Dylan*. The cop looked back at him. Jack gauged that the cop was now two steps away from him. That increased his chances of reaching the gate if he had to run.

The cop said, "You can't sleep here. I'll find you a room for tonight, and we'll deal with the rest in the morning."

Jack's eyes widened. He was not going anywhere with any stranger, not unless he was under arrest. This cop was going to find him a room? Probably some no-tell motel where the cop would expect Jack to show his "gratitude" sexually ... Shit! No way was that happening. Jack barely got away safely two nights before from a proposal wrapped in a far better promise of hope than what the cop was giving him. Jack was finished with being gullible.

Pulling himself to his full height, he tightened his lips, determined. He was not swapping one hell for another--no way.

"No. Thanks, but no. I have to be at the bus station first thing in the morning." He tried to keep the hopelessness out of his voice, tried to sound confident around his chattering teeth. He mapped out the words in his head, and he knew exactly what he was going to say. He wanted the cop to think he had a reason for being on a bench in the snow on a cold winter night. The cop would have to respect that. It was a free country.

"Okay, Jack," the cop sighed. "You're making this difficult. It's late, it's cold, it's been a long day, and I *really* want to go home. We can do this one of two ways. Option one is, you come with me voluntarily, get a decent meal, a shower, and maybe some warmer clothes, and then you can sleep tonight in a warm bed. This can be all your own choice. Option two is, I make it official and arrest you, then force you to go."

Jack looked around desperately, at the small church, the graveyard, the bench, the snow, and back at the young-looking cop in front of him. He was so screwed. The strength in his legs was failing. The ice beneath his feet climbed his long limbs, bringing insistent pain. He had run for a week, managed to keep ahead of everything and everyone, and he only had two more days until he could stop running. Why was his body choosing now to give out?

"So," the cop continued, "I haven't got all night--and I really don't want to spend my day tomorrow standing over your frozen corpse, filling out paperwork, and explaining your death to the coroner. What's your choice?"

Jack knew this was a no-choice situation. He knew the cop knew it too. He straightened as best he could, the pain of the deep bruises across his lower back burning back to the usual level, despite the cold that had started to numb the tenderness slightly.

"Okay," Jack said quietly, surrendering. After all, this was a cop. Was it so wrong to want to be warm for just one night? "Just don't arrest me. And ... not a cell, okay?" he asked cautiously.

The officer--Dylan--turned and started walking away from the bench. "Nope, not a cell and you're not under arrest."

"You promise?" *Damnit!* Jack swore--could he sound more like a whiney little kid? No way the officer would think of him a responsible adult in control of his life now.

The cop stopped and looked back at him, pushing his hands into the pockets of his thick jacket. Jack found himself looking at it enviously. "I promise," the cop said. He turned, clearly expecting Jack to follow, which he did.

Jack stumbled on the icy path in the same thin sneakers he had been wearing when he was thrown out one week ago. He cursed under his breath that the cop's boots afforded him surer footing on the ice when Jack had to scramble to keep up. All this stumble-slipping-tripping behind the cop like a lost puppy was pathetic, humiliating. At the same time, Jack knew he could not outrun the cop if he decided to just get the hell away from the officer. He had nowhere else to run anyway. His only choice was to follow as best he could.

They walked in silence for several blocks through the cold, empty streets, past a town square and a clock built into the wall of a small library. The clock announced the time was twelve-fifteen. The cop stopped at a small mom-and-pop convenience store with a *Closed* sign in the window, checked the door, and peered with his flashlight beam into the emptiness inside. Jack just watched, scuffing his sneaker against a ridge of ice on the sidewalk. Then the cop led Jack toward a row of similar houses, to the large house at the far end. The front drapes were partially open and Jack could see lights on, bits of a suburban living room, the promise of warmth welcoming them as they tramped up the cleared pathway. The officer stamped snow off his boots by the front door, let himself in, and gestured for Jack do the same and follow.

Jack hesitated. He could feel the warmth from inside, smell something like home-cooking. Still, this cop was asking him to enter a house. No one would know Jack had gone into that house with this cop. With a stranger.

The cop beckoned Jack through the door. Jack took a breath and stepped over the threshold.

"Dylan?" The new voice belonged to a good-looking man about the cop's age, in a tee-shirt and shorts, who appeared from the brightly lit hall. "Late shift ran later than usual? And you brought a visitor."

Dylan stripped off his jacket and hung it on a peg. "I told him he could sleep in the guest room tonight." The cop pulled off his gloves and heavy boots. "Ike, this is Jack. Jack, Ike."

"Hi," Jack said, but pointed his eyes at the floor. He was not in acceptable condition to be meeting people. He had not bathed in three days. He knew he smelled rank, and his hair was a greasy mess.

"Come on in, baby," the new man, Ike, said. Jack bristled at being called *baby*, one of his father's favorite insults--thinking, *I'm practically an adult, not a baby*--but Ike seemed to have meant no offense. "Is that all you're wearing outside on a night like this? Just hang your jacket up there and leave your sneakers on the mat to dry."

The warm air prickled his frozen face and hands almost painfully, and Jack blinked at the sudden change as the door shut behind them. Fear twisted his stomach into a momentary ache--he had not been shut inside by doors for a week. He feared this place would feel like a prison.

The cop, Dylan, guided him into a living room where a gas fire hissed and crackled behind the grate. They stood warming their hands. Jack got his first good look at the man who had pulled out of the churchyard.

Without the bulky coat and cap hiding the details, Dylan was Jack's height, solid and muscled, dark-haired. His eyes are chocolate brown, Jack realized, answering his own question from the churchyard. Dylan's uniform looked good on him, fitted him close and neat. Jack hated uniforms and the power they represented, but the cop did not look officious, not like the security guards in the parks or the shadowed doorways where Jack had been sleeping. Dylan did not look harried or suspicious or hard. The contradiction unnerved Jack.

Dylan's voice was deep and confident. "Jack also needs some chow and some clothes." He did not make excuses for bringing a stranger to his house, and in return, this Ike guy did not seem all that surprised.

"Follow me, baby," Ike said to Jack. He winced at *baby* again and wondered if calling other men *baby* meant Ike was gay. If so, did that mean Ike was Dylan's boyfriend? "You can get yourself cleaned up, and then we'll feed you." Ike did not wait for him, but at that point the thought of a clean bathroom, an actual toilet, and maybe a shower was enough to overcome Jack's hesitation. Ike had smiled at him, but Jack was disorientated, exhausted, and in pain. Staying on his feet required all his concentration, leaving little energy to return the smile.

Ike led Jack upstairs and to the end of the hall--a bedroom. The guest bedroom, Jack surmised. "Bathroom's on your left," Ike told him. "Go get yourself cleaned up. When you're done, come downstairs and I'll have some food ready for you."

Jack spent the next hour in a daze of blessedly hot water in the shower. The bathroom door did not lock, but the lure of a shower was too great. The last time he had managed to clean himself up was three days ago in the bus station rest room, using water that drizzled suspiciously brown from the tap. Now, soap and shampoo seemed miraculous. The steam and spray thawed him. He soaped and re-soaped. *Heaven*, Jack decided.

When he finally emerged, scrubbed newborn-pink and nearly scalded, he pulled an oversized fluffy towel from the rack and dried himself. He finally felt clean for the first time in a week. He wiped condensation from a section of the mirror with the towel. He stared at himself in the mirror, tried to see himself objectively. For the first time in days, Jack was seeing himself in something other than a shop window. He knew he had lost weight, had felt it in his jeans that refused to sit right, but in the mirror he saw a shadow of himself, beaten, exhausted, and so damn skinny. His body had always been slim, as he hit his growth spurts and shot up, but lack of food over the last week had left his frame nearly gaunt. His tired eyes and gray-tinged skin made the thinness even more noticeable. At least his hair was clean, the blond dark with water and finger-combed back from his face. His blue eyes seemed to pop out of his face--they were bloodshot, smudged underneath with lingering purple bruises. He looked pathetic. He felt pathetic. In a week he had been changed from a suburban teenager struggling with studying into a stereotypical street kid, and the suddenness of the change scared him. He did not want to be this nearly broken version of himself that he saw in the mirror.

A new disposable razor, shaving cream, toothbrush, and toothpaste sat on the counter. Jack's beard was still too adolescent-straggly to need shaving daily, but he hadn't shaven in a while. He lathered up and razored away the thin stubble on his cheeks and chin. He had not used a toothbrush in a week, and the familiar taste of mint toothpaste seemed so ... home. *Not my home*, he reminded himself, since the cop had only promised one night.

Jack reached for his clothes and froze. His clothes were gone. Somebody--Ike or Dylan--had snuck into the bathroom while he showered and taken his clothes. *They saw me naked*, Jack thought, panicking, and cursed himself for letting down his guard. He should have noticed the intrusion, should have been smart enough to keep watch. Where his clothes had been, someone had left a neatly folded stack: tee-shirt, sweatshirt, sweatpants. The sweatpants were warm, dry, and felt soft on his clean skin. He pulled on the tee-shirt, then

the sweatshirt over his towel-dried hair and looked at the mirror. The sweatshirt was nearly the same blue as his eyes, though darker.

He knew he had to go and face the cop and the cop's--what was Ike, the cop's roommate, lover? Whatever, Jack knew he could not stay in the bathroom forever. Cautiously he opened the bathroom door, half-expecting the cop to be waiting outside with handcuffs. The bedroom and the hallway outside the bedroom door was empty, but that did not make Jack feel less nervous. He crept barefooted down the hall, following the voices toward the kitchen. Apparently Ike and Dylan had been talking about him, because when the bottom stair squeaked under Jack's foot, the silence was immediate and felt to Jack somewhat uncomfortable.

Jack walked into kitchen. The officer was sitting at the table, a mug in his hands, looking in the bright light too impossibly young to be a cop.

Ike popped open the door to the microwave oven. "Look at you. You cleaned up well. Don't worry about your clothes--we'll get them washed for you tomorrow morning. Chicken okay with you, baby?" he asked Jack as he transferred a plate to an empty place at the table.

"God, yes," Jack said quickly, wincing at his loss of control and then realizing what he had said. He may have turned away from God for leaving him to be beaten and rejected by his father, but he knew he should not risk offending these men in case they were religious. He should watch his mouth. "Sorry, sir," he blurted quickly. "I mean, yes, chicken will be fine."

The cop found this amusing and snorted, "Sir," with a quiet disbelieving chuckle.

Ike smacked the officer's shoulder. "Not a word out of you, Dylan. *Some* people still have manners." To Jack he said, "Just call me Ike, not 'sir.'"

Jack nodded. The food smelled heavenly, a generous baked chicken breast and leg covered in sauce, piles of veggies. His stomach growled and he tore into the food. Ike and Dylan watched as he ate, but Jack didn't care. They were probably both sitting and judging him for how he looked and where the cop had found him, but he would worry about that after he finished shoveling pieces of chicken down his throat and into the bottomless pit inside him.

Ike turned to Dylan and pretended everyday conversation. "Dylan, baby, are you off duty now?"

"Until tomorrow morning. I work the day shift."

"Go change out of your uniform. That'll give me and Jack here a chance to talk." Jack lifted his head at this, a forkful of beans halfway to his mouth. *The talk*. Shit. He was so screwed.

"Back in five," Dylan said firmly. Jack looked at him, saw the warning in the cop's expression: *Don't cause trouble*. Jack nodded slightly to the cop to show he got the message, watched as the broad-shouldered man left the kitchen.

"So, baby, I'm guessing you aren't here by choice?" Ike watched him intently. Jack wondered what Ike saw when he looked at him, and he felt embarrassed. He knew old and new bruises covered his face, only partly concealed by still-damp blond hair. He knew he looked younger than nearly eighteen and was often mistaken for much younger. He did not know how to handle this situation.

"No, sir," he finally said, biting another slab of chicken. If he chewed a mouthful of food, maybe he could get

away with not saying anything at all. He had listened to enough lectures at home to be able to tune them out.

"Dylan says you're nearly eighteen, and that you haven't told him much except your first name."

Damn. His surname. Ike wanted to know his surname. Jack guessed it did not matter much now, since there was no way he was going home. In only two more days he turned eighteen. That did not give the cop long enough to track down his family, and in two days Family Services would not be able to touch him. Still, Ike had not actually asked for his surname, had simply made a statement. Jack decided to ignore the implied question.

Ike asked, "Do you have a family? Can you tell me why you're not home with them?"

"My family, they ... My dad doesn't want me in the house anymore."

"Why is that? Drugs? Alcohol?"

Jack closed his eyes briefly, considering his options. Did Ike think this was Jack's fault? On the other hand, Ike did not know Jack--why would he *not* think this was Jack's fault? Should he lie or tell Ike the real story? Ike kept calling him *baby*, which made Jack think Ike was gay, but would Ike want to hear the real situation? Other people had asked, but they turned out not to want to really hear. What if Jack misjudged the situation?--Would they push him immediately back out on the street? Should he tell Ike about the strict ex-Army father who felt lessons were best learned through plentiful corporal punishment? Now that Jack was warm and clean and had dealt with most of the ravenous pit in his stomach, exhaustion pulled at him, made concentration difficult. He did not want to lie, disliked lying unless he had to. He decided to use the easy option and tell just the truth. "No, it's because I'm gay."

"That's why you ran away?"

The food sat unsteadily in Jack's stomach. "No. I didn't exactly run away. They tried to fix me, but it didn't work. I didn't want it to work. So my dad threw me out."

"I see," was all Ike said.

"Thank you for the food, sir. I appreciate your help, and your--uh--Dylan's." Jack pushed his body up, feeling jabs of pain in his legs as he stood, and turned around, stopping only because the officer was blocking the doorway. The man was fresh from the shower, nearly naked except for a pair of dark blue boxer shorts, with his dark hair spiky and his chocolate eyes alert. While he looked less like a cop and more like a normal guy, Jack found him even more intimidating like this, with his muscular chest tensing as he leaned in at Jack.

Jack was determined to leave. They would not want him under their roof now. At least he had gotten a hot meal in his belly, and he was damned if he was going to give back the warm sweat-clothes. He gauged the front door, calculating distance, speed, and direction for an escape. He could probably outrun the cop if he had a good head start since the other man was standing in the hallway with bare feet. Jack's feet were bare too, but he only had to find his shoes and jacket, and then he would be gone into the night. Jack tried to push past, but the cop refused to step aside.

"Ike? Did he do something? Are you okay?" Dylan ignored Jack.

"It seems Jack's parents threw him out because he's gay," Ike said simply. Jack stepped back from the cop to gain maneuvering room. Something like anger flickered across Dylan's face. *Shit*, Jack thought immediately,



*here it comes.* The cop brought up a hand, and Jack cringed from the imminent blow. Instead, the cop laid his hand on Jack's shoulder, gripped it reassuringly, and appeared to ignore the fact that Jack had cowered back in fear.

"That happens a lot," the cop said, his face not revealing any expression, "but in this house, it isn't a problem. Everybody living here is gay." He paused, letting the message sink in. He released his grip on Jack's shoulder.

"Oh," was all Jack could find to say.

Dylan said, "Being gay isn't going affect your stay with us. Okay?"

Jack twisted to look at Ike, still sitting at the table. Ike nodded his agreement. The situation felt surreal, like some chick-flick with exceptionally pretty people being exceptionally nice to young runaways. He blinked, eyes widening as it all sank in.

Ike rose and put Jack's empty plate in the sink. "I'm going to go to bed, Dylan. Why don't you and Jack talk?"

Jack felt nervous tension quiver through his body. What the hell was he supposed to talk about with this nearly naked cop?

Dylan headed for the cabinets. "You got any room left in your stomach for hot chocolate? With marshmallows or without? I like mine with just a little bit of cinnamon too, if that's okay with you?" He started pulling out the ingredients.

*Well, this is going well,* Jack thought, frowning, trying to make his exhaustion-addled brain figure out the situation. Hot chocolate was too big a temptation to pass up. "Uh, with marshmallows, I guess."

"Excellent choice."

Soon the smell filled the kitchen. Dylan led Jack into the living room and waved for him to sit on the couch too. After considering for a few seconds, Jack sat down next to Dylan, keeping as much space between them as the couch allowed. Dylan sipped his mug of chocolate and scratched at his bare abdomen, just beside his navel and the patch of hair that surrounded it. Jack pretended not to notice, pretended not to be fascinated by the way the hair trail disappeared into Dylan's boxers and not to be curious about the mound those boxers barely concealed. Jack looked away quickly, fearing he was seconds away from throwing an erection the sweatpants would not disguise.

"Ike seems nice," Jack said.

"Yeah, he's great."

"He keeps calling me 'baby.'"

"Yeah. He calls everybody 'baby.' You'll get used to it."

Is he your boyfriend?"

"No. Just a friend and roommate. I'm single. Ike is too, if you're interested."

"Uh ..."

Dylan seemed to find Jack's embarrassment amusing and snorted out another chuckle.

Dylan said. "All the guys living here are great. I've been here the longest, nearly six years, since I was about eighteen and a half. Ike's been here around four years. There's usually six or seven guys living here. The guy who owns this house doesn't care about the gay thing. Honestly, I think he likes that we're all gay."

They sat in silence. Jack tried to work out why, as an officer of the law in this sleepy small town just outside the metropolitan suburbs, Dylan had decided to help an underage kid he found on the street. He tried to work out how he came to find himself sitting on a couch drinking hot chocolate in a house where several gay men lived. Exhaustion kept shutting down his brain. Jack decided to change the subject.

"So, you're a cop?" Jack mimicked the way Dylan had asked him questions.

"Yep. Graduated from the police academy about a year ago. It's a good job. I'm the rookie, lowest rung on the ladder, so I get all the shitty shifts, like working the late shift tonight and being back on duty at eight o'clock tomorrow morning, but, yeah, it's what I wanted to be since I was your age."

"Dylan, can I ask you a question?" Dylan nodded, so Jack blurted, "How old are you?"

"I'm twenty-four. I have a job I love, and great roommates too--they're practically like family to--"

Jack winced. Why did just the mention of family twist his insides? He decided he needed to get over that reaction but still found himself automatically in self-protection mode, pulling his knees up and wrapping an arm around them.

"I'm sorry, Jack. I didn't mean to--"

"No, it's okay. It's your life. It sounds cool."

"The guy who owns this house--he's kind of picky about who he lets stay here, so I can only promise you this one night. But if he likes you, he can be generous. He paid for my college and police academy tuition, even helped me get a job with the local department. In the morning you can meet him. If he likes you, maybe he'll offer to let you stay too, but I can't make any promises. Or you can go, if that's what you want. That's all up to you." Dylan stood up and took Jack's empty mug out of his hands. "It's late, and I have to be on duty in a few hours. I'm going up to my room to get some sleep. You ready to turn in? You can find your way back to the guest room?"

"Yeah," Jack murmured, feeling his brain starting to shut down at the mention of sleep. He felt both relieved and disappointed that Dylan had not offered to let Jack sleep with him.

"Okay, then. Off to bed with you." Dylan carried their mugs to the kitchen.

Jack stood and pushed his exhausted body toward the stairs.

## 2.

Jack was dreaming. He knew he was dreaming. That did not make what was happening feel any less real.

He lay on his back in the bed, buried to his nipples under the warm, soft, clean-smelling sheets and comforter. Dylan's body hovered over his. Jack could feel the heat of his body through the bed sheets, feel the sheer

presence of the man, smell the scent of him, masculine and maybe just a little undertone of sweat?--yes, just a hint of clean, male sweat. Dylan bent, pressing his muscular weight against Jack's through the covers, against Jack's erection. Jack's erection ached with pent-up demands, a *haven't cum in a week* needfulness. Dylan's mouth brushed his, and Jack parted his lips to signal his readiness. Dylan's mouth covered his, tongue probing, sliding against Jack's teeth, then entering. *A real kiss*, Jack thought, my first real kiss. Dylan's tongue tasted of chocolate with a trace of cinnamon. The taste and feel of Dylan's tongue inside his mouth excited him, the way that tongue teased his. *God damn*, Jack swore, then felt himself blush at how easily he took God's name in vain--*How does his tongue keep finding the perfect way to make the kiss feel better and better?* Jack's dick responded with the familiar need and buzz. The buzz spread through his cock and into his balls. Dylan ground his body against Jack's through the sheets, ground his tongue against Jack's. The buzz spread through Jack's entire body and he began to ejaculate.

Jack opened his eyes carefully. He was awake now, feeling the last of his orgasm ringing through his body. What time was it? Where was he?

Heavy curtains--blackout curtains--obscured all but a thin rim of sunlight that told Jack it was daytime.

He remembered. The guest bedroom. Right. The bedroom door had no lock, so Jack had pushed a chair in front it last night. The chair could not stop someone who was determined to get in, but it would have made enough noise to wake him. He would not have been caught by surprise. Last night, Jack had pulled off the sweatshirt and tee-shirt, but kept the sweatpants on, remembering lessons he had learned on the street, when he climbed under the quilt and snuggled down into the soft sheets. He had known he would sleep well, not caring that it was only for one night.

Jack sat up in the bed. The chair remained in front of the door exactly as he had left it. No one had entered. *Yes, only a dream*, he assured himself, *only a wet dream*. Then--"Shit."--he felt the gooeyness around the head of his softening cock. He pushed the sheets back. "Fucking shit." They had loaned him this pair of sweatpants, and now he had gotten semen on them.

Jack stumbled, still groggy after his first good night of sleep in a week, to the bathroom. He took off the sweatpants, rinsed the cum spot under the tap, hoped it would not leave a stain. They had taken his jeans, and all he had to wear was this pair of sweatpants now with a large wet spot near the crotch.

Jack pissed. In the mirror he decided his color looked better, skin less gray. He showered and shaved again--not because he needed to, but just in case he got no other opportunity in the next few days. Also, he hoped to buy time for the wet spot to dry somewhat before he put the sweatpants back on.

He liked feeling so clean. He had not in a long time. He resolved to find somewhere to stay--no more sleeping on the streets. He would do whatever he had to. Dylan had mentioned the possibility that Jack could stay here. *No*, he told himself when he felt anticipation making his chest swell, *Dylan only promised one night, and I shouldn't not to get my hopes up*. Better to be realistic now than disappointed later if he was pushed back out on the streets.

Finally, he knew he had to face the people who lived here. He could not hide in their guest bedroom all day. Jack pulled on the sweatpants, then the tee-shirt and sweatshirt, and arranged the shirt to cover as much of the damp spot as he could.

Still barefooted, he crept down the stairs, carefully avoiding the squeaky bottom step that betrayed him before. The house seemed quiet, and he wondered if everyone was at work or whatever they did during the

day. When Jack thought about that, though, he realized how odd it seemed that Dylan and Ike would leave a stranger alone in their home.

Noises from the kitchen meant he was not alone after all. He followed the sounds to find Ike emptying the dishwasher and putting away the dishes. Ike wore nothing but a jockstrap, and Jack got a flash of his bare butt cheeks before Ike turned his way.

"Hey, baby," Ike greeted, and Jack lost his chance to escape unnoticed. Ike was smiling, seemed completely unashamed, as if he always did chores in nothing but a jockstrap. Jack hoped his embarrassed flush was not too obvious. "How'd you sleep?"

"Good," Jack admitted. "Real good, thanks."

"You want some breakfast? I can cook you some eggs and sausage? Or there's cereal?" He rummaged in a cupboard, and Jack got an eyeful of Ike's V-shaped back and bare ass cheeks again--really nice bare ass cheeks, Jack decided, feeling himself blush again.

"Dylan likes this stuff," Ike said, making a *bleeh* face and dumping a muesli cereal box on the table. "And *this* is what I like." Ike held up a brightly colored kids' cereal box with a big grin, then offered the box to Jack. Jack just nodded shyly as he took the box and the gallon of milk that Ike offered, exchanging a smile with the man who shared his love of a morning sugar rush.

Ike made small talk about how Jack had just missed Dylan, who headed off for his morning shift. Jack wondered how the hell was Ike so perky. Ike was obviously one of what Jack considered the world's most inscrutable species: a morning person. Jack munched skeptically and occasionally grunted when Ike seemed to be waiting for his reaction.

Then Ike announced: "Eat up. The man who owns the house wants to meet you. After that, if you're willing, maybe you can help me with some small chores around the house?"

Jack looked over the spoonful of cereal he was about to shove into his mouth. Ike's chest, sleekly muscled but slimmer than Dylan's, distracted him for a moment. What was Ike saying? Right. A meet-and-greet with the house owner, then some chores. It seemed the least he could do to repay them for dinner, a night of sleep, and now breakfast. Jack nodded and chomped down on that waiting spoonful.

After breakfast, Jack found himself standing before a door into a part of the house he had not seen yet. He hoped, in his borrowed sweatshirt and sweatpants and bare feet, he looked presentable. He looked at Ike in his jockstrap and decided Ike might not be the best person to ask for meet-and-greet apparel tips.

"Go on. Knock," Ike prompted him. "Don't keep him waiting. Stop worrying--he'll like you. And if he likes you, he might offer to let you stay a while."

How the hell was Ike so good at knowing what Jack was thinking?

Jack knocked softly. A masculine voice from inside called, "Come in."

"Good luck," Ike whispered as Jack reached for the doorknob.

*Great*, Jack wondered as worry tensed his stomach again, *why would I need good luck?*

He opened the door and walked through. The room seemed a combination office-study-library, with a large

wooden desk, a laptop computer setup, a few chairs, and walls lined with bookshelves. Everything looked more expensive than what Jack was used to. The rest of the house seemed typically suburban, but this room was more ... *Classy*, Jack decided was the word.

"Come in," the well-dressed man said.

"You must be the Doctor?" Jack tried to sound cool and in control of the situation, like an adult. "Nice to meet you. I'm Jack."

They shook hands. The doctor motioned Jack to sit, and then he chose the adjoining chair. The surroundings intimidated Jack. He looked around and decided he was definitely underdressed, but now he had to gamely push forward. "Thank you for letting me stay here last night."

"It was our pleasure. How could we say no? Dylan told me a few details about your situation, but I'd like to hear them directly from you?"

"What do you want to know?" Wariness flared in Jack. He found himself calculating direction, speed, and distance if he needed to run.

"Dylan said you're seventeen, nearly eighteen. So, you're a senior, I guess?"

Jack shook his head. In the silence, he realized the doctor was waiting for more. "Home schooled," Jack offered with a quiet shrug. "I told my Dad I was gay when I was fourteen. He blamed my school for making me gay. So he pulled me out. I haven't been to school in, like, nearly four years."

"Making you gay?" The doctor did not seem surprised. He seemed to be mulling what Jack had said.

"Yeah. Who'd have thought public school could turn you off girls?" Jack tried a smile, hoping humor would diffuse his nervousness.

"So why didn't you get thrown out at fourteen?"

"Interventions. They tried to straighten me out--literally. My dad's Army buddies would take me on week-long trips in the wilderness or state parks, for running, hiking, guns, hunting, all kinds of shit they hoped would make a man out of me and make me start liking girls sexually."

"I see. Go on."

"I took it all--the interventions, the orders, the lack of a life. They pulled me out of school, took away my phone and my music, and made me stop seeing my friends. They let me use the computer for my lessons for a while, but when they found out I was using it for email and downloading gay porn, they turned off the Internet service. My Dad was not happy about that *at all*. He had all these plans for my future, my being gay wasn't part of those plans, and I didn't have a choice in the matter."

"He wanted you in the Army?"

Jack nodded. "Yeah. Preferably the Special Forces. He was Special Forces until he was invalided out."

"Clearly you didn't join the Army. What happened?"

Jack sighed, shook his head, and hesitated. "For years he told me that on my eighteenth birthday I'd

absolutely be enlisting. My dad was always worrying about what people thought. We'd go to church every Sunday, even though I don't think my parents were that religious, but it was the place he wanted to be seen. He made me dress in my suit even though it was getting too tight, and he'd wear his uniform with all his medals on his chest. He was always telling everyone I wanted to follow in his footsteps and serve my country, and how proud he was. He wasn't proud of me at all, though, not really. I was kind of smart and athletic in school, but nothing was ever good enough for my dad. Before he pulled me out of school, he'd always say my A in math class should have been an A-plus, or the eight points I scored in the basketball game should have been ten. After I told him I was gay, he said it was the gym locker rooms that turned me queer. He was always going on about how the Army would make a real man out of me. Last week, I told him there was no way I was enlisting. I don't want it. That was the first time I ever stood up to him. I told him, I'm choosing my own life and it doesn't matter if I'm gay or not. It's my life."

"That was a brave thing to say."

"Fucking stupid is what it was." Jack laughed at how easily profanity came now that he was out from under his father's rules and quick backhands. "My dad is six-four and has muscles on top of muscles. He hit me a lot when he thought I needed it. But after I stood up to him, he really beat me the shit out of me and threw me out of the house in under an hour. He told me if he ever saw me again, he'd shoot me right between the eyes."

"I'm sorry, Jack."

"The only people who'll miss me will be the people who don't see me at church anymore. My dad'll probably just tell them I was so eager I decided to enlist early. I'm pretty sure he won't tell them about the gay or beating parts. But honestly, I'm so over what he did. They don't know what they've lost, 'cause one day I'll be rich and famous and married to the most gorgeous guy on the planet. We'll adopt a couple of kids, and live in a big house with a couple of dogs, and then my folks'll come running back, and I'll just tell them to fuck off."

The doctor chuckled. "Tell you what, Jack; you give me his address, and I'll tell them to fuck off for you."

Jack tried a smile. "Heh. Thanks."

"So, after he threw you out, what did you do next?"

Nothing that happened after his eviction included details the Doctor could use to send him back to his father--this was safer territory for Jack. He stared at the floor, a trick he had learned to show humility to his father; that seemed to make talking about these events easier.

Once Jack started talking, the entire story tumbled out of him. He had walked and hitchhiked to the first town large enough to have a bus station, planning to buy a ticket to the nearest large city. For the long term, he thought he could connect with the gay community there, but in the short term he planned only to find the a youth shelter or runaway services there, get himself cleaned up, and wait until he turned eighteen and could find a real job. He had eighteen dollars in his pocket. The clerk behind the bus ticket window had not actually laughed at him, but had made it clear Jack would be lucky to get halfway, in that casually condescending way only sales clerks could manage. Jack had taken what he could get. He ended up a few towns away and had been slowly making his way toward the city and safety ever since.

He told the Doctor he had avoided personal conversation with anyone until the cop--Dylan--yesterday. He had thought maybe the church would be open and offer him sanctuary for the night. But in this small, sleepy suburban community, barely three traffic lights wide, the church had been closed, locked up tight. When the cop found him, Jack said, the real reason he let Dylan walk him here to the house instead of running was

because he realized he had nowhere left to run.

The Doctor nodded. "Jack, can I ask you a personal question?"

Jack froze a moment, then he nodded.

"You said your father beat you, and I can see you've got bruises on your face. Dylan said you appeared to be limping when he found you and he saw bruises on your back when you were in the shower."

Jack nodded again. All of this was just facts. He waited for the question.

"Would you show me, please?"

Jack thought about the question. He had always thought of the aches and bruises his father inflicted as marks of shame, evidence of Jack's many failures. He wondered if they were instead his own war medals, proof of his survival. Jack nodded. He stood up, turned his back to the Doctor, and lifted his sweatshirt and tee-shirt to his armpits, enough to show the half-healed purple and brown marks. The worst, centered around his kidneys, had nearly immobilized him with pain the first couple of days.

Jack said, "He always told me the Army taught him the best places to hit for maximum pain without doing lasting damage." He was amazed at how casually he managed to say it.

The Doctor asked if Jack had any sharp or deep pains, any blood in his urine, what seemed to be general medical questions. *Probably trying to see whether I need a hospital*, Jack thought, since the pain had been so bad that first day he had considered going to an emergency room. But having no way to pay for treatment and knowing the staff would have either sent him home or called the authorities stopped him. Jack stood there and answered, "No," to each one.

"Thank you," the Doctor said. Jack took that as his cue to lower his shirt and sit back down.

"Jack, how much experience would you say you've had with other young men?"

Jack stared at the floor, since being a virgin at nearly eighteen was one of the saddest things he could imagine.

The Doctor seemed to take Jack's silence as his answer. "Well," said the Doctor, "you're a good-looking young man. I have a feeling that sort of thing will take care of itself soon enough for you."

Jack blushed.

"Jack, I've talked to Dylan and to Ike. I trust their judgment, and their assessments agree with mine. I assume they've told you about The Offer?"

Jack frowned. What had Dylan said last night about an offer? Jack had been too exhausted--and too distracted by the gorgeous, nearly naked cop--to pay much attention at the time. He did not want to lie, but maybe he should just go along. "A little," he said, which he decided the truthful enough.

"They think you'll fit in here, and I do too. It's obvious you need a place to stay, at least until you get your feet on the ground. I can help you with that too. So my question for you, Jack, is: Would you like to stay here a while longer?"

Hope knotted his stomach. "What's the catch?" Jack asked, because he had learned every too-good-to-be-true kindness came with a catch.

"It's very simple, really. We go on a day-to-day basis. Each day, you can choose whether you want to stay or leave. You can leave at any time. I think Dylan and Ike told you I can be a generous man. If you decide you want to stay, it's rent-free and your meals are provided. If you want to go to college while you're living here, I can help with your tuition. The only thing I ask in return is this small thing: Every day that you decide you want to stay, you will let me hypnotize you."

Jack fought against the surprise to keep his face an expressionless mask. "Hypnotize?"

"Yes, that's right. That's The Offer. Each day that you want to stay, in return you will let me hypnotize you."

"Uh ... That's kind of weird."

"Jack, I'm a man of eccentric hobbies. If you like, just consider this one of my eccentricities."

"So ... Dylan and Ike ..."

"--Have been letting me hypnotize them every day since they came to live here. For Dylan, that's been about six years. For Ike, about four years."

"What if, y'know, uhm, I can't be hypnotized?"

"Everybody thinks they can't, but everybody can. It's just a matter of finding the right method and earning the subject's trust. While we've been chatting, I've given you a couple of inconspicuous tests for suggestibility, simple things you probably didn't even notice, and I've identified a few methods that I think will work quite well on an intelligent young man like yourself."

Jack could not decide what to make of this. He was not aware of having been tested, and he could not decide whether to feel flattered that the Doctor thought he was intelligent or offended at being tested without his consent.

The Doctor stood. Jack thought the interview was over, but the Doctor said, "Don't make a decision right away. I know all of this seems overwhelming, and you need some rest and good food to make sure you're thinking clearly and carefully considering your options. Why don't you stay here again tonight--no obligations. Talk to Dylan and Ike and the other young men who live in my house too. Get their perspectives. I know Dylan and Ike seem to want you to stay. They'll be happy to answer your questions about their experiences. Then, after another good dinner and another good night's sleep, you can decide and give me your answer tomorrow by noon. If your answer is yes, then I will expect you to let me hypnotize you tomorrow. For today, all I ask is that you check in with Ike and see if he needs some help with the household chores or maybe cooking dinner. Sound fair? We'll go day by day. Sleep on it and give me your answer tomorrow."

The Doctor held out his hand. Jack understood the interview now was officially over. He stood, shook the Doctor's hand, said, "Thank you, sir," and left the man's office.

### 3.



Ike intercepted Jack moments after he left the Doctor's study. Jack wondered if Ike had been waiting for him, then decided that of course he had been. The Doctor said he had spoken with Ike about Jack; Ike had to know what was going on.

"So don't keep me in suspense, baby. Did he make you The Offer?"

Jack nodded. "Uh huh."

"Did you say yes?"

Jack shrugged. "He told me to think about it overnight and give him my answer tomorrow by noon." Then he added, to make sure the Doctor had told Ike the most important part: "He said I could stay another night"--and then, because he did not want to seem ungrateful--"and I should ask if you need help with the chores?"

Ike nodded, still smiling, unsurprised. "Sure, baby. I've got some laundry going, and then--"

Jack heard the unmistakable sound of a washing machine timer: *Ding!*

Ike grinned. "Laundry it is."

Jack nodded. Laundry had been part of his chores before his father evicted him. He could handle laundry.

Jack followed Ike to a utility room. A clothes washer and dryer occupied one area, part appeared devoted to storage, but the part that caught Jack's attention was a desk with an expensive-looking computer setup with several peripheral devices Jack could not immediately identify. His family's computer had been much simpler. "Nice," he said, looking at it.

"Thanks. That's where I do my video editing work. When I'm not keeping this house running smoothly and making sure everybody gets fed regularly, I do some video editing work for the Doctor's special projects. It's like on-the-job training because I'm also in grad school--film studies."

"Graduate school?" Jack asked.

"Don't sound so surprised. Yes, all this"--Ike gestured down his body, naked except for his wrist watch and jockstrap--"is more than just a pretty face, excellent pecs, six-pack abs, a perfect butt, and a big dick. I have a brain too, baby." Ike cocked a lopsided grin, and Jack laughed too.

If he had not met Dylan first, if Dylan were not so gorgeous, Jack might have found himself interested in Ike. But without Dylan, Jack would not have met Ike, would not be standing in this house, clean, fed, rested, alive. Jack decided there was no comparison. Ike was a nice guy, smart, certainly attractive, and gay without seeming obvious about it other than calling him *baby*, but Jack wanted to see where this attraction to Dylan led. And Dylan had seemed at least a little interested in Jack too. Maybe they could get to know each other, go on a date, become boyfriends.

But Jack was making conversation with Ike right then, not Dylan. He asked, "So why do you call everybody 'baby'?"

Ike chuckled. "I don't know--never thought about it. I just do. Always have. Does it bother you? I can call you 'pumpkin' instead?"

Jack shook his head. *Don't be a baby*, his father's voice bellowed in Jack's head. *You can't be a man if you're always acting like a fucking baby?* But his father was not here, would never find him here--or anyplace else. His dad and those rules were safely behind him now. And if his father ever did find him, Dylan could beat him up, or arrest him, keep Jack safe from him. Now, *baby* was just a word. Jack shook his head again. "I guess it doesn't bother me."

"Good," Ike smiled. He opened the clothes dryer and hauled out a load of clean shirts. Jack saw his own in the pile. "Grab those hangers behind you. I'll iron. You can handle the hanging and folding. Deal?"

Compared to panhandling on the cold sidewalk all day yesterday for money to buy a burger, another war his pride lost, laundry seemed simple and uncomplicated, domestic. "Deal," Jack said.

Ike said, "So ... you seem awfully interested in our Officer Dylan."

Jack froze. Had he been that obvious? What should he say?--deny it, admit it? Was Ike jealous? Jack said, "Uh ..."

"Come on. Dish. Inquiring minds want to know."

Jack tried, "What ...?"

"Oh, come on. Of course you're interested in Dylan. First, just look at him. He's fucking gorgeous. He's a real sweetheart. Plus, he looks damn fine in his uniform--if you know what I mean." Ike winked.

Jack was in fact not sure what Ike meant. His interactions with authorities in uniform up until then, especially over the last week, did not make him think they were particularly good-looking as a whole, though he had noted, back before his father shut off their internet access, that men in uniforms were featured heavily in the gay porn scenes he found online.

Ike pulled another shirt off the pile. "Everybody's smitten with our Officer Dylan. Second, you haven't once tried to touch my butt--which, as you recall, we've already established is perfect in every way."

*Especially since it's hanging out on full display*, Jack thought.

"So obviously the reason must be because someone already stolen your heart. Call Officer Dylan--there's a four-five-nine in progress!"

Ike grinned. Jack was not sure he got the joke, but he grinned too and looked at the floor.

"Oh, you're no fun. I want secrets. I want dirt. Have you at least kissed yet? Dylan's a great kisser, isn't he?"

Jack felt himself blush. "I--uh--I--" *Fuck, stop stammering like a lovesick kid*, he swore at himself. "I wouldn't know. We--I've never--"

Ike raised an eyebrow as he passed the freshly ironed shirt to Jack. "You never what? You never kissed a guy?"

Jack took the shirt and shook his head, blushing again. He was glad folding the shirt gave him something to look at other than Ike's big grin.

"Oh, baby, don't be nervous. Kissing is easy. You'll catch on real quick, I bet."

Jack was afraid for a moment that Ike would volunteer to demonstrate, but he did not.

"Don't worry, baby. If you're gonna be immune to my many, many charms, Dylan's an excellent choice. He'll teach you all about kissing--and lots of other things too." Ike winked again, grinning bigger. "And I know from experience, Dylan's got a nice, big dick. If you're into that sort of thing. Are you?"

The image of Dylan naked and erect, with a dick like that really big one Dylan saw in a porn video once--Jack blushed more fiercely than before.

Ike seemed neither to notice nor to wait for answer. "I have it on good authority that our Officer Dylan thinks you're awfully cute too."

*What?* Before he could stop himself, Jack blurted. "He thinks I'm cute?"

"Uh huh. Just look at you. You're adorable. Too bad Dylan stole your heart first."

Ike's wrist watch made a sound: *Beep!*

"Woops. Time for my session with the Doctor. Better not keep him waiting. There's only three shirts left--can you finish up the ironing? I won't be long. Help yourself to anything in the refrigerator, or watch some television, or there's a gym in the basement if you want to work out or something. Make yourself at home."

And then Ike was gone.

Jack finished ironing and folding the last of the shirts. He looked around. That seemed to be the last of the laundry to be done. What next? He eyed Ike's computer. Maybe Ike would not mind if Jack used it to go online and check his old email account? He still remembered the password, if the account had not been closed after years of inactivity.

He sat down and turned on the computer. It booted and went directly to the desktop. Jack found and started the web browser, and typed in the address for his last email provider. The sign-on screen looked different, but he expected that after several years. He typed in his user name and password. Nervousness tugged his stomach, but the site accepted the information and displayed the welcome screen. All he had to do was click the link to go to his Inbox.

Jack paused. Did he really want to check for messages? His old friends had never tried that hard to contact him. If he got back in touch with them, would they remember him? They had gone on with their lives. And would they do or say something that would get back to his parents? He could not risk his dad learning where to find him. No, he decided, better to let his old friends, like his family, stay safely in the past with his old life. His new life was starting now. He did not want any old fears tainting it. Whether he decided to stay in this house or not, his old life was over and he could not, would not, go back to it.

At loose ends, Jack called up a news site and read the headlines. None of the stories interested him. He did not recognize any of the sites in Ike's bookmarks list, most of which involved film-making and cooking, and neither of which interested Jack.

He looked around on the computer desktop. He did not recognize most of the application names and decided they must be video editing programs. He knew nothing about video editing and did not want to screw up anything by playing around with the programs, especially since he did not have Ike's permission to be using the computer.

He found a trove of video files and called one up--*G&J Cum Shot Camera 2*--because the file name sounded dirty. The scene seemed to be raw footage. A high-definition view of a scrotum filled the screen, then a hand wrapped around an erection, pumping quickly. A man's voice groaned, "Oh, yeah, fuck my ass!"--too loudly--and Jack fumbled for the volume controls and hit the Mute button.

*So Ike likes gay porn*, Jack thought, grinning.

Onscreen, the camera kept a tight focus on the crotch-level action, as one man's hand flogged away at his erect penis--*Dick*, Jack corrected himself, *I can call it a dick now*--while a second man's hips pounded away at his butt. Without sound, the actions seemed surreal to Jack, but his own penis--*cock*--started to harden. Onscreen, the hand pressed down to the base and the masturbated dick began to shoot out thick strings of seminal fluid--*cum*--until the last of the man's load flowed like lava down the fiery head.

Jack grinned at how easily the nasty words came to mind, now that he did not have to be afraid of his father finding him watching gay porn, now that he did not have to fear his father's frequent backhand slaps--*Watch your damn language, boy, show some fucking respect!*--that left stinging bruises on his face.

The onscreen fucker pulled out and shed his condom. The camera zoomed in on that dick, as the fucker fisted it over the fucked man's spent cock and balls, and the fucker ejaculated--*shot*--onto the fucked's body.

Jack closed the video and shut down the computer. His erection--*hard-on*--tenting the borrowed sweatpants, too obvious and obscene to be missed if Ike came back. Jack debated whether to sneak upstairs to the guest bedroom to play with himself--*jerk off*--but decided he could not risk being missed if Ike came back. He needed to cool down, needed to get his mind off sex, and Dylan, and sex with Dylan. The image of Dylan in just his boxers from last night did not help Jack's problem, nor did the image of Dylan naked and hovering over him from his dream.

He walked back into the kitchen, willing his needy hard-on to subside, which it began to do, so slowly. If he knew which door led to the basement, he could check out the gym setup Ike had mentioned, maybe work off some of his nervous energy. He saw a chores list on the side of the refrigerator. *Clean kitchen* was on the list for tomorrow. He looked around the kitchen, which he thought looked pretty darned spotless already. He opened the cabinet under the sink: Cleaning supplies, as expected. *I can do this*, he decided. This would be both something useful he could do and the perfect distraction until his hard-on went away. He reached into the cabinet for the cleaners.

## 4.

In the late afternoon, Jack helped Ike and Jeff start dinner--which mostly involved them handing him things to wash or slice or chop while they did the actual cooking. Ike in his jockstrap, and Jeff in just his jeans were both attractive, but Jack found himself thinking of Dylan. Dylan would be home soon, and half of Jack's attention was focused on the door, waiting to see the handsome cop again. He tried not to be obvious but found himself turning every time he heard something that might be the front door opening. Ike and Jeff exchanged knowing looks, so Jack decided he had not been as subtle as he hoped.

On his way back from a bathroom pee break, Jack heard Dylan's voice through the Doctor's door. How had Dylan come in without Jack hearing him? He stopped to listen.

"Yes, Doctor," he heard Dylan say. "Everything's in the folder. There's not much, other than his school records, and those stop a couple of years ago. That's consistent with his story about being home-schooled.

There's nothing about the physical abuse, but I think the bruises speak for themselves. Everything he told us seems to check out, and no missing persons report has been filed on him."

Shit, the cop had dug up his history and knew who he was. *How did they find out my name?* Jack wondered. Then he realized: His school identification card. It had been in his wallet. It was old, since he had not been enrolled for several years, but he had never discarded it. When they took his jeans, they found the card. With Dylan's police connections, they found out everything there was to know about him. They probably knew his parents' address. The Doctor said he could stay--would he change his mind and send Jack home? The thought of going back to his father made Jack's stomach knot.

"Hey, new dude, what's wrong?" Jeff asked when Jack stormed into the kitchen.

Jack demanded, "Where's Ike?"

"Went to the store. We need a few things for dinner."

Jack remembered the mom-and-pop convenience store he and Dylan had passed the night before. He hoped Ike had put on clothes first, but the memory of the handsome man in his jockstrap did not curb Jack's anger. "Did you know about this?"

"More specific, please?"

"The doctor and Dylan--I heard them talking through the door. They looked up my records."

"Oh. Well, yeah. A background check is standard procedure when we take in somebody new. And technically, you're still a minor, right?"

All that made sense to his head, but Jack's gut still felt betrayed. He told Jeff they should have taken his word. They should not have gone behind his back and dug into his past without permission.

"Hey, sorry they offended ya, new dude. It's just the way things have to be. And y'know, if you hadn't been eavesdropping, everything would have gotten cleared up and you wouldn't have gotten yourself so upset."

"Here," Jeff said, spinning Jack around by his shoulder to face away from him. Jeff's strong hands massaged at Jack's shoulder muscles through the sweatshirt. "So tense. You've gotten yourself all worked up. Just take a deep breath and try to relax. Let me help you relieve some of these knots."

Jack heard himself sigh and lean back into Jeff's grip. "That feels good."

"Good. I'm a certified massage therapist. Let's move to the couch. Take off your shirt, and I can make it feel even better."

"Uh." Jack was suddenly aware of the proximity of Jeff's bare chest, of Jeff's hot breath so close to his neck.

"Don't be afraid." Jeff purred. "Just a little massage between friends? No big deal, right?"

"I don't think ..."

"Then don't think. Just enjoy." Jeff leaned in and whispered against Jack's ear. "Dylan won't mind. We share everything around here."

What Jeff was doing with his thumbs at the base of Jack's neck felt particularly good, loosening knots and tension Jack had not realized he carried. Jack felt his cock responding, slowly starting to inflate. If Jeff reached around him and touched his nipple, touched his fluttering stomach, his swelling crotch through his pants, would Jack let himself be led upstairs and seduced? Probably, he decided, and blushed at how fickle his semi-erection made him.

Jack pulled away. "Stop."

"The man said stop, Jeff," Dylan said from the doorway. Jack knew he should stay angry, but he was still glad to see him. Dylan had already changed out of his uniform; Jack thought he looked so sexy in nothing but a pair of blue checked boxers. "That means stop. Mind telling me what this is all about?"

Jeff made a hands-off gesture and backed away. "New dude here heard you and the Doctor talking about his background check. He's pissed off 'cause you didn't tell him you were gonna run one. I'm just talking him down off the ledge."

Dylan looked at Jack. "I'm sorry. You're right--we should have told you. But we needed to know whether you were telling us the truth. Now we know. I'm sorry. From here on, you've got our trust."

Jack nodded.

Ike walked in with a grocery bag. "Hey, guys. What'd I miss?"

## 5.

Jack said to Dylan. "Can I talk to you? In private?"

"Sure. Follow me."

Dylan led Jack to his bedroom, nearly identical to the guest room where Jack had slept--sparsely furnished, same blackout curtains. Dylan sat on the edge of his bed and motioned for Jack to sit beside him. Jack did. Sensing the heat of Dylan's nearly naked body in the air between them, Jack flushed.

"So ...?" Dylan said. "Is this about The Offer?"

"Uh, yeah."

"You're wondering if it's a good deal or just freaky?"

Dylan's directness surprised Jack, who stammered, "Yeah."

"Did you say yes?"

"He told me to think about it and give him an answer by noon tomorrow."

"Fair enough. Well. All I can tell you is my perspective. It's been a pretty good deal for me. I found this place when I was just a little older than you. I was a typical street punk, not quite homeless but pretty close to it. I graduated high school with no real skills or prospects, and I spent my time dealing drugs and barely avoiding getting arrested and major legal problems. One of the guys who lived here at the time--he's since moved out--found me and introduced me to the Doctor, and he made me the same offer he made you. He helped me

clean up my life and get my shit together. I decided to go to college and then the police academy, and the Doctor made that possible. Like I said last night, he gave me the money for tuition--even helped me get a job here with the local police force when I graduated. I owe him more than I can ever repay. I can't tell you what decision to make, but for me it's been a great deal. I can't imagine my life any other way."

"Is that why you brought me here?"

"What do you mean?"

"You could have left me on that bench at the church. I wasn't hurting anybody."

"And then you would have frozen to death. We had a report of a vagrant, and I had to check it out. You were halfway to hypothermia already. If I'd left you there, I'd've had to fill out reams of paperwork about your dead body the next day. It was either turn you over to Social Services or bring you here. I took a photo of you with my phone, sent it to the Doctor, and he said I should bring you here. If he liked you enough to make you The Offer, he must think you'll fit in around here. He doesn't make The Offer to just anybody."

"What about--I dunno--the freaky stuff?"

"You mean the hypnosis?"

"Yeah."

"Trust me. It's not that freaky. And he can't make you do something you don't want, if that's what you're afraid of. After a little while, it just becomes part of the routine, like brushing your teeth or shaving every day."

"I don't shave every day."

Dylan chuckled. "That's because your body is still maturing. Trust me. You'll be shaving every day soon enough. You cleaned up really well--a good-looking guy like you, the boys'll must be all over you."

"I wish." They grinned at each other. Jack felt intimidated by Dylan's closeness and good looks. Jack smiled timidly. So Dylan thought he was good-looking? The thought made Jack's chest feel fluttery. Nervousness made him babble: "I've never had a boyfriend. I've never even kissed a boy."

Dylan grinned. "I think we can fix that. Kissing is one of my favorite things in the whole world."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah."

*Show me, show me, show me*, Jack begged silently, hoping his face did not reveal how badly he desired this. He feared exposure would be so fucking embarrassing, especially if Dylan did not--

Dylan's face moved closer. Jack closed his eyes--*thank you, thank you, thank you*--and felt Dylan's lips brush his. He let Dylan lead, trembled as Dylan's hand slid around the back of his neck, cradling his head. Dylan's mouth found Jack's again, more than just a brush this time. Jack tensed for a moment, but just for a moment, before he melted into the larger man's touch to accept his first kiss.

Dylan's mouth slid across Jack's, and he felt Dylan gently nibble at his lips. Jack parted his lips just a little,

wanting to encourage him, and he felt the tip of Dylan's tongue glide over the cusp of his lower teeth. Dylan's mouth tasted of fresh mint toothpaste. Dylan's tongue probed the outer spaces of Jack's mouth, moving slowly, teasing. Jack's entire body prickled with arousal. Dylan's tongue slid deeper into Jack's mouth, rubbing alongside his tongue. Jack gripped the mattress, concentrating on the sensations in his mouth as he tried to imitate Dylan's little flicks and pokes, but his tongue felt clumsy and hopelessly thick compared to the little teases and gentle pressures he received from Dylan's.

Dylan groaned softly and pulled away. Jack opened his eyes, missing Dylan's tongue already. "You," Dylan smiled, "are going to be a great kisser. I can tell."

Jack was suddenly aware of his erection tenting the soft fabric of his sweatpants. He risked a glance down and saw a similar lump in the crotch of Dylan's boxers. *Holy fuck*, he thought, remembering what Ike had told him, *Dylan really does have a big one!*

The neediness in his erection urged Jack to do more, to feel more. He decided to take the risk and reached for Dylan's crotch. Dylan's hand intercepted Jack's wrist before Jack's fingers could grasp the prize.

"No," Dylan said.

"Why not?" *Great*, Jack swore at himself, thinking he sounded like a petulant child.

"Because technically you're still a minor, and I'm a cop. Jack, I think you're a good-looking guy, and I'm honored you want to go further with me, but until you're eighteen that's not going to happen."

*He didn't say never--I only have to wait another day and a half*, Jack practically cheered in his head. "Can we at least kiss some more? I want to learn ..."

"Risky," Dylan said. "I don't want us to go too far."

"Please? Just teach me how to kiss. Hands stay above the waist--I promise."

Dylan put his hand on Jack's shoulder and drew their faces together once more.

Some time later, Dylan pulled back. He and Jack were stretched out more comfortably on the bed by that point, and Jack's erection ached, telegraphing its need. Still, all they had done was kiss. Dylan allowed Jack's hands to investigate his bare chest, his abs, and Dylan himself had hand-surveyed Jack's chest but only through the outside of Jack's sweatshirt. Jack was amazed by the solid feel of Dylan's muscles, the strength they promised. Jack tried only once to reach for Dylan's crotch again, but Dylan snagged his wrist and pulled Jack's hand away, back to his chest.

"We should go downstairs," Dylan said. "Dinner will be ready any minute, and they'll be wondering what we're doing."

"Aww," Jack groaned.

"You, uh, need some privacy to take care of that?" Dylan's eyes smiled and flicked down at Jack's erection straining to escape his sweatpants.

Jack's eyes dropped to the ridge in Dylan's boxers. "We can both take care of ourselves right here," Jack suggested, hoping at least to see Dylan's hard-on even if touching it was not allowed.



Dylan laughed and sat up. "You are going to be one heck of a firecracker when you hit eighteen."

"Only a day and a half away."

"Mmm," was all Dylan said as he climbed off the bed.

Somebody knocked lightly on the door. Ike's voice: "Dinner in five."

"Be right there," Dylan answered, all stoic confidence, broadcasting the *nothing going on in here* message. Jack thought Dylan sounded calmer than *he* could have managed.

## 6.

Jack knocked on the Doctor's door at ten minutes before noon. The Doctor seemed happy to see him, told him to sit down, asked if Jack had any questions.

Jack was dressed in his own familiar clothes, the ones he had been wearing when he arrived, now freshly laundered. He felt more like himself in them, especially after two good nights of sleep and good meals. Still, the Doctor's inquiry made him blush. Jack shook his head. "No, no questions."

"And do you have an answer for me?"

"Yes, I do. I'd like to stay. My answer is yes. I'd like to stay."

"Very good. Let's get started. Are you ready to be hypnotized?"

"Uh ... Right now?"

"Of course. Don't worry. You don't have to prepare or get ready at all. It's easy. Just close your eyes, and listen to my voice."

Jack was not sure what to expect, but he had not expected this. He shrugged and closed his eyes and settled back in his chair.

The Doctor told him to imagine he was entering a forest, walking down a trail. Jack knew about forests from camping trips organized each summer by his father, and the *make a man out of him* wilderness interventions with his father's Army buddies. The Doctor told him to imagine the sunlight through the leaves overhead. Fill in the details; as if it were real. The feel of the breeze. The scent of loam. The leaves brushing his arms. The shape of the leaves themselves, the texture, the deep and light green colors. The calm, peaceful feeling these woods gave him. The safety. Walking ever deeper into the forest, just following the trail.

Jack saw and felt it all in his mind. He had always prided himself on having a vivid imagination, and he decided it came in handy now.

The Doctor told him to breathe deeply. To feel his arms and legs relax and grow limp. As the Doctor suggested, Jack imagined the feel of the ground under his feet, the sounds of birds in the trees. He tried to make it all as real as he could. He could feel the summertime sunlight warm his face. He could still hear the Doctor's voice as if from far away, but he enjoyed focusing more on the breeze whispering through the limbs above him, the chirps and calls of birds and squirrels overheard, the burgle and gurgle of a stream somewhere nearby, just off the path.

Yes, he realized, *I do feel peaceful and calm.*

Yes, he thought, *I do feel relaxed and drowsy.*

The path led him to a clearing. A peaceful, quiet clearing in the middle of this forest. The ground was covered with soft grass and moss, so inviting. He wanted nothing more than to sit down and enjoy the stillness, the calm and quiet peacefulness. He sat in the middle of the clearing. He looked around and understood the thought that came to him from the gentle whispering breeze: *So this is how it feels to be deeply hypnotized.* He looked back and could not see the path. The clearing had sealed protectively around him. He was alone here, so happily, peacefully alone here. He could sit. He could relax, finally really relax. He could lie back on the so-soft grass and moss; just let himself sink down into it, deeper down. He could relax, and he could sleep ...

"--and three. Wide awake now." The Doctor snapped his fingers for emphasis.

Jack blinked and looked around. He still sat in the same chair. His clothing was all in place. He had not drooled on himself. He blinked again.

"You did fine," the Doctor said, answering Jack's unspoken question. "Beautifully, in fact. That's all for today. Please close the door on your way out."

"Uh ... That's it?"

"Yes, that's it for today. You may stay tonight. Each day you want to stay here, I get to hypnotize you; so if you want to stay tomorrow night too, I'll see you tomorrow."

Jack was clearly being dismissed, so he stood up and walked to the door. "Uhm--Thanks, Doctor," he said.

"Ah, thank *you*, Jack," the Doctor said. "Now off with you. I've got other work to get done. Check in with Ike, please, and see if he needs help with some of the chores."

"Yes, sir," Jack said, and closed the door behind himself.

## 7.

The second and third days were similar. Jack knocked on the Doctor's door and was told to have a seat. He kicked off his freshly washed sneakers before he sat back and listened to the Doctor talk him through a walk into the deep, peaceful woods. The Doctor snapped his fingers to awake him some time later. Jack bent and picked up his discarded shirt from the floor without really remembering when he had taken it off.

On the third day, Jack's birthday, Ike made a big production over giving Jack's ass a spank at breakfast and wishing him "Happy Legality," which made Jack laugh. Dylan was working a double shift at the police station, which meant Jack would not see him until late--disappointing, since Jack was finally legal and wanted to push the flirtation with Dylan into sexual play, hoping Dylan would relieve him of the burden of virginity. But at dinner Ike and the other roommates minus Dylan presented Jack with a birthday cake, new clothes--"Because I'm already tired of seeing you wearing either that one shirt or that old sweatshirt," Ike announced--and a dildo as a joke gift. In case Jack wanted to practice, Jeff clarified, and they all laughed.

Dylan arrived home late, exhausted from his double shift, and went directly to his bedroom, pausing only to

tell Ike he had eaten dinner out of a vending machine at the station and was not hungry. Given how health-conscious Dylan was about his diet, Ike made a big production out of fearing for the end of the world over this, which made everyone laugh except for Dylan, who excused himself and disappeared into his bedroom.

Jack waited what he thought was a discreet few minutes, then excused himself to go to bed. Instead of his bedroom, though, Jack went to Dylan's door and softly knocked.

Dylan opened the door. He was shirtless, still in his uniform pants.

"Can I, uhm, come in?" Jack asked, in what he thought was his most seductive tone of voice.

"Jack, I'm sorry I missed your birthday dinner, but I need to get some sleep. Good night." Dylan was already closing the door.

"Okay, sure," Jack said, angry and embarrassed from Dylan's rebuke, and slunk off to his own bedroom.

Jack sat down on the edge of his bed. Had he misread the situation with Dylan? Was Dylan not interested in him sexually after all? Or was he really just tired?

Jack lay back on his bed. He was suddenly tired himself. Very tired, in fact. He closed his eyes and saw the woods around him, the sun-dappled green leaves barely waving in the softest of breezes. Yes. So peaceful and calm here. Jack smiled and stood up and continued his walk down the path.

As he entered the clearing, his shirt came unbuttoned. Had he done that? The shirt flapped at his ribs as it slipped off and fell away. Had he done that? The grass, the moss--the clearing looked so comfortable and inviting. Jack took off his shoes and socks. Yes, he loved the feel under his bare feet. Sunlight shined down bright as stage lights, but it did not interrupt the peaceful calm. Instead, its bright warmth relaxed him even more. He wanted to warm himself. He popped open his jeans, unzipped, and pushed them and his briefs to his ankles. His feet slid free, and he was naked. Naked in the middle of the clearing, in the middle of the peaceful, calm woods. Naked in the sunlight, as birds with eyes like cameras--no, just ordinary chirpy birds--watched him and sang their relaxing song just for him. Naked, relaxed, and so very horny.

His cock hardened and felt great. He sank down into the grass and moss and touched his cock, wrapped his hand around it. The birds watched closely. Jack stroked himself. From somewhere came the idea to finger his ass, something he had seen in porn videos online but had never before done to himself. He ran a spit-wet finger over his asshole as he stroked his cock, then poked the finger inside. It all felt so great. His balls zip-zapped that familiar sensation, and he poked the finger in deeper. It felt so nasty, so dirty in a good way, and suddenly he was cumming and cumming and cumming. Jack came until his balls were empty. He sagged into the grass and moss and let them swallow him into their comforting depths.

Jack became aware of a rolling motion. He forced his eyes open. He was cradled in Dylan's arms, against his bare chest. The larger man carried Jack easily up the stairs in the dark house. Jack smiled and closed his eyes and snuggled closer to Dylan's chest.

## 8.

Jack opened an eye. Saturday morning--yes, he remembered. The day after his birthday. The day after Dylan rejected him. He felt his new life had begun yesterday morning and ended yesterday evening. Jack rolled over under the soft sheets, ignoring his morning hard-on, and decided he did not want to face anyone. What if

Dylan had told them all? What if they were laughing at him right then, the silly stupid "new dude" kid who thought he could play grown-up games just because he was magically one day older and legal. He climbed out of bed to empty his nagging bladder but got back under the covers afterward. No, Jack decided the only safe thing to do was to sleep in.

But somebody knocked at his bedroom door. Ike called through it, "It's time for your session."

"Ugh," Jack protested at the thought of having to get out of bed, but he yelled at the door, "Okay," to let Ike know he had heard. The Doctor. Jack had to get up and go talk to the Doctor. Dylan was right--the daily hypnosis was just part of the routine, like brushing his teeth.

Jack climbed out of bed. He was naked, naked and erect. He picked up that familiar pair of sweatpants and slipped them on, careful to tuck his hard-on inside gently. Surely the Doctor would not mind if he showed up in just his sweatpants. Jack would be going back to sleep after his session--minimal clothing would make stripping down for bed again easier. Besides, he had seen Ike go into sessions wearing only his jockstrap.

"Ah, Jack, right on time," the Doctor greeted him, as he shuffled still sleep-groggy into the office. "It's good to be on time, isn't it? You know how I hate waiting. And you're even a couple of minutes early. Eager, aren't you? Well, after your screen test last night, I think you're ready."

Jack yawned. Screen test? He did not understand what the Doctor meant, but he said what always worked with his father: "Yes, sir."

"Let's get to it. This way," the Doctor said, and led Jack not to the chair, but to a door on the opposite side of his office. He ushered Jack through.

The large room was separated into quadrants, each in a different theme. One had lockers and benches and looked like the locker rooms Jack remembered from school gym class. Another, the one to which the Doctor guided him, was done up as a bedroom: a bed, a nightstand.

Jack walked over to the bed and sat down. It seemed vaguely familiar. A camera watched him. No, not a camera--a bird--a bird with eyes like a camera. He yawned a second time, suddenly so sleepy all over again, and felt everything slide into place. He leaned back on the bed--no, not a mattress--a mossy, grassy clearing. Stage lights--no, sunlight--shone down on him. Jack grinned at the bird, sharing his secret place.

His sweatpants seemed out of place, so he pushed them off. Naked. Better. Yes. Relaxing. Sexy. Horny. Hard. Yes. Hard-on. Jack leaned back on the moss and stroked his cock under the sunlight. The bird leaned in for a closer look. Jack got up on his knees, putting on a show for the bird, and reached back to finger his asshole. The bird watched it all. Jack gasped, and his body bucked, and he stopped a second before he would have ejaculated. *No*, he told himself, *mustn't cum so soon, not yet*.

Dylan was there. Jack smiled. Dylan had never visited this special clearing in the deep, peaceful woods with him before, but Jack was glad to see him. Dylan came closer. He wore only a pair of shorts. Jack liked looking at Dylan's muscular chest and legs, the way they shown under the sunlight. Jack grinned, naked and brazen and proud to display himself for Dylan too.

Dylan looked down at Jack. Jack reached for him. Dylan hooked his thumbs in the waistband of his shorts and dropped them. Now Dylan was as naked as Jack, and Jack realized that was good, so very good. Seeing Dylan naked for the first time was like his every fantasy coming true. Jack reached for Dylan's semi-erect dick. His hand wrapped around it. He had been right: Dylan had a big one. Jack stroked it slowly, fascinated

by the feel of it, the first cock he had ever touched other than his own. It swelled as he stroked it, becoming fully stiff.

Jack pulled Dylan toward him by his rod. He wanted to make love to this gorgeous man who had so much to teach him, and he wanted to be made love to, too. Dylan sank down onto the yielding moss with him. Jack did not know what to do next, other than the basic mechanics he had seen in videos, so he was happy when Dylan took the lead. They lay back on the ground, and Dylan bent over Jack's face and kissed him, deeply, slowly, lingering. Dylan aligned their bodies to maximize the pressure of their hard dicks rubbing up against each other.

Jack allowed Dylan to caress him while they kissed. He allowed Dylan to kiss along his jaw and nibble at his ear. "More," Jack muttered as he squirmed under Dylan's hands and mouth. When Dylan moved his head lower, kissing Jack's neck and throat, Jack arched his back in pleasure, as the warm sun beat down on them and the birds strained for a better look.

"Guh!" Jack gasped. Dylan's hand had moved lower to sketch around his hard nipple, pulling on the nub, twisting gently. Lightning traveled straight to Jack's dick, and he could not form a coherent sentence. His own hands were not moving, but gripped the grass below them. He groaned again as Dylan's confident hand moved lower, twisting into the curly pubes at the base of Jack's dick.

Dylan's dick rubbed at Jack's hip, thrusting hard against him. Jack was so close to orgasming here under this warm sunlight--Dylan's hand pulling, twisting, searching at the base of Jack's erection, Dylan's teeth now on Jack's nipple, a bite, a suckle, marking Jack's flesh as Dylan's, owning him. It was the most erotic thing Jack had ever felt, Dylan naked and moving against him, and an orgasm was building in Jack's balls, his cock, the base of his spine.

Crap!--He was going lose it too quickly, but he was so relaxed he could barely form words: "Please ... slow ... gonna ..."

Dylan seemed more coherent. "I need to see you shoot it."

"Gon' ... cum ..."

"That's right. Cum for me, Jack." Dylan nipped at Jack's nipple again.

Jack lost his fight to hold back. White heat made lightning-bolt runs from his crotch down to his toes and up to his head. He arched up into Dylan and ejaculated.

Jack sank back into the soft, comforting grass and moss. The intensity of his orgasm had left him incapable of thought or motion. His cock twitched against his stomach. His nipples burned softly from Dylan using them to push him so damn high so damn fast. *Bliss*, he decided.

"Gorgeous," Dylan said simply, then tilted his head in for a kiss. Dylan groaned low in his throat, their tongues mingling, urgent, insistent. Their tongues battled for taste and touch as Jack became more confident, pushing hard against Dylan's hard thrusts in his mouth--a fight for control. These acts--the naked need and the trust in them--excited Jack and scared him equally, but this clearing was a safe, peaceful place. He relaxed and enjoyed the feel of Dylan pushing his groin roughly against his, pushing for friction.

Dylan's mouth and hands felt hungry against Jack's skin, all searching lips lowered to nipples, and hands pulling and teasing, all of it drawing whimpers and moans from Jack's blissed-out throat.

"Dylan ..." he mumbled happily, meaning to say more but not able to form his gasps into words.

"So gorgeous," Dylan was saying, "so hot, taste so good," interspersed with kisses and bites. The press of Dylan's mouth and hands and body against Jack's anchored him, kept him from drifting into the depths. Jack managed to move his hand, dropping across Dylan's hair.

Jack saw Dylan's erection hard and flush against his stomach. "Dylan," he whimpered, meaning: *Give me your cock*. He was not begging, not yet, but he wanted it so much, wanted to taste what he had only touched before. He tried to speak, tried to push out words, but nothing made sense. Jack melted against the moss, a sigh escaping his mouth, his hand caressing Dylan's hair. Just saying Dylan's name left him gasping, moaning, asking for everything, incoherent, and out of his head with pleasure.

Dylan's mouth was lower now, sliding along Jack's renewed erection. Dylan hollowed his cheeks, alternatively sucking and moving and releasing. Jack decided it felt a hundred--no, a thousand--times better than he could have imagined. He sensed his body moving, on instinct, unconsciously tipping his pelvis, thrusting deeper into Dylan's mouth. Dylan pulled back slightly as his gag reflex kicked in. The next time he was ready for Jack, and he held Jack's hips, held him down so Jack could not move, held him down with both hands while his lips traveled along Jack's dick, pushing up as his lips traveled down, wringing every ounce of pleasure from Jack's body. One of Dylan's hands disappeared, and Jack hoped Dylan was jacking himself off, giving himself the pleasure that Jack was too limp to perform, to match the pleasure Dylan's mouth was giving Jack.

Dylan strangled a moan around Jack's cock-shaft, a warning, and Jack felt his lover's body tense, trying to pull back, and he pulled off. Jack moaned, hearing and feeling an answering release from Dylan, a gasp, a groan, a sigh, and Dylan's dick spitting cum hot and hard against Jack's leg. Dylan slumped against Jack, gasping for breath in the afterglow. This was, Jack decided, the hottest thing he had ever felt in his life.

Jack was malleable and shaking in Dylan's control, under Dylan's body still pressed so tightly against him. Dylan's lips dragged final, breathless kisses, against Jack's hip.

"So fucking hot," Dylan whispered fiercely.

"Dih--l'nnnn ...," was all Jack could get out.

At first, everything was nothing more than kissing, lazy and undefined, with no purpose other than to taste, to tease, and Jack started to relax under Dylan. When the kisses became deeper and more urgent, they felt like a natural progression, and when Dylan was sucking on his nipples, lapping at them with his tongue and scratching his teeth across them, it was heaven. Jack felt his cock twitch and tingle.

Dylan pulled aside and rolled Jack face-down on the moss. Dylan seemed to want to take this slow, but the urgency Jack felt had him squirming beneath the larger man, grinding his boner against the rough grass beneath him. Dylan's kisses hunted for the taste of Jack's skin, stopping every so often to suck more small marks of possession, murmuring how hot Jack was, as Dylan pressed his arm across Jack's hips to hold him still.

Jack felt Dylan slather lube between his ass cheeks. Was he using enough? Too much? Worry tugged at Jack's thoughts, but a deep breath of the fresh air all around them helped him relax. The worry and tension slipped away, replaced by complete trust in his lover. Was that Dylan's finger in his ass?--Please let it be a finger. Those fingers drove in, all sizzling stretches and perfect pressure. The prostate; Jack remembered the name from a gay sex education primer he read online without his parents knowing. Wasn't it supposed to be tricky

to find sometimes? How had Dylan's fingers managed to dive right for it? There was some pain, a weird sensation of fullness, but also growing pleasure. No way--no fucking way was Jack cumming so soon, with nothing but fingers up his ass. Shit!--How could he feel this good and not shoot? How could there be so much pleasure spilling over through his body without it spilling out his dick? Dylan's fingers felt burning-hot, sliding, stretching, twisting, massaging the gland inside Jack's ass that sent his head flying skyward.

Jack felt himself demanding, whimpering, moaning, and pleading for more. Dylan's hands seemed rough yet finessed at the same time, never pausing, never uncertain, all eagerness to answer Jack's needs. *Damn*, Jack wondered, *how is it Dylan knows my body so well and it's our first time?* He decided this was the advantage of having an experienced lover. Jack moaned Dylan's name into the moss beneath him, appreciatively.

Dylan pulled his fingers out. Jack looked over his shoulder; he watched Dylan roll on a condom with practiced ease, watched Dylan press the head of his cock against the loosened muscle between Jack's ass cheeks, holding Jack down to prevent him from squirming. Jack wanted to see everything as Dylan pushed at his legs again for better access and inched his way in, pulling back, pushing in, until at last he rested inside Jack's hole, inside his body.

Dylan seemed to be watching him for a sign, Jack decided, any indication of pain. Jack felt some pain from being entered, but he wanted this, wanted to be a virgin no longer, wanted Dylan to make a man out of him. He moaned, hoping Dylan would interpret that as permission. Dylan took the decision away from him, pushing down, his eyes glassy, groaning too, and Dylan moved, leaning down to kiss Jack's neck as he set a fuck-rhythm that made Jack's head fly again.

Jack did not want to cum yet. He wanted Dylan to take his pleasure, to take his ass and own it. Jack had never seen anything as beautiful as this man moving above him, so beautiful Jack could hardly breathe.

Dylan rolled Jack over, onto his back, hoisted Jack's over his shoulders. Leaning forward, one hand anchored on each of Jack's arms just below the shoulder, Dylan held him pinned to the ground. Jack wrapped his legs around Dylan's neck. He needed touch, craved touching and being touched. He wanted to touch Dylan's chest hovering above him. He wanted to touch his own cock. He wanted so much. He wanted everything. The motion of Dylan fucking his ass felt awkward and perfect at the same time. Dylan seemed to sense Jack's need, because he pulled one hand back, gripped Jack's erection, and jacked it as he buried himself impossibly deeper in Jack's ass, then pulled out until only the tip of him remained inside the dark, tight heat. Every pass of Dylan's dick inside his ass made Jack groan and arch his neck, desiring and fearing the ecstasy at the same time, wanting the penetration, wanting to be owned, fearing the climax building in his balls.

"Close ... fuck ..." Jack tried to get a warning sentence together, failed, but then came the warmth of his jizm spurting out of his cock, coating Dylan's sliding, gliding hand as Jack's orgasm stiffened his body and made him shout his release. Dylan would not, could not, stop and bowed his head to touch his forehead to Jack's, his spine stiff, trembling, his breathing ragged. At the last moment, he pulled his cock from Jack's asshole, tugged the condom efficiently off his dick, and hand-whacked his meat until he shot hard across Jack's stomach and chest, shuddering through his pleasure. Jack had never seen another man's penis erupt in real life before. He decided he liked it. Dylan tilted his head a bit and they kissed.

Jack stayed still momentarily. He had many words in his head, but none that he could make his mouth form. Dylan pulled away, lowered Jack's legs. He tossed the rubber aside. Dylan rolled onto his back alongside Jack, one arm over his eyes. "Fuck," Dylan panted.

"Uhhnn," was Jack's best response because he was already closing his eyes and sinking into the darkness.

## 9.

Jack surfaced from deep sleep one layer at a time: one eye opening, then both, then awareness, then consciousness. He sat up. He was in his bedroom, naked under the sheets. Alone. His body ached. His asshole burned. His dick and balls felt drained. *What a fucking dream*, he thought.

His stomach growled. He had really overslept. Carefully, he extracted himself from the sheets, stumbled into the bathroom to piss and shower. He pulled on his briefs, nothing else. No one would care--most of the men paraded around in less.

In the kitchen, Jack sat at the table, happily munching on his bowl of sugar-packed kids' cereal. Ike walked in and passed around behind him on his way to the refrigerator. "Looking good today, baby," Ike said, trailing a fingertip across Jack's bare shoulders as he passed, and Jack blushed. As usual, Ike wore a jockstrap and nothing else. He pulled a bottle of water out of the refrigerator and took a swallow. "That was some show you put on this morning."

"Show?"

"Yeah. The Doctor showed me some of the footage. He's really pleased. Says you're a natural. I knew you would be."

Jack did not know what Ike meant, but he did not want to seem ignorant. He said, "Can I see?"

"Sure, baby."

Ike led him to the computer in the utility room. At the desk, Ike clicked a few icons and a media player window opened. "I've still got some editing to do so it's still kind of raw in spots, but trust me--the subscribers are gonna go ape-shit when they see you, baby."

The player displayed a glowing white message that said the website viewers were about to see a just-turned-eighteen first timer lose his male-male virginity onscreen to one of their fan favorites. Then the scene itself began to play.

Onscreen, in what looked like a bland suburban bedroom, a cute blond boy wearing nothing but sweatpants walked over to a bed. Jack thought: *That's me*.

After the blond was naked, a dark-haired man in shorts joined him. Jack thought: *That's Dylan*.

Jack thought: *That's us--but it didn't happen in a bedroom--it happened in a forest, with a clearing, and birds, and sunlight*.

His stomach knotted as he realized: *No, the Doctor only made me think it happened in a forest*.

"How many subscribers did you say?" Jack asked, as he watched himself orgasm while Dylan chewed at his nipple.

"Not sure. I don't get involved in that part. Enough to pay for us living here, I guess. When this scene gets posted, they're gonna eat you up, baby, and still be hungry for more."

"When does it get posted?"



"Tomorrow, after I'm done editing it."

Jack felt ... uneasy--no, nauseous--fascinated--repulsed--too many things at once. He was unsure how to classify what he was feeling, but he knew he did not like it. "Where's Dylan?"

But Jack was already stomping off and barely heard Ike say, "Out."

Dylan wasn't in his room. Jack went to the Doctor's door and knocked. He tried the knob. Locked.

"What's wrong, baby? The Doctor isn't here. He'll be back later. You already had your session this morning, remember?"

"I want you to delete that footage--right now!"

"But why, baby? You're gonna be a star. Besides, this is just a copy for editing. There're masters and backups nobody but the Doctor can get to."

"Then you don't touch that footage until I talk to the Doctor."

"Uh, no can do, baby. I've got a deadline if that scene's going online tomorrow."

"Fuck!" Jack stormed upstairs to get dressed. He was going to find the police station and find Dylan. Dylan would know what to do.

## 10.

When Jack burst out of his room, fully dressed now except for his thin coat still hanging in the foyer, from the top of the stairs he saw Dylan and Ike huddled in conference. Dylan was still dressed for the frigid weather, coat on, though he had already shed his snow-covered boots. They looked up as Jack trampled down the stairs.

Dylan pushed a grocery bag at Ike and intercepted Jack at the foot of the stairs, blocking his way with one hand on the rail and the other against the wall. Dylan asked, "Where are you going?"

"Well, I *was* going to the police station to find you."

"I'm not working today. I have the day off after that double shift yesterday. I'm gonna watch the game on television with the guys. I went to the grocery store for healthy snacks. You know the kind of crap these guys eat. I wanted to make sure there's things I can eat too."

Jack tried to push past, but Dylan's hand on the rail never shifted. "Uhm, you can let me by."

"No. Not 'til you talk to me, Jack."

"You can't keep me here."

"No, but I want you to stay. You're entitled to another night, and you don't have anywhere else to go."

"He had no right to film me--us--I didn't--He had no fucking right--"

Dylan's interruption was quiet. "Look, Jack, I wanted more than anything for your first time to be special. I

know you wanted it to be with me, and believe me, I'm honored. And if I hadn't been so exhausted last night, I'd have tried everything in my power to give you the best first time possible. But ... Well, shit happens. Sometimes things don't work out the way we want, and all I can say is I'm sorry, and I want you to stay."

"He--I--"

"Oh, for the love of--" Ike pushed his way under Dylan's arm and confronted Jack. "Listen, baby, Dylan's right. You know he is. Sometimes something happens and you just have to live with it. You just gotta put one foot in front of the other until you get past it. You're getting yourself all worked up over nothing. None of us want you to be upset, and I bet you don't really want it either. It's easy to calm down. Just take a second. Take a deep breath"--Ike inflated his chest so Jack would follow along--"and close your eyes, and imagine yourself taking that first step on the trail into that peaceful forest you know so well. You know how easy it is."

"Ike ...," Dylan growled.

Jack blinked. *Fuck!* he swore at himself. He had almost done exactly what Ike said--had almost imagined himself taking that first step and felt a little downward tug on his thoughts. If he had taken that step along the path in his imagination, he would not have stopped. He pushed Ike away and ran back up the stairs, the only thing that he could think of to do.

He heard Dylan say, "Let him go," as Jack reached the top and sprinted to his room.

His door had no lock, but Jack pushed the dresser and chair in front to barricade himself in. He balled himself on the bed and tried to think of a way out, someplace he could go. Anywhere but there. Maybe Dylan would come with him--they could leave together. Dylan would have some cash--they could get bus tickets to Jack's distant cousin in another city. Maybe the cousin would let them stay until he and Dylan could find jobs. Or maybe Dylan had some savings and they could get an apartment. All of his plans involved Dylan agreeing to leave with him.

Dylan knocked on his door. "Jack? You okay in there? I'm sorry about Ike. You want to talk?"

Jack did not answer. Dylan eventually walked away.

Dylan returned later. "Jack? Ike's really sorry. Me too. You want to come watch the game with us? It's starting soon." Dylan waited, but Jack's only response was to clamp his eyes tighter. "Well ... okay. Come join us if you want. I got some of those cheese puffs you like."

*Moping isn't getting me anywhere*, Jack thought. While he was not much of a sports fan, in spite of his father requiring him to play sports before withdrawing him from school, Jack decided he would not mind watching the game with the others. Maybe he could get Dylan alone later, tell him his plan, convince Dylan to leave with him. After Jack's outbursts, Dylan probably thought he was a petulant child. Spending time watching the game with them would prove Jack was mature, was making a good decision--the right decision. Dylan would have to see that. Dylan would have to leave with him.

Jack pushed his makeshift barricade away from the door. His socked feet made little sound as he walked down the hall. He heard the other men in the living room below yelling their disappointment as a player on television bungled a play.

He looked over the railing at them--Dylan, Jeff, and Greg on the couch, Ike in an adjoining chair. He liked these guys ... Maybe he should stay? Maybe Dylan was right and this was all a big misunderstanding. No--no,

leaving was the right decision. The Doctor's offer came with too many catches. If the other guys did not see that, Jack suspected he could say nothing to convince them, but he and Dylan had to leave.

The guys were hooting, and Jeff bellowed, "Oh, you fucker," at the screen and threw a handful of the popcorn he was in the process of chewing. Ike kicked him and threatened to withhold dinners for a week unless Jeff cleaned up his mess after the game. Everybody laughed. Jack watched them from the top of the stair. He caught himself grinning; their horseplay was infectious.

The Doctor walked into the room. "Where's Jack?"

"New dude's upstairs being all pouty and stuff," Jeff said around his latest half-chewed mouthful of popcorn.

The Doctor said, "Ah. Well, I can work with just the four of you." He picked up one of the remote controls, pointed it toward the television and poked a few buttons.

Greg asked, "What're you doing?"

"Recording the game for you. It'll be waiting when you're done. Right now, though, it's time for your session."

Greg said, "But--"

"It's time for your session," the Doctor said firmly. "You can watch the game later."

"Yes, sir," Greg and Jeff said as they and Ike stood up.

*Yes, Jack thought, I should go downstairs for my session.*

He caught himself just before his foot would have descended onto the first stair step. *What am I doing?* he swore at himself. Wait--what had Ike said through the door that morning when Jack wanted to sleep in? *It's time for your session.* That had been when Jack realized he needed to go downstairs for his daily meeting with the Doctor? *Session.* The Doctor must have built some sort of post-hypnotic suggestion into that word, a compulsion.

Downstairs, Dylan said, "But I already ... this morning ..."

"A virile young man like you can easily handle more than one session per day, Dylan. You know that. In fact, you like having more than one session per day, don't you. You want to be part of this session too, don't you." This was not a question.

Dylan stood. "Yes, sir."

"Excellent. Now come with me."

Jack held back and watched. They walked toward the Doctor's office. Jack waited--one minute, two--then crept down the stairs.

The door to the Doctor's office was not shut completely. Jack peeked through the opening. The office light was on, but the office was empty. He heard voices from deeper inside. He crept across the office in his sock-feet. The opposite door was open. He remembered the four-part room. He knelt and edged his eye around the corner. In the quadrant done up like a locker room, Jeff, Greg, and Dylan wore blue and white

basketball uniforms. Ike walked over, wearing a similar red and yellow uniform.

Based on what they were saying for the camera--Jack had a brief flash of it as a bird's face, but told himself, forced himself to see it as, what it really was: a camera--the scene being enacted was basic. The guys in blue and white were part of the team that had just lost the big game to Ike's team. Ike played a member of the winning team who unfortunately had chosen a locker too close to the losing team's.

Jeff, Greg, and Dylan closed in around Ike, giving him grief over some foul that the referee had not caught and how it cost them the game. Ike was pushed back against the lockers.

"We should teach this cocksucker a lesson!" Jeff yelled.

"Yeah!" Greg hollered.

Ike put up a struggle that looked real at first and fake toward the end, and the others soon had him on his knees, his mouth first in the crotch of Greg's shorts, then Jeff's. Ike mouthed their erections through the material. Shirts came off, then shoes and socks and shorts and jockstraps. Cocks poked into Ike's mouth--Greg's, then Jeff's, then Dylan's.

Four naked bodies shifted, and Ike was on the locker room bench, on his back with his legs in the air. Greg and Dylan stroked themselves while Jeff fed his erection into Ike's ass.

"Teach this fucker a lesson. Yeah! Fuckin' teach his ass a lesson!" Greg snarled. He grabbed Ike's head and pushed his dick into Ike's mouth.

Greg and Jeff fucked Ike from both ends, while Dylan stood alongside and watched and stroked himself. Jack hoped Dylan was not joining in directly because he was being faithful to Jack, but that fantasy ended when Dylan pushed Greg out of the way and stuffed his dick into Ike's gaping mouth.

Jack found himself erect, his cock stiff like steel in his jeans. He told himself it was the sex. Four hot guys having sex would make anyone hard, he decided, even if the four guys were not doing it of their own free will. He slowly, quietly unzipped his jeans and fished out his erection. He stroked it while he watched.

Greg, fucking Ike's ass now, pulled out his cock and yanked off the condom with a snap and fast-jacked himself. His cum spurted out across Ike's chest. Dylan pulled out of Ike's mouth and grumbled deep in his chest and fired his load across Ike's face and chest too.

Bodies moved. Greg and Dylan leaned against the lockers in the background, kissing and slowly exploring each others' chests. Jeff bent over the bench, masturbating while Ike buried his face between Jeff's ass cheeks. *Rimming*, Jack realized. He has seen it done in some porn scenes he downloaded, but had never thought he would see it in real life. Did guys really like having their tongues up other guys' asses? It seemed dirty, but somehow fascinating too. Jack decided maybe he would like to try it sometime, if Dylan was into it.

Minutes later Ike was fucking Jeff doggy-style, while Jeff jerked himself off. Watching them, Jack felt his orgasm build. He bit his lower lip, an old trick to ensure he would climax quietly, and cupped one hand in front of his cockhead, ready, as he jacked with the other. He slowed down, not wanting to cum while there was still more to see.

Ike pulled out and came on Jeff's back and ass cheek for the camera. Jeff rolled out on the bench on his back, and fisted his cock quickly. He gasped and shot his cum across his own chest.

Jack came too and caught his cum in the palm of his hand. He was practiced at leaving no evidence. He'd have to tuck away his softening penis and zip up later--first, he had to back out of there before somebody saw him.

## 11.

Jack did not go back to his bedroom. Instead, after wiping his hand and discarding the paper towel in the trash can, for the first time in days--the first time since he had arrived--he put on his shoes and coat and went outside. He needed to think. Maybe the winter air would clear his head. Yes, a walk would be good--some exercise, some fresh air. He needed to think.

He had no plan. Dylan was obviously happy with living at the house. He would not run away with some barely eighteen punk he'd only know for a few days. Jack would need to convince him. But how? If Jack said no to the daily hypnosis and was forced to leave, would that shock Dylan out of his complacency? Would Dylan leave too?

The cold bit just as hard as he remembered through his thin coat. When Jack returned home--how many hours had passed?--he could barely feel anything, numbed by both the cold and his ongoing emotional short-circuit.

The front part of the house was dark. Had they gone to bed? Had they locked him out? Had they even noticed he was not inside? He tried the front door. It opened, and he said a little grateful prayer. He shut it silently and half-slithered, half-shivered silently out of his coat and snow-caked sneakers.

The living room and kitchen lights were off. The Doctor's door was open, and his office was dark. The opposite door was open too, and light came from the adjoining room. He peeked. It was empty, the only light from another door on the far side. Jack heard nothing. This was the perfect time to do some snooping.

He started with the Doctor's desk and computer. The computer was already on--no need to activate it and risk boot-up chimes--and the screen lit when he moved the cursor.

What he was looking for was easy to find. Obviously, the Doctor had no fear of exposure. Spreadsheets. Email. Accounts. Names, physical descriptions, lengths of time trained, special instructions given, dates of sale, current owners, amounts paid. Jack wondered whether he was understanding all of it correctly. Was the Doctor selling his hypnotized men to the highest bidders? The Doctor used them for his Internet sex site, then--maybe when they landed a rich fan, or maybe when they were no longer fresh meat--he placed them with a new "owner" for a substantial fee. The logs had close to three dozen names, ending with half-completed entries for Greg, Jeff, and Jack himself, half-completed because only the names and descriptions were filled in. Greg's, though, had the cryptic message "pending" in the date of sale column.

Why were there no entries for Dylan or Ike?

He heard voices from the other room: Ike and the Doctor. Jack hid under the desk, hoping they wouldn't notice the screen's glow.

Ike said, "So how many will this give him?"

"Greg will be his third. The Sheik has been a very good customer. Greg is an excellent choice for him."

"I'll make the arrangements, sir. Once you finish transferring his obedience protocols to the Sheik, we'll be

ready to put him on a plane to meet his new owner."

Obedience protocols? Jack did not like what that implied.

"Excellent. Good night, Ike."

"Good night, sir."

Ike came through the door, walked across the office, and disappeared into the house.

The Doctor never appeared. Instead, the light beyond those rooms went out as a door was shut. Jack waited five minutes, counting off the seconds--*one Mississippi, two Mississippi*--and then crept out of the Doctor's office.

He had proof. Dylan had to believe him now. Dylan could have the Doctor arrested using the evidence Jack had found. They would be heroes.

Jack tiptoed in his socks up the stairs and into Dylan's room, easing the door shut behind him.

Dylan was asleep. Jack turned on the bedside lamp, crouched beside the bed, and shook Dylan's shoulder.

"Hey ... Jack," Dylan murmured, blinking away sleep and the sudden light.

"You gotta come downstairs and see this. The Doctor's up to some seriously illegal shit. Bring your badge and your handcuffs--you're gonna have to arrest him after you see this."

"Mmm? What?"

"Seriously, like human trafficking and selling-people-into-slavery shit. Greg's gonna be next."

Dylan blinked and sat up. "What are you ...?" Then he looked at Jack and grinned.

"This isn't funny!"

"No, I mean, what you're wearing. I haven't seen you wearing that much clothing since that first day I brought you here."

Which was probably correct, Jack realized.

"Not the point. Be serious, Dylan. The Doctor's up to some seriously illegal shit here. You gotta come see what I found on his computer before he erases it or hypnotizes you to forget it or something."

"Uh, I don't think that's how it works--"

"Just come with me and see for yourself."

"Oh, all right. If it'll help settle this once and for all ..." Dylan pushed back the covers and swung his feet to the floor. Jack stared at Dylan's thick penis as Dylan retrieved a pair of boxer shorts and slid them on. Dylan was so beautiful--Jack considered instead pushing him onto the bed and kissing his chest and sucking his cock. "Well?" Dylan prompted, impatient. "Let's go. Show me."

At first, Jack thought Dylan was inviting him to indulge what he had been fantasizing, but then he realized

what Dylan meant.

Jack led Dylan to the Doctor's office. "It's in here," he said and led him through the door.

The lights came on. "And what are you two doing sneaking around in here in the dark?" the Doctor asked.

Surprised, Jack whirled his back to the Doctor and clamped his eyes shut and put his hand over Dylan's. "Don't look!" he cried, though he was not really sure what the Doctor was going to do. "He's going to try to hypnotize you or something!"

"Uhm, Jack ...?" Dylan said, pushing at Jack's hand. When Jack refused to let it budge, Dylan sighed and talked around it. "Sorry to disturb you so late, Doctor, but Jack thinks you're up to illegal acts like human trafficking or something?"

"Nonsense. Everyone who stays or leaves here does so of their own volition. If I facilitated new living arrangements for them, that was by mutual consent of all parties involved."

Jack snarled, "You gave them 'obedience protocols' and took money for them. That sounds like slavery to me."

"Jack, Jack, I have such high hopes for you, but you're not irreplaceable."

"Huh?"

"Come now. You're a beautiful young man. Finding you a new arrangement will bring me a good price once your training is complete. But if you choose to cause problems instead, well, sometimes sacrifices have to be made. Dylan and Ike have been excellent recruiters. If we have to evict you because you choose not to abide by the terms of my offer, I'm sure they'll find a suitable replacement in no time."

"That's bullshit," Jack snapped. "Dylan and I don't want any part of this. We're leaving."

Dylan said, "Uhm, Jack, we haven't talked about that."

"Exactly," the Doctor said. "We should all sit down and talk, like mature adults."

Jack fumed at the implied insult. "No, thanks. We won't be staying."

"You should take a moment and consider this. Dylan has lived here for several years, and he's quite happy here. He doesn't want to leave. If he leaves, he loses everything--his friends here, the job he loves, his life. I think the only way you two can be together is if *both* of you stay, and that means both of you have to abide by the terms of my offer. *Both* of you, Jack."

Dylan cleared his throat. "Jack, I ... I really like you and I'd like to see where this thing between us goes, but ... I can't see leaving here."

"That's because he won't let you. You're not his slave, Dylan."

The Doctor said, "How about a compromise? Dylan and Ike are my best recruiters, so I'm not taking outsourcing offers for Dylan here. How about if I take you off the table too, Jack? You can stay as long as you want, as long as you and Dylan are together. I won't 'sell' you, as you so callously put it, but in return you'll have to abide by The Offer and you'll have to start recruiting too."

Dylan said, "Jack ...?"

"It's obvious you two care for each other, even though you've only known each other a short time. Perhaps a quick session would help you focus and think more clearly? How about it, Dylan? Why don't you sit down in this chair here and we'll have a quick session."

"Okay, Doctor," Dylan said.

Jack pleaded, "No! That's how he-- Fight it, Dylan! Please!" But Dylan was already stepping around him.

"That's it, Dylan. Have a seat right here. Good. I'll start the session in just a moment."

"Yes, sir," Dylan said.

Jack heard the chair squeak as Dylan sat down, and he felt like he was losing.

"Now you, Jack? All you have to do is come over here and sit down. That's it. That's all you have to do to stay with Dylan. I know you want to. I know you love him. It's clear, isn't it? All you have to do is turn around, and come over here, and have a seat in this familiar chair.

"Not interested."

"Then why haven't you left yet? That you're still here tells me you're considering my offer. Come sit down. A quick session will help you see things much more clearly. You know it's the only way you can be with Dylan. What harm can a quick session do?"

Every time the Doctor said the word *session*, Jack felt the tug. He could already almost picture that familiar forest path, could almost see himself taking that first step.

"Dylan is willing. He likes you very much, but he doesn't want to leave. Why don't you come join us, Jack? Please? Just a quick, clarifying session, and then you and Dylan can be together if that's what you want. Come sit down so I can start the session. Dylan's waiting, Jack, but he won't wait forever. Come on, Jack. Take that first step. Just one step. That's it. One little step, and then you can sit down and we can begin the session. Just take that first step."

*Why is life always so hard*, Jack wondered. If he stepped onto that familiar path down into the peaceful forest, he would not have to worry about this. Someone else would make the hard choices and deal with the consequences. But did he not want to make his own choices? His new life was supposed to be about him making his own choices. But maybe this once he could choose not to choose? Surely letting someone else make the hard decisions for him was a choice Jack deserved to be able to make too? Jack, in spite of himself, imagined what it would be like to take a first step down that familiar path again. *No!--Fucking hell no!* he swore at himself.

"Dylan, why don't you ask Jack to join you so we can begin the session?"

Dylan murmured, "Jack ... please ...?"

Jack felt something inside him twist. Dylan was so beautiful and caring; Dylan was everything he wanted.

"Just take that first familiar step," the Doctor coaxed. "Just that little first step. So familiar. You've done it several times before. Do it again now, Jack. Take that first step."



Jack imagined taking a step down that forest path.

Then another.

"That's it," the Doctor cooed. "You'll feel much more clear-headed once we begin the session. Now come sit down here next to Dylan."

As he imagined walking down the forest path, Jack found himself turning around, turning toward the Doctor and Dylan, walking over to them, sinking down, sinking down into the familiar chair once more. He was so tired, so sleepy, so ... sinking. He could not stop it now. He had chosen to give up the decision. It felt like the right choice. As he surrendered to the feeling, accepted it, his hand crossed the short space between them and gripped Dylan's.

## 12.

Dylan led him by the hand. They were walking down the path together, approaching the clearing, the perfectly calm, peaceful clearing that sometimes seemed like a bed. Around them, the breeze whispered in their ears, sounding sometimes like a voice, but mostly like shimmering leaves. *Yeah*, Jack thought to himself, *I do like feeling relaxed like this*.

Dylan turned and smiled at him, and Jack felt so much love for this man, so much love that it burned away everything else. Dylan wore only his favorite dark blue boxers, and the bright sunlight shone on his shoulders. Dylan eased his boxers down, teasing Jack by doing it so slowly, and stepped out of them, naked now, so gloriously naked, and already three-quarters hard.

Jack was still clothed. He looked around at the clearing, at the birds with the eyes he might someday, soon, be comfortable thinking of as cameras but for now still preferred to see as bird eyes, just staring bird eyes. Someday he would be able to see this as it was and still stay so focused and calm and relaxed, but for now, seeing the peaceful clearing was so much easier.

Jack looked at Dylan and smiled back. Dylan drew him close and kissed him. Jack did not want to think anymore. He just wanted to savor the kiss and the heat that it caused to run down his neck, directly to his cock. Dylan cradled Jack's chin, deepening the kiss, stepping closer to grind their hips together, Dylan's cock against Jack's through the material of Jack's pants. Despite the sudden ache, the need, in his balls, Jack did not fight Dylan for control, just met the rub and thrust of Dylan's tongue and the shift and glide of his lips.

"Damn," Dylan swore appreciatively, stepping back. His fingers trailed across the solid length straining in the crotch of Jack's pants. Jack smiled his go-ahead. Dylan unbuttoned Jack's shirt and pulled it off of him, followed by the tee-shirt. Then came the pants and briefs and socks. Now Jack was as gloriously, happily naked as Dylan.

Dylan drew him down onto the grass and moss. Dylan rolled onto his back, pulled Jack down on top of him. Jack looked down at Dylan's erection and felt himself fall in love with it all over again. He bent his head to it and felt himself fall in love with every red inch of it as it slid between his lips, like his mouth had been made for it. He dove for it now, the crown of it gliding past his lips, then sliding along his tongue, filling Jack's head with Dylan's smoky taste.

A hoarse grunt, and Dylan's hand pressed down heavily on Jack's head. No need to urge him--Jack wanted to spend hours worshipping Dylan's cock. The twisting vein, the spot under the head that made Dylan buck his

hips, the feel of his pulse against Jack's tongue. Letting the head slide on the back of his throat, Jack tightened his lips at the spot where the skin shifted color, and Dylan's thigh muscles shook under Jack's hands.

But Dylan knew Jack too. Slipping a hand between them, Dylan squeezed Jack's nipple, tugged and pinched until Jack was whimpering around Dylan's dick.

"Stop," Dylan whispered, and pushed on Jack's head off his cock. "Don't wanna cum yet. Too soon. Want you to make love to me, sweetheart." Dylan pulled his legs up, knees toward his chest.

*Sweetheart*. Not *baby*--that was Ike's word. *Sweetheart*. This word would be theirs. Jack grinned and nodded.

Hands on Dylan's shoulders, Jack flattened the larger man on the grass and moss and knelt between his legs. Jack's cock was aimed right at Dylan's ass. From somewhere came lube, a rubber. Dylan looked into Dylan's eyes. The rush of fear and want in them echoed the tensing in Dylan's legs even as Jack eased them apart. Then Jack felt Dylan's leg muscles relax and saw Dylan's eyes unfocus and soften. Dylan smiled, lazy and relaxing under this warm sunlight, this breeze, Jack's touch.

Jack rubbed his dick under Dylan's balls, across them, then over his cock, lube-slick. Dylan arched up as Jack pushed the shafts together, skin dragging sweet and good against skin, their dicks pulsing right next to each other. When Jack locked his hand on Dylan's hip, he gave Dylan a look that he hoped said *I'm gonna fuck the shit out of you and you're going to love it*. Dylan grinned and nodded his understanding. That handsome face hit Jack the same way every time he saw it--a hot rush of blood concentrating into his cock, setting a moan to burn in the back of his throat.

"C'mere." Dylan grabbed the back of Jack's neck and pulled him down.

Jack grinned through the kiss and pressed the tip of his cock into Dylan's balls again before driving it up along the shaft of Dylan's dick and sliding the rims together. Heat and a hard, slick pressure. What made Jack ever think he wanted to leave? He was happy here. He had to be here to be happy. He needed this, the shift and press of Dylan's cock against his, the smell of their sweat together. He could not live the life his father set out for him. His life was waiting here all along, alongside Dylan.

Dylan brushed his mouth across Jack's neck before fixing on his nipple. The first tight suck, the first hint of teeth, shot electricity from nerves that had a direct line to Jack's dick. His balls tightened and he flung his head back. "Ah!"

"You like that, sweetheart?" Dylan's hoarse whisper sent a good deep buzz through Jack's balls.

All Jack could find the strength to say was: "Yes."

Jack's cock still glided along Dylan's as their hips worked together. He was going to take his time, go slow, enjoy his first time fucking Dylan. That seemed to be fine with Dylan too. Every minute they stayed locked together, Jack would not have to think about anything else. Soon, nothing else would matter.

Jack eased back until his dick was riding the crease of Dylan's ass. Dylan pulled his knees closer to his chest. His ankles settled across Jack's shoulders. Dylan made a sound that might have been a growl or a laugh and drove his hips forward again and again, and he grunted, "Fuck me. C'mon. Do it."

Staring at beautiful Dylan made thinking difficult. That was how Jack wanted them both to be right then, not thinking, just fucking, making love.

When Jack touched him with a lubed finger, Dylan's eyes rolled up.

"Okay." Dylan's voice got more determined. "Fuck me."

Jack pressed the broad head of his dick to Dylan's ass, pushed it forward into the hole, stretching the opening. Dylan relaxed and the hole gave way, and Jack eased past the stinging resistance, swiveled his hips, and backed off. Jack did not want it slow; his body wanted it hard and fast, wanted to pile-drive Dylan's buttocks. Dylan had a tight grip on Jack's hips, though, and they were going at his pace.

Jack's body knew what to do. He nudged in again, shifted, and then shoved in all the way. Dylan groaned, making the same sweet sound getting fucked that he made when he fucked. The sensation and the sound flooded Jack with need. Dylan reached back between their legs, gripping Jack's thigh to keep him tight and deep.

Jack needed to say their word: "Sweetheart ... I wanna fuck you, sweetheart."

"Fuck me," Dylan agreed.

Jack started his first ass-fucking by instinct, using quick hard slams Dylan seemed to love. No technique, he realized, just animal rutting. His slams made them both pant loudly over the slap and thud of flesh together. Jack felt himself shudder, building a pressure that made him think he could cum from nothing more than Dylan's ass milking his dick like that. Jack leaned forward and put a hand on Dylan's chest and pressed him down so that Dylan's hips tipped up higher and Jack stabbed his cock deeper.

Jack reached for Dylan's dick but got his hand slapped away.

"Too close," Dylan groaned groggily. "Don't want cum yet. Wanna turn over."

Dylan flipped onto his hands and knees. Jack inserted his cock again, feeling the heat of Dylan's guts burn around his shaft as it slid back home into Dylan. Dylan was right; it was better like this. Better with the way Dylan's body opened for him, with the way Dylan's ass rubbed and squeezed all the right spots on Jack's dick. Dylan had so much to teach him, Jack knew, and he wanted to learn everything.

"So good inside you, sweetheart," Jack purred as a bird zoomed in for a closer look.

"Yeah," Dylan grunted and tightened his muscles around Jack's cock.

As they moved together, Jack stroked Dylan everywhere he could reach: the rigid muscles of Dylan's arms supporting his weight, the sensitive edge of fuzzy hair at the nape of his neck, the big muscles of his back and his spine as it moved in a wave to drive his hips and ass into Jack's thrusts. Jack loved the feel of his first fuck, so perfect. It would never ever be his first time ever again, so Jack had to make it last forever. He tightened his grip on Dylan's hips.

Dylan's voice grew hoarse as he panted. "Fuck me. Fuck me." He reached back and grabbed at Jack's ass and urged him faster. The rush of pleasure built in Jack's balls.

Dylan tossed his head ecstatically and moaned, "Love you, sweetheart. Love making love to you." This was the first time Dylan had said *love*. The first time any man had said it to Jack. The first time in a long time anyone had said it to him.

Jack loved making Dylan feel like that. He whispered, "Love you back, sweetheart," and answered as well

with the pulse of his muscles driving his cock in and out and the squeeze of his hands.

Dylan moaned so loudly Jack thought he had climaxed, but he just caught his breath and pushed back again, wanting Jack's dick deeper inside. Jack grabbed Dylan's shoulders and anchored himself there to give more force to his thrusts.

"I'm so close, sweetheart. You close?" Dylan asked.

Jack did not want to be, wanted this to last forever, but--"Yeah"--he was close. Jack leaned forward and ran his hands down Dylan's chest, got a good squeeze on his pecs, rubbing the nipples over his palms as he moved the muscles and skin back and forth. A sharp spike of heat in Jack's balls and he knew what was about to happen. "Gonna fuck you stupid, sweetheart," Jack gasped.

"Gonna fuck you stupid too, sweetheart," Dylan answered.

Jack did not want this to end. Not now. It felt too great. They could do it again later. And again. They had to.

Jack's body spasmed. It was almost too much sensation, feeling Dylan's guts clamped around him, that sweet, hot wetness enveloping his dick. He felt himself reach the edge of orgasm.

Underneath him, Dylan hissed, "Gonna cum. Fuck!" He shuddered, and Jack saw the red flush of Dylan's orgasm spread over his face, his neck, and his back.

Jack pulled his dick out of Dylan's ass. He fumbled with the condom--shit, how had Dylan made tugging it off look so easy? When he had his cock free of it, Jack started jerking off to follow Dylan over the edge into bliss.

Dylan groaned again and rolled his head to look at Jack, and that was all Jack needed. A few sharp tugs on his cock and he was shooting onto Dylan's chest and face, thick ribbons of it as his body gasped out the sweet release. Dylan rocked gently against him until Jack stopped shaking and his breathing started to slow.

"Together, sweetheart," Dylan murmured sleepily, as the breeze whispered like a voice around them.

"Always, sweetheart," Jack happily accepted, and let his eyes close.

13.

Jack sat at the kitchen table with the computer in front of him, typing data into the onscreen form.

Ike walked in, as usual wearing just his jockstrap. "What'cha doing, baby? Another college application?" Ike draped himself along Jack's bare back, chin on Jack's shoulder, looking down at the screen.

"Yup," Jack confirmed. He had gotten his GED too late to apply to the major schools in the area like the one Ike attended, but he could still make the application deadline for some of the junior colleges, then transfer the credits later. Naturally, the Doctor offered to pay his tuition.

"Good for you, baby," Ike murmured and nibbled Jack's ear just the way he liked it.

Jack moaned appreciatively and leaned back slightly into the press of Ike's warm body. Jack felt his dick stiffen in the familiar loose sweatpants that were pretty much the only thing he wore around the house these days. He liked the way the fleecy insides scrubbed across the sensitive head of his cock when he went

commando, which with all the time now, sending little shudders of pleasure and arousal through his body.

Jack moaned again under Ike's nibbles. "Stop that ... 'til after I get this finished."

"I'm proud of you, baby. We all are." Before he pulled back, Ike found Jack's nipple with his forefinger and thumb and gave it a soft pinch that made Jack groan again, a trick Ike had indulged at length the night before when, like so many other times recently, he joined Dylan and Jack in bed for a night of Olympic-class sexual fun. "But soon as you're done, how about clearing your shit outta here and setting the table for dinner, okay?"

"You got it, old man.

Ike was only in his mid-twenties, only a year older than Dylan, but that made him five or six years older than Jack, and Jack liked teasing him, calling him *old man*. The other guys used to call Jack *new dude*, but they would not be able to do that now. There was a newer *new dude* in the house, named Derek, Jack's very first recruit, who was at that moment in the Doctor's office having his first session. Jack hoped it went well. The Doctor had already told him and Dylan that, if Derek's indoctrination progressed on schedule, they would have their first sexual training session with Derek in a week. The thought of seeing Derek's dreamy face bisected by his cock never failed to give Jack a hard-on.

Once, in his very first meeting with the Doctor, which seemed like years ago instead of only a few months, Jack said he intended to be rich, famous, and married to the most gorgeous man on the planet, part of his plan to make his family jealous. His exploding popularity on the Doctor's website had not been what he meant at the time, but it felt like an achievement to him nonetheless. His small bit of fame among a select group of subscribers who liked to see angelic young men saying and doing naughty things to other men no longer felt like revenge against his father or his birth family. Jack had a new family now, and he loved them all more than he could have conceived.

The front door shut as Jack continued typing. "Hi, sweetheart." Dylan's arms circled Jack from behind, and Jack let himself melt into them.

"You're home. Hi yourself, sweetheart," Jack answered happily and turned his head for a kiss.

Ike as usual made quiet retching noises, taunting them, until Dylan and Jack each flipped a middle finger at him without breaking the lip-lock. They knew this banter was just Ike's way of saying he loved them too.

"When you two are done," Ike huffed, still pretending mild offense at their display, "we got another email from Greg today. He's doing fine, thanks for asking. The Sheik is taking him to Brazil next month for yet *another* honeymoon."

"See," Jack said, "I told you the secret to making a man fall in love with you is the judicious use of teeth."

"Show me," Dylan growled, and kissed Jack again.

"Ahem!" Ike coughed. "I put his message on the refrigerator if you want to read it. Or you can just pretend I'm not here and carry on with your carrying on. Just ignore me; see if I care. I'll be right over here making chicken for dinner. Oh, wait, you're *already* having chicken for dinner, aren't you, Dylan?--And right in front of me too. That's so rude ... unless you're gonna invite me to join you."

They ignored him. Dylan's fingers found the erection in Jack's loose sweats, originally induced by thoughts of Derek but now being reinforced by what Dylan's tongue was doing in Jack's mouth. Dylan's fingers teased it

through the fleece. He broke the kiss to say, "Somebody's sure happy to see me."

"Always, sweetheart," Jack said, reaching for Dylan's face again. "Always."

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